

# CALLAN PARK EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL USES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Callan Park is one of Sydney's most important cultural landscape. It is however, a complicated environment with many stakeholders and significant opportunities and constraints affecting its future.

## STRENGTHS

- Callan Park can be understood as a 'whole of site cultural environment' within which particular localities have meaning for the community.
- Callan Park accommodates some of the city's most important cultural stakeholders including Sydney College of the Arts and NSW Writers Centre
- It is an increasingly important venue for community & cultural events
- It has particular Aboriginal significance as the home of the Wangal people, the original inhabitants of the area and is the location of 8 Aboriginal sites
- Callan Park occupies a place on Leichhardt's cultural ridgeline extending from the Red Box through to Balmain
- Callan Park has become a cultural symbol of the power of community action

## CONSTRAINTS

- Limits to the kind of educational facilities that can be provided
- Constraints on building new cultural facilities and adaptive reuse
- Contamination, condition of existing buildings and other issues common to the site
- The lack of a street frontage to enable a creative dialogue with Balmain Rd

## OPPORTUNITIES

- The potential to expand and consolidate the cultural and education sector
- The potential to develop student housing on site as part of SCA
- The opportunity to create a centre for excellence in creativity, health & wellbeing
- The potential to develop the short-term residential opportunities of the Writers' Centre and SCA
- The opportunity to extend the exploration of Aboriginal culture in Callan Park
- The potential to strengthen the cultural cluster and to connect Callan Park to the 'cultural ridgeline'
- The opportunity in a consolidated urban environment to explore a deeper cultural ecology

## RISKS

Risks surrounding the scope of cultural actions and interventions discussed include:

- The footloose nature of cultural institutions
- The very exacting nature of the Callan Park Act
- The past uses of Callan Park
- The practical issues of remediation and site recovery

## EXPECTATIONS & THE WAY FORWARD

A culturally led future for Callan Park might include:

- The formation of close working relationships with key cultural stakeholders
- Inclusion of adjacent creative industries to strengthen the potential for a sustainable cultural cluster
- The development of connections between the various cultural interventions into the natural environment and open space
- Cross divisional work linking cultural outcomes with areas of planning including student housing, artist/writer residencies & community studios
- Restorative work with past stakeholders and communities to develop capacity for change and innovative thinking about Callan Park

## **STRENGTHS OF THE SITE**

### **The strength of Callan Park as a cultural environment**

The whole of Callan Park functions as a cultural environment within which particular localities have meaning for the community. The Statement of Significance states:

*'The site as a whole has very high levels of social significance and has special associations for the local and broader community both as an open space resource and for its cultural and aesthetic value'* Tanner

The vistas across the expanse of open space, the exceptional heritage buildings and their generous surrounds and the presence of the foreshore are part of this. Localities such as the Broughton Hall Garden, Kirkbride Garden and Charles Moore Garden are valued as are places and spaces adjacent to heritage buildings. The scale of community and cultural uses from the community garden to Sydney College of the Arts is already impressive but the scope and breadth of the site itself is a rare and unusual cultural strength.

### **The range of current educational & cultural uses**

Callan Park accommodates some of the city's most important cultural stakeholders. Sydney College of the Arts occupies the Kirkbride buildings. SCA is the visual Art Faculty of the University of Sydney and relocated to Callan Park in 1996. The College is a campus of Sydney University. Programs are studio based and facilities include computer, multimedia labs, print, clay, glass, wood, metal workshops, film, video, sound production studios. The campus also includes SCA Gallery, Library and student exhibition spaces. A range of spaces are available for events hire. Callan Park is also one of the most popular venues in Leichhardt for commercial photography. SCA leases venues for this purpose.

The NSW Writers Centre occupies the Gary Owen buildings. It was established in May 1991 to support and promote the work of writers. The Centre offers literary resources, professional information and events such as book launches, readings and lectures. It support professional development through seminars, courses and workshops and has an expanding resource library.

Educational use by primary and secondary schools is in the area of school sport. King Georges Park and Waterfront Drive Oval are regularly used by schools for sporting fixtures, carnivals and training.

Closely aligned to the notion of a cultural cluster is the mix of activities and organisation that support 'life-long learning' in Callan Park and its neighbourhood. The location of Sydney Community College on Balmain Road should be noted as should the capacity of Sydney Writers Centre and SCA to engage with mid-career creatives and mature aged students.

### **The capacity of Callan Park to host cultural events**

King Georges Park is a location for community events including the community protest meetings about both Callan Park and the new Iron Cove Bridge. As SCA has become more involved with the local area an increasing number of cultural events are located there. This has included the Flightpath Festival.

### **The significance of Callan Park as an Aboriginal cultural environment**

Leichhardt Council has developed several public art projects in Callan Park and adjacent Leichhardt Aquatic Centre. In 1996 Aboriginal artist Joe Hurst developed an aboriginal interpretive trail along part of the foreshore at Callan Point. Small ceramic plaque works describe plants, food and tribal language information. A major bronze 'map' locates visitors in relation to, and names, places of importance to Aboriginal people. Bronwyn Bancroft is currently working on a major artwork at the Aquatic Centre.

As an area of Parramatta River foreshore which has natural sections such as Callan Point the area evokes the culture of the Wangal people, the original inhabitants of the area. There are 8 Aboriginal sites

in Callan Park. Five sites at Callan Point contain shell middens close to the water's edge. These sites contain the remnants of meals comprising shells from rock oysters, cockles and mussels and 'tell the story' of the places groups stopped at to camp and eat. Similar middens in Port Jackson are thought to be 4,500 years old. Artworks by Joe Hurst as well as archaeological sites such as the middens at Callan Point reinforce this important cultural landscape.

### **Callan Park's place on the 'cultural ridgeline'**

Leichhardt Council have identified a 'cultural ridgeline' or spine that runs from Lilyfield through the Rozelle area and on through to Balmain. The following creative industries are located in or in the vicinity of Callan Park.

- 1 + 2 Artist Studios, Balmain Road
- Circus Unique
- Fellowship of Australian Writers
- NSW Writers Centre
- Sydney College of the Arts
- Sydney Community College
- Feminist Bookshop
- Washhouse gallery; Nola's Studio; ArtEreal
- Parachute Regiment Site, Big Red Box
- Australian National Playwright's Centre
- Community Cultural Development Network NSW
- Gravity Feed Inc
- Marguerite Pepper Productions
- Poet's Union Inc
- Legs on the Wall Inc

This cluster has positive implications for the level of cultural activity Callan Park may be able to sustain in the future.

### **The fight for Callan Park as a symbol of community action**

Callan Park has been a highly contested site in a city where many battles have been fought over areas of cultural significance. Callan Park joins The Rocks and Glebe as localities where considerable grassroots action has taken place over a long period to achieve a 'win for the community'. The current situation is seen by many residents of Leichhardt LGA as a significant victory and symbolic of a culture of dissent and political action.

## **CONSTRAINTS**

### **Limits to the kind of educational facilities that can be provided**

The Callan Park Act 2002 prohibits the use of the site for a primary or secondary school. "educational facility" means a university or any other facility providing educational services on a not-for-profit basis, but does not include a secondary school or a primary school

### **Constraints on building new cultural facilities and adaptive reuse**

The Callan Park Act 2002 restricts the kind of new development to that which can occur in the footprint of existing buildings. Although the demolition of intrusive buildings may present opportunities Leichhardt Council points out in its *Callan Park Scoping Workshop Presentation*, March 2009 'some of the intrusive buildings may be more useful than the heritage buildings to generate income' and that 'retention may be warranted for financial reasons' These considerations indicate the difficulty that may occur in developing purpose built facilities on this site.

### **Contamination, condition of existing buildings and other issues common to the site**

Many of the constraints identified in past geotechnical and heritage evaluations of Callan Park will also impact on the capacity of the site to accommodate growth in the cultural and educational sector. The cost of remediation or construction may be prohibitive especially to the limited development budgets of the community sector.

#### **The lack of a street frontage to enable a creative dialogue with Balmain Rd**

The position of the key facilities deep within the site has constraints as well as advantages. The lack of a street frontage to Balmain Road, the lack of public access and casual visits from passersby may have an impact on the viability of facilities such as galleries. There may be out-of-hours safety issues for those using Callan Park. The mood and character of cultural institutions may be defined by the heritage environment rather than other forces such as 'youth culture' that are more evident in a street front context.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **The potential to expand and consolidate the cultural and education sector**

Callan Park has significant cultural stakeholders that have played a vital role in shaping the site as a contemporary cultural landscape. The capacity to expand and consolidate the cultural education sector is an opportunity. In particular the potential to expand the range of courses and functions offered by SCA to include residential courses, expanded programs and a greater capacity to partner with other stakeholders.

#### **The potential to develop student housing on site as part of SCA**

The development of accommodation on site would activate the area at all times of day and night, increasing community safety and security. The opportunity to address the identified need for low cost accommodation for young and emerging artists and art students in the Leichhardt area should be explored as part of broader site options.

#### **The opportunity to create a centre for excellence in creativity, health & wellbeing**

The links between art and health are well established. A number of well developed projects and partnerships exist accompanied by an expanding body of research. The opportunity exists for SCA to be supported in their interest in this dynamic and topical area of cultural development. The scope to include a clinical mental health component should be investigated.

#### **The potential to develop the short-term residential opportunities of the Writers' Centre and SCA**

Callan Park offers a range of opportunities for adaptive use of buildings that could activate artist's studios, short term residency accommodation and the opportunity for residential courses. The capacity to provide studio and workshop space for local government public art projects in the Inner West should be explored.

#### **The opportunity to extend the exploration of Aboriginal culture in Callan Park**

The importance of Callan Point, the linked bush regeneration, the development of art and heritage work might all form part of an extended heritage trail. This might link with City of Sydney's Eora Dreaming.

#### **The potential to strengthen the cultural cluster and to connect Callan Park to the 'cultural ridgeline'**

Leichhardt has one of the most successful subregional creative industries sectors in Australia. The potential to link Callan Park to the broader neighbourhood through Master Plan interventions including urban design, improved connectivity, programming, partnerships and projects is significant and would benefit the sector.

#### **The opportunity in a consolidated urban environment to explore a deeper cultural ecology**

The expanse of Callan Park with its extraordinary range of micro environments, garden and horticultural landscapes, bushland and active regeneration provides a meaningful opportunity to explore the connection of nature, culture and ecology. The linked role that the natural environment of Callan Park

has played in the treatment of mental illness and its role in community well-being in contemporary Leichhardt have great potential to shape themes and design work.

## **RISKS**

Risks surrounding the scope of cultural actions and interventions discussed include:

- The footloose nature of cultural institutions and the danger that major stakeholders may move elsewhere compromising the Master Plan
- The very exacting nature of the Callan Park Act may discourage innovative approaches to managing open space and built form
- The past uses of Callan Park, in particular, the trauma of mental health treatment, the unwelcome relocation of services and unresolved community attitudes may compromise the energy needed for innovative cultural change
- The practical issues of remediation and site recovery may prove so expensive that new initiatives can't be funded

## **EXPECTATIONS & THE WAY FORWARD**

There is considerable scope in the Master Plan process to plan a culturally led future for Callan Park. For this to happen the following directions are important:

- The formation of close working relationships with key cultural stakeholders including Leichhardt Council, SCA and the Writer's Centre
- An expansion of the project to include adjacent cultural services and creative industries to strengthen the potential for a sustainable cultural cluster
- The development of connections between the various cultural interventions into the natural environment and open space – gardens, aboriginal heritage, foreshore, bush regeneration, city farm ideas
- Cross divisional work linking cultural outcomes with areas of planning including student housing
- Restorative work with past stakeholders and communities to develop capacity for change and innovative thinking about Calla