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**COMMENTS ON PLANNING FOR MIDDLE HEAD -
NPWS, HARBOUR TRUST AND JOINT PLANS FOR COLLABORATIVE
MANAGEMENT**

The Mosman Parks & Bushland Association was founded in 1964 when bushland at Bradleys Head was threatened with destruction. That area is now part of the Sydney Harbour National Park. We are proud to number Eileen and Joan Bradley, originators of the Bradley method of Bush Regeneration, among our founding members. The objectives of the Association remain the same today - the protection and preservation of parks, bushland and open space in Mosman. Members continue to work practically in bush regeneration.

Middle Head is a national asset.

Its superb location, its landscape and natural values, its heritage, aboriginal and defence, give it a national significance that Australians as well as visitors from abroad should be able to appreciate. Planning for its conservation and interpretation will create an enduring legacy for future generations.

Collaborative Management and Interpretation

The Association would like to congratulate both the NPWS and the Harbour Trust on the planning day for their respective areas prior to making their draft plans. Collaboration between the two agencies is essential for a holistic interpretation and management approach to this nationally significant area. We are confident that such collaboration will enhance public enjoyment of the sites. We remember with great pleasure the Bungaree exhibition in the oil tanks last year - an excellent example of cooperation between the two organisations and Mosman Council.

Public engagement

We appreciate the extension of time for feedback following the planning day. Genuine public engagement throughout the planning process is vital. Without adequate time to consult, the community loses, and the organisations also lose if there is a feeling that the process is not genuine. The high level strategic material at this stage of the planning is particularly significant as it sets the scene for what follows.

Our comments below attempt to follow the format of the "Have Your Say" form, with comments common to both organisations first, followed by comments relating specifically to the NPWS tenure and then the Harbour Trust tenure.

NPWS AND HARBOUR TRUST - Comments relating to the whole site:

Public access, recreation and enjoyment of both areas should relate primarily to the values of the park.

1. Parks, Bushland and Open Space

Mosman Parks & Bushland's primary concerns are parks, bushland and public open space. A collaborative approach to the restoration and management of the natural assets of the whole area provides an opportunity for bush regeneration in both tenures, but also to improve connectivity and biodiversity through joint planning. Mosman is blessed with larger areas of bushland than many urban areas, but the isolation of bushland areas is a concern, particularly for birdlife and other fauna. It may be possible to increase and enhance protective bush corridors in both areas and across the tenures.

2. Public access for views, walking, appreciation of natural assets and the heritage of both the NPWS and SHFT sites is fundamental to the enjoyment of Middle Head.

We note the suggestions for increasing the walking tracks. The NPWS plan for a track along the foreshore as an approach to Middle Head from Chowder Bay is a highly desirable extension of the Sydney Harbour Scenic Walk and will also provide an alternative to the road from Chowder Bay which is being used heavily by cars and cyclists. MPBA would also support the construction of a path around the perimeter of Middle Head oval with lookouts across Middle Harbour so long as the bushland here is not diminished. We hope that tracks will be constructed of natural materials.

Public access to heritage areas and buildings is essential for the interpretation of their heritage. If buildings are to be adaptively reused, that use should not detract from public appreciation of their heritage.

3. Buildings

For the enhancement of the natural environment and landscape, any increase in the built environment is undesirable. Existing buildings should be used if possible in preference to increasing the number of buildings. A new building should only be contemplated if it is essential to the purposes of the park and only where there is no alternative.

3.

4. Heritage - aboriginal, defence and natural - and its interpretation

All aspects of the heritage of Middle Head are important. The defence heritage is particularly significant.

An Interpretive and Educational Centre

The story of Middle Head covers so much of the history of Australia, from Aboriginal times through more than a century and a half of Australia's defence history that it warrants, indeed requires, an on site interpretive centre.

A centre could also provide a whole of harbour interpretation.

We have gained an impression that both NPWS and SHFT are disinclined towards the provision of an interpretive centre, as there are other ways to gain information. Guided tours are indeed very effective. Other more modern methods of interpretation eg the internet and apps for phones are sometimes suggested. We acknowledge the value of both as means of interpretation but consider them as additional to rather than replacing what an interpretive centre can provide. The internet requires study prior to or after a visit and while apps will enliven interpretation of the various sites they will only provide a site specific part of the story.

An interpretive centre could provide an area for films, exhibitions, class room activities and would add immeasurably to the value of a visit to the headland. We are aware that the provision of such a centre would require funding, and ongoing funds as well, but believe that there is a wonderful opportunity here which should not be missed because of a present shortfall in finances.

We note that the Harbour Trust Management Plan of 2007 (Outcomes) does include a 'Headland Park Visitor's Centre incorporating interpretive materials relating to Middle Head in the context of providing an overview of the entire Headland Park.'

5. Peace and tranquility - roads, car parking, ferries and light

As usage of the area increases, it will be important to maintain the qualities of beauty and peace which people currently find so delightful.

1. Roads should be well maintained but not increased in size.

2. Car parking: A collaborative approach to the problem of car parking would be beneficial. Sharing the nearby Harbour Trust car parks between the organisations should be achievable. (Further comments under Harbour Trust section)

3. Public transport is desirable, but small buses only for this part of the headland.

4.

4. Ferries: We would be loathe to have the scenic attractiveness of Cobblers Beach destroyed by a wharf.

5. Lightspill: Lightspill is a form of pollution. There are regrets already about the lighting on the MH playing field. Although aimed downward, they have decreased the amenity of Balmoral. Other lighting should be kept to a minimum.

6. Environmental sustainability should be part of all planning.

7. Use of Middle Head should not oblige bushfire protection methods that are detrimental to the environment.

NPWS specific comments

1. The isolation of the NPWS Middle Head fort area is a feature of the sites which should be retained for appreciation and interpretation. If increased usage is envisaged it should be for these purposes, not for unrelated extraneous commercial use.

2. The fortifications, moat and buildings on this site are of national significance. NPWS is to be congratulated on its work to date to preserve these. Recent volunteer efforts to uncover the Middle Fort have achieved remarkable results.

3. The cluster of wooden buildings and the beautiful sandstone guardhouse

a. are part of the whole fort complex and should be included in the interpretation of the heritage park

b. are beautiful examples of the period. They should be repaired and restored as necessary but not changed by additions

c. some should be open to the public

d. Mosman Parks & Bushland has no problem with the operations of NPWS being based here

e. and no problem with having an on site ranger there. Indeed if increased usage of the area is envisaged, especially at night, it may be an advantage.

4. Use of these building

The Mosman Parks & Bushland Association recognises that this cluster of buildings is an integral part of the "fort" at Middle Head and forms part of a heritage park of national significance.

Currently, the Soldiers' Institute and its curtilage are providing a wonderful community place. There's a community garden; volunteers meet there - volunteers who are not restricted to the local community and have included refugee and corporate volunteers; workshops and training events for volunteers are held there - members of the association have attended such events. The MPBA has also had the privilege of holding meetings and functions there.

The ideal would be if planning for future access and interpretation and use by a wider, national public did not preclude the current community use.

HARBOUR TRUST specific comments

1. In general the reuse of buildings has respected their heritage and the natural surrounds.

2. The remaining controversial site - Terminal 10

MPBA is of the view that the footprint and height of these buildings should be reinstated to their existing size as shown in the 2007 Management Plan.

Its use: The site of this building complex makes it ideal for shared purposes with the NPWS. We have written above of the importance of an interpretation centre for the whole headland and possibly Sydney Harbour, being as it is, a microcosm of the history of Sydney and Australia. The central building would surely make an excellent centre for films, exhibitions and class room activities.

The 2007 Management Plan for Middle Head is unenthused about back of house uses for Terminal 10. However it does consider that the garages at the eastern end could be used for garaging or back of house use if appropriately screened. As the NPWS has need of more operational space, perhaps further consideration could be given to this possibility especially if the need for an extra building on NPWS land could thereby be avoided.

3. The Barracks Buildings

The MPBA supports the demolition of these buildings and the provision of a more natural landscape with an extension of bushland.

However if it were considered appropriate to retain one of the buildings for heritage reasons, the adaptive reuse of the building nearest to the oval as a sporting facility would provide a replacement for the existing sporting pavilion. The barracks building has a considerably larger footprint than the current building however, so a smaller, well designed and less obtrusive replacement pavilion would be equally acceptable if all the barracks buildings were demolished.

4. Playing surface on Middle Head Oval.

Mosman Parks & Bushland is strongly opposed to the use of synthetic turf on Middle Head Oval. The plastic grass sewn into a rubber base, laid onto an excavated area where the natural grass has first been poisoned, is totally contrary to natural and bushland values in an area where biodiversity and connectivity should be conserved. The northern slopes of the oval contain remnant native vegetation that requires protection as a bush corridor as recommended in the 2007 Management Plan.

5. Car Parking

The amount of car parking provided on Trust land is now greater than that envisaged in the 2007 plan. The car park to the East of 10 Terminal is visually unattractive and not a sympathetic surface in a precinct which aims to enhance natural values. The 2007 plan actually envisaged re-landscaping paved areas to the East of 10 Terminal 'to provide setting for fortification'. MPBA questions whether such a large expanse of bitumen is necessary. Perhaps a smaller area of bitumen parking for normal use with an extension of grassed parking for occasional heavy use could be considered. Collaboration with NPWS would be desirable.

Mosman Parks and Bushland appreciates the opportunity to "have a say" in the community consultation process.



Kate Eccles
President
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