

Executive Summary

This discussion paper suggest how the concept of Public Space/Community Space, set out by the Callan Park Taskforce, can be first understood and then applied to Callan Park. This paper looks at the way people interact with public spaces, from individual interactions through to group and community interactions. It identifies four levels or types of space that are commonly found with urban parks: Personal Space; Cultural-Social Space; Economic Space; and Environmental Space; and then gives examples of how these spaces function.

The paper then uses the SCORE analysis to make an objective assessment of Callan Park based on the four space typologies.

Because there will be a wide scope for interpretation of what is a constraint or opportunity within the four headings used to structure the discussion paper, many of the issues raised will be difficult to quantify. Likewise, because the paper is specific to Callan Park, it avoids direct comparisons with other places and does not examine precedents as opportunities.

The expectation is that the Master Planning process will be informed by principles that are generated through debate and research around this discussion paper, and that these principles can be used to identify precedents in the next stages of the project.

Public Space / Community Space

A public space refers to an area or place that is open and accessible to all citizens, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level. Public spaces allow for freedom of access, association, and expression. Public spaces are where public life takes place and people inevitably come together.

It is in public spaces that we share the many experiences of urban life.

The public spaces of a city can also have a global significance, contributing to the image and brand of a location – think Times Square, Hyde Park – and to the local and national economy through tourism.

A community space is harder to define, particularly in the modern information age. Traditional Community spaces are often thought of as spaces within buildings, such as halls or smaller outside areas where particular groups or small linked populations gather. Traditional communities had strong geographic and physical links, but the advent of the Internet and instant forms of communication such as SMS have created new forms of communities that regular meet online to share their passions and ideas, with the ability to work together to influence public life like never before.

Callan Park is definitively a public space. It is in public ownership, has open public access and allows its many users a freedom to associate and pursue a wide range of interests and activities. Callan Park also operates as a community space because there are a number of communities that live, work and study within it. Callan Park also provides community groups a range of places and spaces to meet formally and informally and the setting has helped to create communities with common interests, such a dog walking groups. Finally, the recent campaigns against the redevelopment on the site created a broad community group that has reinforced the concept of Callan Park as a community space.

The role of parks and open spaces

In this global age, cities are growing physically and demographically as more people move to urban areas. As the city of Sydney continues to grow, the role of parks will become increasingly important. To better understand why parks are so important this discussion paper looks at how parks operate as four different types of spaces:

- Personal spaces
- Social-Cultural spaces
- Economic spaces
- Environmental spaces

Personal spaces

Personal spaces are where we feel comfortable and secure. City parks and open spaces are for many people the places we go to for reflection, solitude or simply to forget day-to-day problems.

Parks also offer a different type of personal space that is effectively internalised, because parks are often associated with memories from childhood or other key periods in our lives and these bonds with physical spaces remain strong and emotive. Parks may also be associated with specific major life events; a first kiss, proposals of marriage and birthday parties and these connections with family members and friends form the basis of shared memories.

Parks can also contribute to mental health and well being in both passive and active ways. There are recognised therapeutic benefits of exposure to nature and taking part in activities such as gardening and walking in parks.

Parks offer members of the public the space to exercise and maintain physical health through a number of formal and informal pursuits. The flexibility of open spaces ensures these opportunities at every stage of life, from school or team sports as a child or youth, through to running or cycling as an adult and walking with companion animals in later life.

Social - Cultural space

Green or natural open spaces also offer city dwellers a window into the past, a chance to appreciate the landscape without buildings and roads, and experience open expanses of space in the confines of the city.

Parks and open spaces are also the setting for many shared cultural and social activities, from recreation and physical exercise to art exhibitions and concerts. Parks are increasingly seen as venues in their own right and in summer parks offer a multitude of possibilities for events for both the local community and other city residents.

For indigenous groups, parks offer a spiritual connection to land and the interpretation of these aspects of open spaces within cities can help to promote mutual understanding of indigenous cultures and the values they place on the natural environments.

Parks offer spaces for organised and self-lead education and learning. From bird watching to students sitting beneath trees and studying in groups, to structured learning around flora and fauna, parks are an educational resource for everyone.

Parks and open spaces in cities are an important common cultural reference point and provide migrant groups with spaces to meet and feel at home within foreign cities. There are often common social norms that allow people from various backgrounds to feel relaxed in parks and public spaces.

Parks also provide a setting for creative expression, be it music, sculpture or the performing arts against a natural backdrop. Coupled with local accessibility, parks offer the chance to take the traditional arts out of purpose built halls and galleries and into communities that might not usually have access to these events.

Economic space

The Australian image globally is based on the projection of sophisticated urban living and an ancient and unique landscape and ecosystem. Most visitors to this country want to experience both of these aspects on any trip. The success of the Botanic Gardens and Domain and the Bondi to Coogee coastal walk demonstrate that city parks and open spaces can be a draw for tourists and help to stimulate and support local communities.

Urban parks are attractive amenities that improve the economic value and desirability of living in high-density neighbourhoods. Many local businesses benefit from being close to quality open spaces - being within close proximity to a park can add upward of 15% to the value of a residential property. The loss of

open space through redevelopment can have a detrimental affect on both local business and homeowners.

Parks and open space provide 'free' flexible spaces for numerous events and activities for the local community, schools, local groups and associations. These groups and institutions that use public open spaces save millions of dollars annually¹ and it is only when these shared assets are lost does there economic contribute become truly quantifiable.

If managed and organised well, parks and open spaces can also generate revenue through hosting events and festivals that attract visitors to the local area.

Environmental space

Parks and open spaces are key to helping to sustain ecosystems and biotopes (or habitats) within cities. Remanent vegetation species can be identified, conserved and enhanced to provide habitats that benefit and increase local and regional biodiversity.

The trees and plants in parks can act as a store of carbon dioxide. A single mature trees is able to capture between on average 170kg during its lifetime, and as well as capturing carbon dioxide trees can filter air and remove particles and pollutants increasing the quality of air in our cities.

Parks and Open spaces within cities also provide a natural cooling effect that goes some way to countering the urban heat island effect, where buildings and roads act as a store of heat energy and produce micro climates within urban areas. The shade provided by trees and vegetation is vital for not only humans but animals in the hot summer months.

A network of trees and vegetation also provide opportunities for wastewater and stormwater recycling and treatment. Understanding and harnessing these natural systems can improve the quality of local water bodies and water can be treated and re-used for irrigation on site and off site with the result of environmental and economic savings.

Callan Park's Strengths

- Callan Park is a large area; it already offers a range of uses and functions as a series of Personal, Social-Cultural, Economic and Environmental spaces
- Callan Park is a unique multi-use public space where personal, socio-cultural and environmental spaces interface with health, education and community uses
- The range of activities carried out in Callan Park means it is enjoyed and well-used all year round
- Within the boundaries of Callan Park there are a variety of different spaces and areas with a different character such as the waterfront, formal gardens and bush areas offering different experiences
- The Callan Park Act protects the open spaces of Callan Park
- Callan Park is a safe place; it has had very few instances of crime over the past few years and the strenth of local community connections helps to ensure its various users mostly respect Callan Park
- Callan Park has a central location within Sydney and is well served by public transport and major roads

Constraints that will impact on Master Planning

- The Callan Park Act may limit the potential to diversify the range of Public Space opportunities

¹ The value of public open space for community service provision. 2001, Sydney Urban Parks Education and Research (SUPER) Group, Sydney.

- Currently there is only a limited budget allocation for the maintenance of Callan Park and any proposals that change use patterns will have to consider any short and long term cost implications
-
- The costs of adapting heritage buildings could limit the potential uses of some of the buildings in Callan Park
- Existing uses and tenancies in Callan Park may restrict potential new uses due to issues such as noise, privacy and established operational requirements

Opportunities

- To expand the range of cultural events within Callan Park and take advantage of the cultural community of Leichhardt and Sydney as a whole
- To adapt for re-use, derelict buildings in Callan Park as venues for community activities
- To create an exemplar sustainable multi-use parkland within one of the worlds global cities
- To use high quality design and landscape architecture to enhance under-utilised spaces within Callan Park
- To benefit the local economy through increasing visitation to Callan Park
- To improve the environmental quality of the local area by increasing biodiversity and improving water quality
- To further protect and manage the remnant bush species within Callan Park
- To create a community nursery for local tree stock that can be used within the Leichhardt local government area
- To use interpretative signage and material to highlight Callan Park's social and cultural history
- To formalise parking and traffic arrangements to ensure minimal impact on the site's infrastructure

Risks associated with the Master Planning process

- That insufficient funding is secured for delivery of the Master Plan
- That Callan Park's current multi-use strength is diluted by the dominance of a single use that marginalises the others
- That new uses or improvements to Callan Park might necessitate increased security and affect existing access
- That new uses on Callan Park are not sustainable from a social, environmental or financial perspective
- That changing the balance of uses within Callan Park will lead to more cars and parking within the site

Expectations

- That the Master Plan will address and find the appropriate balance between the different, personal, social – cultural, economic and environmental spaces within Callan Park
- That the Master Plan will enhance the experience of Callan Park for its local users and also raise the profile of Callan Park as an important regional asset
- That the Master Plan will provide a framework for a long term sustainable future for Callan Park
- That the Master Plan will be framed within the objects of Callan Park Act (2002)
- That more people will come to Callan Park to enjoy and share this unique asset

Bibliography

The Value of Parks, 2008, The Parks Forum

The value of public open space for community service provision. 2001, Sydney Urban Parks Education and Research (SUPER) Group, Sydney.

DRAFT