



1 November 2023

Debra Wright  
Coordinator City Projects  
Office of the Chief Investment Officer  
City of Gold Coast  
PO Box 5042  
Gold Coast Mail Centre Qld 9726

Dear Debra,

**Re: Surfers Paradise Revitalisation Concept Design AILA response**

The Queensland Chapter of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) and specifically our Gold Coast regional members welcome this opportunity to formally comment on the Surfers Paradise Revitalisation Concept Design project initiated by the City of Gold Coast.

As the peak national body representing the Landscape Architectural profession, AILA champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities, and greater environmental stewardship. With this mandate, we strive to anticipate and develop leading positions on issues related to the built and natural environments.

In this context, we commend the City of Gold Coast Council for engaging and working with landscape architects and allied design industry professionals to formulate and deliver City changing strategies for the public realm. In addition, we thank you and your Council team again for hosting our members at your recent meeting at your offices in Bundall to discuss this project. As promised at that meeting, we offer the enclosed response for inclusion and consideration with the community responses received to date.

Overall, AILA supports the City's aim to provide an ongoing clear and coordinated vision for this key Surfers Paradise central precinct. To support the continued viability of the precinct, key connections that support an active and walkable city must be prioritised. We would suggest reconsideration of the staged delivery priorities to delay works to the more recently upgraded foreshore and mall areas and adjust the financial investment focus to the existing 'missing links' like the green bridge from Cavill Ave to Chevron Island and / or the connection of Cavill Ave to riverside parks, which greatly increases the capacity of the central business district and community destinations.

We have compiled detailed comments relating to select principles and elements currently proposed in the staged concept design that we would encourage the team to include in the design assessment and review process. Please refer to the attached Detailed Response to the Surfers Paradise Revitalisation Concept Design.

We welcome the opportunity to remain involved in the design development stages of this key project and would be pleased to continue liaison with the Project Team. Should you have any queries or wish to clarify any of the content herein, please contact Melanie West, AILA Queensland Chapter Manager on 0417 666 622 or [melanie.west@aila.org.au](mailto:melanie.west@aila.org.au) and Lisa Mercer, AILA GOLD Committee Chair.

Yours sincerely,

Tessa Leggo  
Queensland Chapter President  
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

## AILA Detailed Response to the Surfers Paradise Revitalisation Concept Design

The detailed response summary below is an extension of the discussion and comments/queries raised in the recent meeting. Broadly, these focus on the key areas of:

1. **Design philosophy & implementation:**
  - a. Are the proposals suitable and well founded?
  - b. Are they appropriate and supported?
  - c. In consideration of the current political climate within the Local Authority, is the current proposal and staging the best way for the City to invest community funds, or would these be more effectively deployed undertaking alternate projects in the local area for greater strategic benefit and effect?
2. **Design functionality & longevity:**
  - a. Are the proposals suitable for the physical location, in addition to considering the site areas cultural context, vegetation, materiality and diversity of user groups and stakeholders?
  - b. Are the proposals physically robust and implementable and what is the lifespan of these?

### 1. Design Philosophy & Implementation

Although the meeting attendees noted that significant discussion was on the foreshore component, it is recognised that current funding is for Stage 1A of \$40M only. This is secured for the mall extent and a significant budget allowance for a public space. However, whilst we recognise that the design consultants brief is framed around the initial stages, it appears the package presented, strongly focusses on the foreshore initiatives to the potential detriment of the riverside connection and wider city building linkages / connections.

As discussed at length in our meeting, concern exists about the insertion of a design narrative that seeks to make the unique long open stretch of Surfers Paradise Beach, mimic other iconic 'headland' areas rather than celebrating its splendour as it is. We would encourage Council to be cognisant of the operational burden installing and maintaining very substantial areas of natural turf and vegetation on an open and exposed coastal environ. We would encourage restraint in the embellishments, with a close focus on using high quality and durable materials along with an interrogation of the diversity of uses proposed.

Although the Concept Design is staged, with areas such as the foreshore likely to remain in place for some years, it is suggested that there may still be value in the retention and incorporation of select previous interventions, all of which underwent extensive community consultation and design rigour.

**We would suggest reconsideration of the staged delivery priorities to retain the more recently upgraded foreshore and mall areas and adjust the financial investment focus to the existing 'missing links' before committing additional funds to already upgraded public spaces.**

The broad scale Concept Design presented for consultation is silent on some key gestures flagged in previous bodies of work by the city. These include vital components such as:

- The reintroduction of the link across Ferny Ave to Cavill Ave West
- The improved link along the foreshore between Appel Park and Lionell Perry Park
- The provision of a green bridge from Cavill Ave to Chevron Island
- The link between Surfers Paradise precinct to the Bruce Bishop Carpark site and other destinations along the north south axis

Provision of a strong pedestrian connection from the Beach to River fundamentally strengthens the role the Nerang River plays (and can play) as an additional tourism destination and place of activity. This second 'frontage' to the precinct opens a range of water-based activities to generate business for the area and allows the Nerang River to act as a key recreational playground in the city.

The river side offers a protection (in the lee of the predominant South easterly onshore winds), clean water and frontage with good park spaces expanding the public offerings through activation: markets, music, activity, even without further embellishment. The alternate focus on precinct activation also increases dwell time in Surfers, not just Cavill Mall and the beachfront, but draws in approximately 400 metres of retail and business as a thoroughfare/promenade.

It is noted that major expenditure has been invested in HOTA and the Oceanway: a green bridge directly connecting these key city assets through Cavill Ave, would be a crucial link for tourist travel (Cavill Ave to Chevron Bridge is ranked as one of the highest priority bridges in the city, from the Green Bridges Prioritisation Strategy).

## 2. Design Functionality & Longevity

*a) Asset management serviceability, capacity, and community expectation* – A critical factor in the durability and success of public space infrastructure projects (as Council will be acutely aware) is sustaining the financial and maintenance capacity following installation. There is substantial concern that although expressed that the concept package presented for community endorsement via a limited survey was well received, the consultation questionnaire sought responses only on 4 main aspects. We would encourage Council to seek further feedback from the key stakeholder groups once the concepts are further developed to gain clear endorsement of the proposals to be implemented. In addition, many of these areas (extensive green roof installations) will present significant and specific professional skill sets to manage and maintain and an ongoing economic burden for community for the long term in a harsh physical environment.

Based on prior project site experience, the entire precinct, particularly the mall and verge extents, is dominated by multiple sub-surface services and other key infrastructure largely prohibiting the installation of vegetation of any substance or scale beyond those present, particularly in any regularity or avenue such as illustrated in the conceptual package. Significant investment in relocating/adjusting the service infrastructure would likely be required to support any proposal for additional deep planting works. An audit of the existing vegetation as part of the design process for all areas should be considered to aid greater understanding of any vegetation strategy.

Likewise, any substantial gardens and softscape proposed at ground level will also be difficult with the volume and intensity of use the mall receives as a broad uncontrolled public space. The concept imagery of the inground gardens in the mall may not be feasible. The design consultant suggestion for a 'metal edge' to these as a solution from a public safety and practicality perspective will need consideration and review.

The intention for "flexible spaces" is a worthy aspiration and will require thorough testing in view of volumes and type of activities that will occur throughout the precinct also.

*b) Foreshore Circulation* – it would be recommended to support justification of the proposal to include a dimensioned circulation diagram to elaborate on how users will access and move through. The Mall intersection with the beach could be best described as a 'town square' in functionality. It acts as a core activity space and major informal outdoor beachside events arena. It is unclear how the concept proposal responds to these events, the markets and the Oceanway experience?

Care needs to be taken to balance the functional needs of people using the multimodal Oceanway with the cross movements at the junction and the desire to slow, dwell and enjoy the beach outlook. Oceanway users will arrive at the mall junction and be channelled into a narrow alignment adjacent to the remaining vehicle lane. Currently no obvious continuity is shown and the arrangements show potential for cluttered constrained environments without intuitive wayfinding. Potentially opening these areas up with the 'town square' typology, we increase the freedom of movements and reduce 'bottlenecks' and conflicts.

It is unclear in the package where the Oceanway users park their bicycles /PMD etc to then access the beach /mall which may need further resolution.

The 4 pavilions appear to create significant 'pinch points' with associated circulation patterns. There are clarifications required on how the use of the pavilions will be managed and identifying the intended conflict resolution strategy. Perhaps an overlay to illustrate the way they are used, their capacity and ability to allow extended time usage would be beneficial.

c) *Event overlay* - The package describes a capacity for the precinct to host a series of plaza spaces for events. Illustration of how these are facilitated with an event overlay with capacity numbers would be helpful to clarify this.

d) *Seating* - To illustrate the noted '117m of comfortable beachfront seating', including an overlay that illustrates the seating spaces created, their capacity, visit duration expected and experience (for example, 'ocean viewing') would be beneficial. With substantial seating areas already in place on the foreshore with the current installations, a demonstration of the net increase or reduction in seating would be worthwhile.

e) *Building shadows* - In this location, have the shadow patterns of the adjacent high-rise forms been reviewed as part of the user comfort study?

f) *'World class' ocean views* - The landscape provided to the promenade, should be strategic and frame the hero views. The Concept Design appears to distinctly separate the beach from the promenade with less opportunity to view the beach and ocean beyond with substantial vegetation blocking these. The landscape capacity further north and south offers substantial vegetative assets and further opportunity rather than the intensity proposed at the important mall /foreshore intersection zone.

In the current package, some arrangements are unclear. We would suggest that the design development consider the following items:

- Any new elevated areas such as lawns would require DDA access;
- Should any anti-terrorism devices be included (not apparent in the imagery)? Consideration of these and their design integration will be important if required;
- Ensure that any commercial activation of the beach promotes and benefits the retailers and businesses in the precinct, whilst providing something that international travellers can identify as uniquely Gold Coast;
- Foreshore 'wet play' is very difficult and expensive to maintain due to the physical environmental factors including wind and sand, if included, thorough interrogation of the proposals is recommended;
- Confirm the Surf club endorsement on the large green space immediately in front of the ground floor club food and beverage area, review of this in context with appropriate circulation for club members / nippers to cross the road may be required;
- Within the 'green rooms' suggested, it is unclear that is sufficient spaces available for commercial activation such as the food and beverage lease areas, this could be included in the event overlay suggested;
- Thorough investigation by the project traffic consultant be undertaken for any proposed road narrowing and a reduction of a right turn lane suggested for the Gold Coast highway alignment, although we note that the wider pedestrian spaces would be welcomed. In addition, as in the meeting discussions, concerns were raised in relation to the single lane Esplanade and potential issues for safety, access and additional traffic burden that may arise. The suggestion for a high-speed bicycle lane (in effect equal to vehicle traffic and not supporting pedestrian friendly zone) is not seen as consistent with the intent for the pedestrian focussed outcome in these areas. It is also not clear for the land reclaimed through the realignment and lane closure that there is any nett benefit gained for useable public space;
- It is important that the indigenous and colonial histories of the place and 'storytelling' is deeply integrated and considered in any design development rather than the 'overlays' suggested.

- The 'distinctly Surfers' character referred to will need careful consideration in detailed design – currently this does not appear clearly articulated in the design proposals; and
- It is acknowledged that this 'heart' of Surfers Paradise is a truly contested space that has had several design iterations, a range of refurbishments and master planning investigations. Throughout the process, Council has sought to address the challenge to attract locals and tourists into Surfers Paradise, and offer a point of difference in line with other successful Gold Coast public spaces. Lessons learned from previous experiences should be gleaned to avoid repeating the same outcomes.

**Important Note:**

Given the project currently is at concept level only, the AILA member responses are offered as an objective assessment of the published concept document, design narrative and detail shared by the City's selected design consultant (and AILA member) in addition to the Council team at the meeting held on the 11th of October. The representatives selected to comment on behalf of AILA at this time are passionate local Gold Coast residents and local professional practitioners, each with specific detailed project area experience in the Surfers Paradise precinct over an extended duration. The intention of all feedback is only in support of realising a high quality delivered outcome for the City.