

URBAN AGRICULTURE — POTENTIAL ON THE CALLAN PARK

Summary

This discussion paper addresses the urban agriculture potential of Callan Park.

'Urban agriculture' refers to the production of vegetables, fruit and herbs primarily for the consumption of the grower and for exchange through non-monetary, community-based systems such as food swaps.

Sometimes the term 'urban agriculture' refers to commercial market gardening in the suburbs and on the periurban fringe – the area where the suburbs adjoins the countryside.

Urban Agriculture at Callan Park

It is probable that urban agriculture has been practiced at Callan Park since the 19th Century, when the site was occupied by estates, as kitchen gardens that contributed directly to the residents food supply were then a common feature of domestic life.

The January 2010 Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority Focused Environmental Site Assessment, identified a specific area of Callan Park as having potential for a community food garden. This potential site was in addition to the existing community garden. This, Glovers Community Garden, is regarded as Sydney's first community garden, and therefore has regional as well as local historical significance.

The Social Role of Community Gardens and Associated Food Initiatives

It is worth considering the benefits commonly accepted by community gardeners, local government and researchers as stemming from the practice of people producing some of their own food.

The publication, *Community Gardening in SA* concisely sums up the multiple benefits of community gardening and the cooperation that makes it happen: health, nutrition and food security, psychological benefits, community arts and cultural development, community development, food and social capital.ⁱ

Specific benefits include:

- opportunities to improve personal health and wellbeing through:ⁱⁱⁱ
 - physical exercise, access to fresh food, relaxation, quiet space
 - active but gentle recreation, something of increasing health importance to an ageing population
 - psychological benefits such as improving gardeners self-esteem.^{iv}
- opportunities for cross-cultural interaction:^{vii}
 - many community gardens have a multicultural membership (eg. Waterloo Estate, Randwick Community Organic Garden, Chester Hill Community Garden, Greg Hewish Memorial Garden, Newtown Community Garden among others in Sydney and more in the other states.)
- opportunities to facilitate sociability and placemaking:
 - Community gardens are described by Francis and Hester in *The Meaning of Gardens* as ‘...spaces that support social contact and publicness’^{vii}
 - anecdotal evidence supports the social value of community gardens and city farms as safe places for families, for meeting neighbours and working in cooperation
 - writing in *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg describes ‘hangouts at the heart of community’ as the informal, accessible ‘Third Places’ where people spend much of their time (after the first and second places of home and workplace); although he does not mention the USA’s numerous community gardens, they fit well his description of ‘congenial public gathering places’^{viii}
- learning:
 - the acquisition of horticultural, interpersonal and organisational skills
 - organisational skills stemming from responsibility for an area of public land
 - education in sustainability — many community gardens offer educational workshops members and the public
 - skills related to the development of social capital.^{ix}
- improved environmental amenity:
 - writing in *Urban Place*, Peggy Barlett describes a range of benefits brought by community gardens including ‘...sites for urban renewal far beyond notions of beautifying a community... opportunities for community life, food production, engagement with nature, psychological and physical benefits to health, education and political action’^x
 - similar examples of community renewal are made in Patricia Hynes book on New York’s community gardens, *A Patch of Eden*^{xi}
 - anecdotal evidence points to the value of informal surveillance to the security of person and property of having people in community gardens in neighbourhoods.
- preserving the biodiversity of plant species of direct benefit to humanity; agricultural biodiversity is as threatened as is that of native plants^{xixxiii}

- waste reduction through the conversion of green wastes into compost fertilisers and the reuse of materials, a common practice in community gardens that is encouraged by local government
- carbon sequestration in organic-rich garden soils.

The aerial photographs referred to in this paper are Figure 1 and Figure 2 found in *Focused Environmental Site Assessment, Proposed Community Gardens, Callan Park, Rozelle NSW* (Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority), January 2010.

STRENGTHS

Callan Park is ideally suited to community-based food production in the form of community food gardens and orchards and for access by other community food enterprises.

Easy Access

Callan Park is easily accessible by a number of modes:

- walking
- public transport (bus)
- bicycle, especially for those living in closer proximity but too far to walk conveniently
- in walkable distance for many local residents
- vehicle, especially when bulky/heavy materials require access.

Favourable Location

Callan Park is favourably located, adjacent to the medium density population of Rozelle and Balmain and close to Leichhardt.

Soil Contamination

At least one area of Callan Park, LC 3-9 (the site identified by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority) does not exhibit any soil contamination that would affect food production.

Existing Precedent

Glovers Community Garden^{xiv} lies approximately 250m north west of the area identified in the *Focused Environmental Site Assessment, Proposed Community Gardens* as the potential location of a new community gardening opportunity. It occupies a north-west facing slope adjacent to a sporting field, the far side of which forms the foreshore.

Glovers Community Garden is regarded as Sydney's 'heritage' community garden on account of it being possible to trace back the origin of community gardening in the city to its start in 1985. This date puts it among the very first community gardens in Australia. Although the garden has never sought formal heritage listing it is nevertheless of historic value not only to the growing number of people engaged in community gardening but to the local history of the Rozelle-Leichhardt area.

CONSTRAINTS

The practical constraints against urban agriculture on any site include:

1. Solar access – urban agriculture requires a favourable solar aspect to northwards to give most vegetable crops four to six hours sunlight a day, minimum.
2. Shading – food production areas can benefit from trees that provide windbreaks against cold, blustery winter winds that can damage crops, but too much overshadowing can reduce the amount of winter sun needed for successful growth
3. Water- Community gardens require a reliable supply of water, whether from a tap or from rainwater tanks harvesting rainfall from adjacent structures.
4. Root competition - depending of the species of adjacent tree, there may be a potential for root invasion of the community garden growing beds; this has been noticed in a number of other community gardens sited adjacent to trees.
5. Soil contamination – plants have different contaminant uptake capacities, and the type of food which can be grown is constrained by the type and extent of any soil contaminants
6. Soils - soils for community gardens should be free from waterlogging or severe drainage problems so as to avoid plant root damage

OPPORTUNITIES

The Callan Park Master Plan offers a unique opportunity to provide the city with a range of recreational and educational opportunities (particularly those related to urban sustainability) while preserving for public enjoyment an area of historic importance and botanic interest.

Much public land is given over to sports and passive recreation, including that in Callan Park. The Master Planning process provides the opportunity to consider the possibility that small parcels of land should be offered to the public for the practice of a newer form of recreation — community gardening and allied activities.

In relation to producing food and an associated sense of place and community close to where people live, opportunities specific to the Callan Park include:

- retaining and creating new options for the existing Glovers Community Garden
- developing a new community garden at Callan Park, contingent on community interest
- considering other innovative land uses for sustainability, including sustainability education.

The Existing Glovers Community Garden

The Master Planning process creates opportunities to explore retaining and improving Glovers Community garden on its present location on the slope adjacent to the sporting field at the north western point of the Callan Park.

The Glovers Community Garden site is enclosed by a chainlink fence. The gardeners have had an informal arrangement to make use of the upslope portion above their fence to the top of the slope when the number of community gardeners is such that they create demand for gardening space that exceeds the capacity of the garden.

At present, however, the gardeners are deprived of exercising this option by the horticultural activities of an individual unassociated with the community garden who, as far as is known, has no previous arrangement with the land managers. These works are not associated with Glovers Community Garden.

For well over a decade and a half, Glovers has served as an educational facility for visiting community, adult education and TAFE groups and is on the City of Sydney community garden tour circuit which is used to introduce people interested in community gardening to the various types of gardens found in Sydney. For those participating in it, the garden provides a sense of shared place in the area.

The garden also serves as one of a number of Local Seed Networks around Australia. These produce and distribute non-hybrid seed to other gardeners to preserve, through use, the biodiversity of food and associated crops that are at as much risk of loss as many indigenous plants.

There is an opportunity to explore formalizing the land arrangements for Glovers Community Garden, including the land upslope of the upper fenceline, for purposes of community gardening such as community food production, education and celebration, to provide long-term security of tenure.

Opportunity for Other Innovative Community Initiatives in Urban Agriculture

Callan Park hosts mature trees and other species of a type that have been used for food and materials by indigenous people as well as arrivals from other cultures.

This provides the opportunity to develop an educational feature themed around bushfoods and useful species that would increase the social value of the Callan Park. Such an educational feature could include interpretive signage, selected new plantings, and a self-guided bush foods/useful species walk for visitor education.

Nut tree grove

Another innovative, educational opportunity could be establishing a grove of mixed nut trees as a forage food resource and as an educational installation that would enhance the sustainability values of the Callan Park.

Such a planting, which involved the community in its establishment, has proven popular in the town of Totnes in the UK.

City Cousin site

There is an opportunity to explore whether Callan Park is suitable as a 'cousin' site for the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprise Food Connect.^{xv}

Food Connect links Sydney urban fringe farmers with city eaters through making available a weekly box of seasonal, locally grown foods. Their aim is to provide city people with quality food and to provide farmers with a better return than mainstream retailers provide.

City subscribers collect their weekly food boxes from 'City Cousins', which are collection points in different areas. It is possible that Callan Park is suitable City Cousin site.

RISKS

Risks to the existing Glovers Community Garden

No consultation has yet been made with the Glovers community gardeners, so the following comments remain speculative.

Glovers Community Garden has no current lease or licence agreement with any landholder and, therefore, no security of tenure. This places it in a vulnerable position regarding possible use of the Callan Park stemming from the Master Plan.

There are three possible avenues of threat:

1. Redevelopment of the adjacent sports field could lead to pressure to construct some kind of audience seating on the slope presently occupied by the community garden.
2. Pressure could be applied to move the garden to another site even if the gardeners do not want to move.
3. Any future proposal to revegetate the slope that is presently occupied by the community garden with indigenous plants could threaten the existence of the garden.

The garden is protected from vandalism by its distance from the nearest road, Glover Street (which provides the access point for the gardeners) and by a high, chainlink fence that surrounds the garden.

Expectations

If urban agriculture is to be retained, expanded and improved at Callan Park, the expectations are:

That it will be community based, in keeping with the requirements of the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002 (CP Act)

That it can be considered as a 'public recreation' in keeping with the requirements of the CP Act

That it will be open to the public.

That it can provide a historic link with the site's past and with its existing uses.

ⁱ Community Gardening in SA — Resource Kit; 2005; Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association Inc/Government of South Australia.

ⁱⁱ Bartolomei L and others, 2003; A Bountiful Harvest - Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo; NSW Department of Housing & UNSW.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pinkerton T, Hopkins R, 2009; Local Food — How to Make it Happen in Your Community; Green Books, Dartington, UK.

^{iv} Community Gardening in SA — Resource Kit; 2005; Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association Inc/Government of South Australia.

^v Bartolomei L and others, 2003; A Bountiful Harvest - Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo; NSW Department of Housing & UNSW.

^{vi} Woodward P, Vardy P, 2005; Community Gardens; Hyland House, Flemington, Victoria.

^{vii} Francis M, Hester R, 1990; The Meaning of Gardens: idea, place, action; MIT Press, Massachusetts.

^{viii} Oldenburg R 1999; The Great Good Place; Marlowe & Company, New York.

^{ix} Community Gardening in SA — Resource Kit; 2005; Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association Inc/Government of South Australia.

^x Barlett PF2005; Urban Place - Reconnecting With the Natural World; The MIT Press, Massachusetts.

^{xi} Hynes P, 1996; A patch of Eden; Institute on Women and Technology; USA.

^{xii} <http://www.seedsavers.net> - Seed Savers Network

^{xiii} Thomas F, Grayson R2008; Community Gardens — Policy Directions for Kogarah Municipal Council.
<http://communitygarden.org.au>

^{xiv} Glovers Community Garden: <http://communitygarden.org.au/glovers-photo-essay>

^{xv} Food Connect — <http://sydney.foodconnect.com.au>

More on community gardening: <http://communitygarden.org.au>

DRAFT