



Lake Burley Griffin Guardians Analysis of the West Basin Place Planning & Urban Design Review Tender and its Implications

***Based on Attachment 1: Statement of Requirements (SoR)
Part of Request for Tender no. 57746.300 CRA***

3 April 2019

In this paper Lake Burley Griffin Guardians (the Guardians) provides an analysis of — *Attachment 1 of the tender 57746.300 CRA*, for a spatial master plan and urban design framework for West Basin, issued by the ACT Government on 14 March 2019.

The proposed tender attachment is to prepare the spatial master plan component of a tender to be undertaken by the engineering firm Indesco responsible for engineering, spatial master plan, economic assessment, staging, investment strategy and a recreation aquatic facility. The spatial master plan is proposed by the ACT Government for works that will fall within the governance of the Commonwealth of Australia through the National Capital Authority and the ACT Territory Government.

Although there is no consultation requested on this paper, the Guardians hold deep concerns about the West Basin proposal. We take this opportunity to inform ministers and officials of both Governments and others of these concerns. At the same time we address some other concerns we have relating to West Basin and the lake in particular.

The Guardians are a voluntary group whose members have spent a great deal of time researching Lake Burley Griffin issues and liaising with both federal and ACT Governments, the NCA and numerous bureaucrats.

OVERVIEW

Lake Burley Griffin and its lakeshore landscape is a unique cultural feature of our national Capital. Unlike waterfronts of other major Australian cities that are beside flowing rivers or sea waters, the Lake is an artificial water body bounded by an intermittent riparian surround. Its environment is variable, sensitive to the vagaries of a multi-land-use catchment and urban surrounds. To propose a city extension to the lake comparing this with coastal post-industrial waterfronts is irrational and fraught with considerable issues.

The Guardians have been requesting a review of West Basin planning with community involvement for the last 4 years. We would have welcomed an opportunity for constructive contribution to this call for tenders. The Guardians are therefore extremely concerned that this

review is not considering community consultation or involvement and is following the National Capital Plan's obsolete objectives from 2004. The explicit definition of this tender as a 'review' of existing material while not allowing new work, community involvement, or new research is an unforgivable constraint.

The National Capital Authority (NCA) has made seven amendments to the National Capital Plan (NCP) since 2015 when the Guardians was established and it is deeply disturbing that the NCA has chosen to ignore the obviously troubling planning concerns related to the West Basin Precinct raised by the Guardians with the NCA Administration and Board. As the master planning authority for Canberra the NCA should be directing quality, well-researched planning for the future. Our concerns are summarised here:

1. Climate change and the likely heat build-up in densified and concreted areas has not been professionally researched;
2. Eutrophication of lake waters is a serious issue affecting all lake waters in Canberra due to algal blooms arising from nutrient enrichment. Nutrient enrichment will be exacerbated by the hard surfaces of urban infrastructure instead of parkland and inert, hard edges replacing effective filtration by lake edge vegetation. The damage to the Lake that will arise from the 2.86ha lake infill at West Basin edged with a retaining wall as well as more land infill of the Basin's western shores in the future that will worsen eutrophication potential;
3. Social recreation needs of the rapidly increasing City population for access to the 'loose space' of grassed areas, shady trees and naturally vegetated water edges;
4. The privatising of parklands and significant lake vistas, damage to the Lake's urban form and the proposed loss of lake waters for a, primarily, apartment estate and its infrastructure;
5. A serious professional master plan tender for an area that lies within Canberra's designated area and has national significance should follow a sequence of identification of inherent values followed by principles arising from the values, with objectives based on the principles that will lead on to desirable outcomes;
6. A planning process that is obsolete and highly damaging to the iconic Lake and its essential parklands.

The tender shows no respect for the Lake or its landscaped surrounds. It ignores the heritage values of history, aesthetic qualities, natural and social values of West Basin as a critical component of the iconic Lake Burley Griffin. The City Renewal Authority (CRA) should reduce the errors of this planning venture but has done nothing towards influencing the flawed NCP. It is apparent that the prime aim of this review is to maximize revenue from land sales and subsequent rates.

The major objective of Lake Burley Griffin Guardians is to protect the values of Lake Burley Griffin. Given that both the National and ACT Governments have supported neither heritage assessments nor protective management and continue to support blighting development, the Guardians are advocating for legal lake protection similar to the Adelaide Park Lands Act of 2005 that provides for protection along with a dedicated management Authority.

COMMENTS ON THE STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENTS (SoR)

The comments by the Guardians follow the numbered items in the SoR paper.

1.1 Background

Lack of professional up-to-date objectives. The objectives for West Basin in the National Capital Plan (NCP) were developed in 2004, lodged in the NCP in 2006 and retained in subsequent versions. They were criticised at that time by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and numerous relevant experts. They are flawed and with the passage of time are mostly obsolete.

- The objectives for the West Basin Precinct (WBP) (NCP 2016: Item 4.7.3) show no respect for the Griffin plans of 1911, 1913 and 1918 nor the 1964 NDCD plan. This latter plan embraces the brilliance of the Griffins and Australia's best twentieth Century landscape and engineering designers, who all maintained a public parkland perimeter for Lake Burley Griffin, including around West Basin, yet it is largely unrecognized.
- The WBP objectives in the NCP show no respect for the heritage of the Lake, its lake waters or its parklands, the prize-winning Lake plan or the Lake's urban form that was engineered in the 1964 Lake development.
- The WBP objectives in the NCP show no respect for the significant vistas across Lake Burley Griffin from City Hill and Commonwealth Avenue and the importance of these vistas in the inner-city journey to the Australian Parliament from Northbourne Avenue.
- The WBP objectives in the NCP do not address contemporary issues of climate change and how an estate of concrete buildings and sealed roads will exacerbate heat build up.
- Other than a few token words, the WBP objectives in NCP do not address the environmental issues of the proposed West Basin development on the lake bed, nor the destruction of the lake edge zone that is still maturing but already provides wildlife habitat, and the significant filtering of runoff responsible for blue-green algae provided by that lake edge zone.
- The WBP objectives do not reflect the needs of a rapidly increasing and projected apartment dwelling population along Northbourne Avenue and around City Hill. These need public open recreation space with grassed and treed areas, not just a narrow concrete promenade.
- The WBP objectives show no appreciation of the importance of the location of West Basin's Acton Park as a strategic place not solely as a recreation area but one that could be the location of some future iconic public institution. It is an area that should lead the public and visitors to the National Museum as well as to Australia's Parliament House
- There is no reflection on or integration of the planning process being undertaken for Acton Peninsula Draft Structure Plan, Commonwealth Avenue Bridge or the Stage 2 Light Rail.
- The SoR is part of a review, yet there is no WBP objective that involves or includes the community in any of the design planning although the land in question is public parkland and is part of an iconic public lake, central in the National Capital and belonging to *all* Australians.

1.2 CRA Vision

- The statement, "...a mandate that is focussed on design-led and people-focussed revitalisation and renewal" belies many recent expert and community opinions. 'People-focussed' does not automatically indicate people resident at the focus.
- Further, "acknowledging that underlying project parameters and assumptions have evolved since 2013-14...", was addressed above. If the authority is, "currently undertaking a review of the existing planning for West Basin which will inform the future development of this highly significant place" then we ask when will the contemporary community be given a chance to consult, both fully and effectively?
- The community is jaundiced with the ACT Government practice of responding to community suggestions and objections with no more than cosmetic changes that effect (and cost) little or nothing. Community consultation can only be effective if it operates *before* planning is realised and becomes too costly to make changes.
- We assert, that the "...lens of the Authority's mandate.." is severely astigmatised.
- It is no longer valid to brush off criticisms of planning decisions by declaring, "It is in the National Capital Plan".
- The CRA may have involved the community in their City and Gateway Urban Design Framework planning for Northbourne Avenue and Haig Park which Guardian members attended, but these did not include West Basin. The Guardians also notes that an intent for West Basin was added into the final report for the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework released 19 December 2018 and this late inclusion meant that this element had unforgivably not been exposed for community comment.
- With regard to West Basin there is no explanation of the partnership with the community now referred to in this SoR nor how the CRA is planning to do this in the context of the Lake and visitor needs.
- The Guardians are critical that consultation on National Capital planning issues appears to involve mostly the Canberra and immediate local community. When will there be overt and effective attempts to draw in the people of Australia to consult on planning in *their* National Capital?

1.3 CRA Strategic Goals

Goal 1 What is the relationship of these goals to West Basin development, for example, how has the claimed 'people focused' approach been realised at West Basin with the limited consultation to date and demonstrable lack of support for the proposed development?

Goal 3 What are the social and environmental principles and how have they been acted on here?

Goal 5 There has been little evidence of transparent governance and compliance so far.

1.4 Purpose

This states that a review by PPUDC of community consultation and a review of heritage associations has been or is part of an analysis being undertaken. Will these reviews be made available to the public before a 'consultation' on the reviewed master plan?

The Guardians assert that heritage associations should include an update of the nomination of

Canberra the Planned National Capital, which includes Lake Burley Griffin, that was prepared in 2013 by the Department of the Environment. A heritage assessment of Lake Burley Griffin for the Commonwealth Heritage List is underway and the heritage of the Lake already receives a form of protection under the *EPBC Act* (letter to LBG from Minister Frydenberg, 10 May 2018).

The Guardians also fervently request that, as part of the consideration of 'contemporary thinking', the letter by Professor Kono Toshiyuki, President of ICOMOS on the Resolution made at the ICOMOS General Assembly, Delhi, in 2018 should be respected. *Inter alia*, this letter called on the National and ACT Territory governments to halt the planned infill development and requested that the development at West Basin 'be guided by an overarching conservation management plan'.

The SoR states that the Review does not need to go back to first principles but rather reviews and updates existing information. The Guardians strongly argue that an approach from first principles is exactly what is missing from all the planning for West Basin commencing with the NCP 2006 amendments and its West Basin Precinct plan. Now is the time for thorough research and establishing a master plan with integrity.

1.6 Existing land use functions within the Precinct

The Guardians wholly reject any imputation that 'unrealised' justifies a West Basin land-use change away from wholly dedicated to public use. The neglected parkland has enormous potential as a vibrant public landscape. They ask if the neglect that causes most of the unrealisation was intentional?

1.7 Objectives for the Precinct

Developing any building or cultural attraction on one of the formal, key Walter Burley Griffin determinators of his Canberra design, the Water Axis, will, unquestionably, compromise the Axis. The Guardians respect the significance of the Griffin's Water Axis Vista but notes the Henry Rolland Park jetty intrudes on the Vista when viewed from Acton Peninsula.

2 Planning Work Carried Out to Date

The section refers to selected key planning studies most of which have not been made available to the public and those that the Guardians have requested under FOI have been heavily redacted so that relevant information is substantially withheld.

This lack of public documentation is in contrast with the previously stated CRA Strategic Goals of accountability and transparency.

It is extraordinary that the proposed development is not being considered in the context of the Lake, the community and visitor needs and that this spatial master plan is not being considered in the context of the Acton Peninsula Precinct Draft Urban Strategy plan that to the best of public knowledge, superseded the proposal for a recreational aquatic centre.



Figure 61: West Basin – Indicative waterfront promenade

Above left is the 1964 West Basin master plan (not angled due north) compared with the image above right of West Basin from the NCP 2016 illustrating the promenade shape and proposed reduced size of the Basin. With the NCP Basin delineation West Basin will be approximately half the size of East Basin, thus damaging the more balanced urban form of the 3 Basin composition.

3 Base Material provided by the Territory

Relevant reports clearly prove that the primary goal for the West Basin development is to privatise public parkland and lakebed land to raise public revenue and private profits.

4 Related Projects

Concurrent consultancies and related projects are all focused on the goal to privatise public parkland and lakebed land as a net to capture revenue. There are no consultancies on protecting the inherent social, aesthetic or environmental values of West Basin and retaining its inherent potential for becoming the major ‘lungs’ of Central Canberra. Urban renewal is not renewal if it does not include serious considerations of human health and include far more generously allocated open space, properly designed for the purpose.

5 Opportunities & Constraints

The NCP objectives and precinct planning are touted as an opportunity despite the damage that they promote to the lake bed, the lake form, the environment, the water axis vista (already compromised by the Henry Rolland jetty feature), the peoples’ lakeshore parkland and other issues noted in Item 1 above. Not only is lake bed to be lost on the north-east side of West Basin but parkland is to be lost to the excessive urban infill proposed for the Acton Peninsula area.

Additionally, it is stated that a ‘high level economic analysis’ has been prepared for the City to the Lake project and is listed under ‘opportunities’ but no details are provided to support this work as an opportunity for West Basin, especially since it has yet to be ‘reviewed, updated and evolved’. It

seems premature to interpret that the significantly revised report will conclude that development here will be an economic opportunity as it does. This is premature particularly because of the absence of critical funding for the proposed lowering of Parkes Way and its crossing, also the construction of West Road, the expected high cost of the Commonwealth de-gazettal of the National Land in the form of lake bed required for the lake in-fill, and limited available funding for the related Light Rail Stage 2. Without these fundamental underpinnings or critical project cost issues resolved, the project is unviable.

6 Measuring Success

This is a set of generic measures and the use of these as success measures for West Basin is very encouraging. However, they do not seem to be all the measures that should be met here. Expensive accommodation in an exclusive enclave with very good water views is unlikely to foster demographic diversity and have housing choice. If the ACT Government is expecting to maximise the development potential for significant financial return to the Government and private developers then this goal contradicts a number of these success measures.

Despite suggestions for a need for mixed land use [*Item 7*], promoting a night economy and artistic, cultural and leisure activities, events, and market exchange, etc, these are not compatible with an exclusive accommodation precinct necessary to produce a high rate of return.

Various combinations of measures as listed here will be incompatible at West Basin.

The environment is not mentioned here. Alluding to it tangentially through other measures hardly ensures that solutions will be set to remove the substantial obstacles to top health levels of both the land and water environments. The environment of West Basin and the surrounding land *must* be a key measure of success.

7 Sustainability Commitments

It would be interesting to see some detail as to how mixed-use land releases are seen to promote sustainability. Surely the NCA can require and enforce high sustainability standards. If not there is some fixing to be done.

8 Communications & Engagement

Previous communication on the proposed WBP development appear to have been at best — shallow. The Guardians have conducted numerous information sessions at West Basin and can state that 90% of people spoken to had no idea of the proposed lake infill and development.

The Guardians are aware of the consultation undertaken by the LDA in 2013 but question the validity of claimed consultation by social media. Also, those who supported the City to the Lake proposal then (237) were looking at a markedly different and immature proposal for the West Basin component compared to the current proposal which is still amorphous.

The Guardians' have created two petitions, with 606 and 745 signatures against the West Basin development and held two public meetings of 250 and 450 people, most of who were also against

the development.

It is easier to find ignorance of the proposal, and opposition to it, rather than support for it.

The Guardians' experience on development proposal consultation in Canberra is that it is not genuine and only a counting exercise of people contacted or attending activities/meetings rather than actually engaged or supportive of the relevant proposal/activity.

The assumption is made that since this is a '..high level planning review..', significant community engagement is not expected. Is this insertion intended to ensure that, as often before, the community is kept at arms length and not permitted to engage/complicate/delay? The tenor of this document is that comprehensive and effective community engagement, as used by those supposedly seeking community involvement, remains in some previous age. The Guardians and many others wish to see this comprehensively reversed for both levels of government and all departments.

9 Governance

No comment.

10 Outputs & Approach

10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.5 are all aspirational ideas that appear in landscape planning texts. The comments on spaces do not mention the public recreation spaces, lawns /meadows or loose spaces¹. What is not acceptable is that infrastructure roads are included in the measure of public space when they are vehicular routes not public recreation spaces.

10.8, 11, 12, 13 & 14 cover the mechanics of the project

Further comments

The Guardians stress the consequences of rising heat and lake water eutrophication. The summer of 2018-19 has seen Lake Tuggeranong develop blue-green algae described in the media as looking like green enamel paint.

The Governments are continuing to spin the West Basin development as:

a vibrant cultural and entertainment precinct on a waterfront promenade. The area will create a new city neighbourhood, extending the city to the lake with a cosmopolitan mixture of shops, businesses, cafés, recreation, tourist activities and accommodation

¹ Franck, K and Stevens, Q. 2007. *Loose space: possibility and diversity in urban life*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Madanipour, A. 1996. *Design of Urban Space, an Inquiry into a Socio-spatial Process*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.

Madanipour, A. 2001. Multiple Meanings of Space and the Need for a Dynamic Perspective *The governance of place : space and planning processes*, eds. Ali Madanipour, Angela Hull and Patsy Healey. Aldershot, Hampshire, England

Kingston Foreshore clearly demonstrates that they are unable to achieve a vibrant waterfront promenade. Instead, there is just a very ordinary waterfront of concrete retaining walls, with excessive wave action and evening noise from the cafes and pubs. The 'vibrant' foreshore is essentially restricted to the harbour waterfront, the actual Lake waterfront is virtually private, walking along it imbues a sense of intrusion on the owners' privacy, hardly vibrant. West Basin's Acton Park as a landscape can easily be made a vibrant community place without apartments. The Gold Coast's Home of the Arts proves this point.

The minimal public space suggested is hardly sufficient to accommodate the visitor loads from the future populous City Central and Gateway to the north, from the remainder of Canberra and immediate surrounds and from interstate and overseas visitors.

The continual promotion of West Basin development is occurring while there has been no feasible resolution for bridging of Parkes Way while proposed planning for the traffic issues that will occur on Commonwealth Avenue is a cheap solution designed to significantly increase congestion. Meanwhile the centre of the City area — Garema Place, which 20 years ago was vibrant, has been allowed to die. Where is the much trumpeted vibrancy?

The 2.86ha infill of the Lake at West Basin is proposed as the first stage of the development and that alone will cause great damage and loss. But the ACT Government is planning to commence this stage as soon as possible. The West Basin development will set an alarming precedent that will enable similar damaging developments with further lake-bed acquisitions on and around Lake Burley Griffin in the future. This sensitive lake system landscape, our national heritage, only 50 years old, is being mined for financial gain. A *Lake Burley Griffin and Lakeshore Landscape Protection Act* is desperately needed to protect the Lake landscape as a public place for future generations of Australians.

End