



Mosman Parks & Bushland Association

Harbour Trust Have Your Say

<https://consult.dcceew.gov.au/middle-head-gubbeh-gubbeh-draft-master-plan/haveyoursay>

May 9, 2023

MIDDLE HEAD / GUBBUH GUBBUH DRAFT MASTER PLAN

The Mosman Parks & Bushland Association (MPBA) was formed in 1964 to protest against the destruction of bushland at Bradleys Head. The Association's main objective continues to be the protection of bushland and public land in Mosman for the benefit of current and future generations. Our members have taken a keen interest in Middle Head since 1996 when the lands were first vacated by the Department of Defence, through the early planning stages of the Harbour Trust and then the Amendment in 2021 to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act which converted the Trust into a Federal Agency in perpetuity.

Planning for Middle Head has taken a long time to be developed. There is much to like in the draft Plan, and it is evident that careful consideration has gone into such matters as place, orientation, connections, continuity into the NPWS land and into making the visitor experience meaningful and enjoyable.

The Mosman Parks & Bushland Association is of the view that some aspects of the draft Master Plan need to be rethought. However, we are hopeful that with some changes made, the plan will be one to inspire future and current visitors while supporting the needs and enjoyment of the community – local and wider.

Community Engagement

The Association thanks the Harbour Trust for the chance to express its views and in particular we were pleased that the period for public comment was extended.

We note that the Master Plan is not a statutory document. Changes resulting from the Master Plan to the statutory Middle Head Management Plan of 2017 will require further community consultation. We hope that such consultation will be well advertised locally as well as through the normal channels for genuine local engagement.

*A personal comment: This response to the draft Middle Head / Gubbeh Gubbeh draft Master Plan is the response after discussion by the MPBA committee, of which I am the president. I was included in the Stakeholder Group in a personal capacity. I would like to comment that I consider the spirit of engagement was informative, genuine, and that stakeholders were heard. However, although the dot points listed as Themes on P16 were indeed raised in meetings and walking tours, it is my **opinion**, that the implications of some of them were not fully understood and that not **all** of them were agreed to and supported as stated.*

This submission will indicate some of those differences.

**MOSMAN PARKS & BUSHLAND'S RESPONSE
TO THE MIDDLE HEAD / GUBBUH GUBBUH DRAFT MASTER PLAN**

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND PLACE

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

The built environment of Middle Head/ Gubbu Gubbu, including that within the Harbour Trust's land is surrounded by a natural environment that is the wonder of Sydney Harbour. The buildings and open space are nestled within a bushland promontory. We are pleased that the draft Master Plan recognises the significance of this natural setting and plans for its preservation and care.

FIRST NATIONS Connection with Country

It is entirely appropriate that Aboriginal culture should be celebrated and shared here at Middle Head/Gubbu Gubbu.

Backed up by archaeology and geology, where better could the First Nations oral history of the formation of Sydney Harbour be told, and spiritual concepts of Country be understood?

COLONIAL HERITAGE, the Federation and 20th Century significance

Bungaree's Farm is acknowledged as a critical story of the area, but it has not been given a physical place in the plan. If Linda Bergin's findings about the location of the farm are correct, this is a serious omission. The proposed covered terrace to the south of Building 3 may deny the interpretation of the farm and will need to be rethought.

Defence of Sydney and Australia

The buildings and spaces of the Harbour Trust precinct and the adjoining NPWS tell the story of the defence of Sydney and Australia. They are significant in themselves and are particularly valued by the people involved in the relatively recent defence of Australia.

The precinct is included in the Heritage listing under the EPBC Act and on the Register of the National Estate.

DRAFT MASTER PLAN (PART 4)

Key Actions

We appreciate the recognition of the site's values – First Nations, military and natural, and the thoughtful approach to enhancing these values for the visitor. We have already indicated our reservation regarding the location of Bungaree's farm.

First Nations Master Plan future design actions (4.2)

Protection, rehabilitation, connections with the harbour, equitable and educational access are appreciated. An Acknowledgement Walk on Country would add to understanding. Fostering of initiatives and enterprise that share art, dance ceremony and food is also appreciated. We question whether all of these activities could occur in the open air. We would not like to see the construction of a new building. If shelter is required, we hope that somewhere within the brick Terminal Ten buildings would be found.

Pedestrian Movement and Walking Tracks (4.3)

We like the concept of Middle Head as a pedestrian friendly area for walking on country.

Links with the NPWS tracks will enhance a variety of concepts

- of a largely vegetated promontory with views to the harbour for everyone's enjoyment
- of an area for walking on country

- of a military area throughout the headland representing the defence of Australia albeit during differing periods

Within the 'Plateau Walk' area the concept of an attractive heritage village will be encouraged by

- the creation of a shared walking area of Middle Head Road and the control of traffic
- the secondary paths and links through the precinct
- permeable paving on paths and parking areas and native vegetation
- interpretation by revealing the prior materials of the road construction

A DIFFICULTY WITH ONE OF THE PEDESTRIAN LINKS

Whether or not the oval's current configuration is maintained, a walking track around the northern perimeter of the oval poses difficulties, particularly if the intention is to make it accessible for people with disabilities. A track would open up views, but although the bushland below has become mesic and is somewhat weed infested, it would be a shame to lose the natural vegetation. The surface and runoff from an accessible path would exacerbate the problems.

Visitor Experience (4.4)

This is the key objective, and this section of the draft plan has explained how the Trust aims to enhance visitor experience with the Summary of potential visitor journey. "What's it all about?" is a question that we are asked and that needs to be answered.

Very much appreciated are

- the journey through the key points of interest that will interpret the First Nations, Military and natural features (Concerns about the entry and arrival are addressed in 4.9)
- the integrated approach and the collaboration with NPWS
- the provision of a centre
- the various methods of interpretation (We would like to remind the Trust of the value of film – particularly for rainy or hot days!)

We address the Education programming with NSW for an Education Centre in 4.7, but the general principle of seamless movement of groups between the Harbour Trust land and the NPWS land is well recognised.

EVENTS

Events for cultural and interpretive purposes are desirable. Others need careful consideration, particularly if public access is to be denied.

The draft plan proposes to explore the possibilities for events of medium and small scale within the constraints of the site.

MPBA suggests that 'medium' scale events involving up to 2,000 people would be well beyond the capacity of the site and the roads leading to Middle Head. The traffic generated by such events will have a significant and adverse impact on the safety and amenity of the area. The traffic and parking implications are likely to be unmanageable. A well-publicised event early in the life of the Trust,

“Seafood Day at Chowder Bay”, intended to display the delights of Chowder Bay and the Headland sites created a nightmare of traffic queues and disappointments.

The Oval and Community Sport (4.5)

The proposal to move the current changing facilities, thereby improving the sense of arrival at Middle Head/ Gubbuh Gubbuh involves changing the configuration of the oval’s playing surface and diminishing its size. At the Council meeting when the issue was discussed we spoke in support of Council’s objection, while expressing our understanding and sympathy for the ideas of the draft Master Plan. MPBA’s president’s words at the Council meeting are in italics below.

Good evening, Madam Mayor and Councillors and thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Mosman Parks & Bushland.

*My personal relationship with this issue began in the very early days of the Harbour Trust when Don Goodsir and I worked on a brochure for the Headland Preservation Group. In the list of points for the vision for Middle Head and Georges Heights is **Retention of existing sporting facilities.***

As the EP/12 Agenda item explains, the licensing arrangement goes right back to 1997.

There are occasions when Mosman Parks & Bushland crosses paths with sporting groups. Thinking back to our support for natural turf on this very oval was one, which happily for all has satisfied both environmentalists and the sporting groups.

Protection of natural assets and open space are core values of MPBA, but we are not blind to the needs of sporting groups and the benefits to children and adults, and we are only too well aware of the lack of extra space to satisfy those needs.

*So the last thing **we** want is for users of **this** oval to be pushed off and create pressure on other ovals, or for demands for the conversion of other green space currently enjoyed for passive recreation.*

We therefore support the very vigorous protestations of Council at the loss of playing surface to accommodate new change facilities.

But I would like to add that we are sympathetic to the Harbour Trust’s desire to make something of the arrival point at Middle Head. “Here you are. You’ve arrived at a significant area”.

Also understandable and appealing is the idea of a walking track to link up with other parts of the precinct and with the NPWS walking tracks.

*So, is there a chance for a **rethink** of this concept – possibly achieving the arrival point for Middle Head but **also** preserving the playing surface intact and in its current configuration and providing a new or renovated change facility.*

Traffic and parking and tree preservation are further difficulties.

But are the problems insurmountable?

Our understanding is that the upgrade to the sports facilities proposed by Council is modest. It may be possible to retain the existing facilities, renovate them and include female change facilities without increasing the scale of the building and perhaps even making its appearance more sympathetic within its surroundings and not detracting overly from the entry to Middle Head.

An additional concern is that the reconfigured oval could impact bushland to the North.

5.

Regeneration and adaptive reuse (4.6)

The principles of regeneration and adaptive reuse have been well considered and are agreed, particularly that of finding uses that will assist in the conservation and interpretation of their heritage and enhancing understanding of the natural and cultural heritage.

Building retention, relocation and removal

○ The three wooden barracks

Although the three wooden barracks, built after the end of WWII, probably in 1952, are not listed as heritage items, they form part of the military reserve and defence lands described in the Robertson Hindmarsh Conservation Management Plan 2006.

The barracks are proposed for demolition in the draft Master Plan. Mosman Parks & Bushland has consistently advocated the retention of ONE of the barracks buildings. There are very few, if any, remaining examples of this type of military building. They exemplify construction during the constrained economic circumstances of their time. We understand the problems and expense involved in restoration, but we are of the view that the retention of one building and its adaptive reuse will contribute to an understanding of the entire military precinct. We are not experts in fire management, but it has been suggested to us that a sprinkler system on the roof would mitigate the danger of fire.

If the remnant evidence of First Nation occupation is not proximate to the single barracks building nearest to the oval, we consider that the First Nations values may be able to coexist with the military values.

○ Guardhouse and café

Middle Head café is an extremely popular venue. Its many clients love its relaxed character, its position in the trees, overlooking the oval and the choice of seating – outside in the open air, on the veranda or inside. It has played and should continue to play its part in activating the area.

The Ten Terminal brick barracks (Buildings 1,2 and 3)

Noted that their reuse will facilitate the conservation and interpretation of their heritage values.

We note the intention to add covered walkways around the courtyard and a covered dining area beyond the existing southern extent of building 3.

The Garage Buildings (Buildings 6 and 7)

Mosman Parks & Bushland is delighted that the intended use of these buildings is for interpretation and education with the addition of a linking building to facilitate their function. The Association has long held the view that Middle Head, including the NPWS section, and Georges Heights need a centre for interpretation. A physical space need not be the only form of interpretation but there is an advantage for visitors to have a central locality. Their proximity to the NPWS area of Middle Head will provide a seamless focus for the whole headland.

Functional Use of the buildings (4.7)

We understand that functions cannot be prescribed at this stage.

We agree that keeping the linking connections and the courtyard in the public domain is important.

As previously stated, we are pleased that there will be a specific area given to Interpretation.

Noted in 4.4 that the Harbour Trust is negotiating with the NSW Department of Education to support the educational programs proposed for the Environmental Education Centre at Middle Head.

Mosman Parks & Bushland advocates that the Education Centre should be located in Ten Terminal where uses and appropriate tenancies are still to be found, rather than at the heritage Soldiers' Institute in the NPWS precinct. MPBA opposes the construction of a new building (the COLA) in this heritage precinct. The Education Centre would be a good fit with other interpretive material in the

Garage Buildings. Other buildings or sections of buildings in the brick Barracks may also be suitable for use by the Education Centre.

Architectural design and language (4.8)

We are not architects, but we like

- The link between the garage buildings and the 'light touch'
- The cover around the courtyard
- The covered terrace to complement the possible use of Building 3 South as a restaurant and to open the complex of buildings to the South. (Note that not all of our members agree with a quality restaurant being housed in a heritage complex).

Proposed vehicle access and movement (4.9)

Entry and Exit and Arrival

We understand the wish to create a sense of arrival at an interesting place. However, the actual proposals to alter the road configuration at the entry are not considered to be practical given the three-way directions for traffic – to Chowder Bay, to HMAS Penguin and for some limited access to Middle Head. At periods of heavy use, for events and sport for example, problems will be intense.

Parking

- As previously stated, the size of events will need to be limited.
- There are beautiful trees in the existing parking at parking lots 1 and 2. We would be very concerned if the proposal for extra parking there involved the removal of trees.
- limiting the visual impact with vegetation and providing permeable surfaces if possible

Environment, sustainability and energy

MPBA is pleased with the consideration given to the natural environment, and with the intention to achieve a conserved and accessible natural quiet place - in particular

- intentions to revegetate and regenerate degraded areas
- the protection of rare and endangered species
- weed management
- managing the spread *Phytophthora cinnamomi*
- light pollution is sometimes overlooked particularly in parking areas.

TO CONCLUDE

Mosman Parks & Bushland appreciates the thought that has gone into the many aspects of the draft Master Plan, the spirit of recognition of the various components of the interpretation of the headland and generally of the direction the planning is taking.

We recognise that its implementation will be staged. This will allow for assessment of the impact of developments as they occur and for review of the plan's components.

Further consultation with stakeholders and the community as adjustments are made will be essential.

Kate Eccles OAM
President

Mosman Parks and Bushland Association Inc • incorporated in NSW No. Y1414446
P.O. Box 4113 Mosman 2088 • www.mosmanparksandbushland.org.au • mosman.parks@gmail.com