



St Leonards Park
Landscape Master Plan
for
North Sydney Council
8th June 2018

Prepared by

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in collaboration with

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Sydney Council engaged Gallagher Studio landscape architects to prepare a low intervention Landscape Master Plan for St Leonards Park. The team included CRED social planners and consultation experts, Collins and Turner Architects, and Alluvium water engineering.

St Leonards Park covers approximately 15 hectares and is bounded by Miller, Falcon and Ridge Streets and the Warringah Freeway. It is the location of North Sydney Oval, as well as other facilities for organised sport including Bon Andrews Oval, netball courts, cricket nets and a bowling club. St Leonards Park is listed as an item of state significance on the State Heritage Register. Items of heritage significance include the Victorian park structure and path network; North Sydney Oval and grandstands; Bon Andrews Oval; Music Shell; North Sydney War Memorial; Tunks Fountain; WWI Field Gun; and the gardenesque style of planting and historic alignments of trees. Several of the above items are listed on North Sydney's 2013 LEP.

The purpose of the Landscape Master Plan is to provide guidance and direction on future park upgrades, in recognition of the park's importance as a heritage asset, sporting destination and open space resource. The objectives of the project are to:

1. Improve and enhance the park landscape
2. Improve and enhance recreation opportunities for a range of park users
3. Develop a range of options for additional facilities that could appropriately be provided in the park to meet community needs
4. Ensure the park is accessible and appealing to all members of the community
5. Resolve existing circulation and access issues for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles

PROJECT SCOPE

The project scope includes all external spaces within the park and is defined by the surrounding streets and arterial roads. While the North Sydney Oval complex and Bowling Club are located within St Leonards Park, they are not included in the scope of this Landscape Master Plan. The development of the St Leonards Park Landscape Master Plan has been undertaken in 5 stages, commencing in mid-2016. Community consultation has been undertaken throughout the development of the Landscape Master Plan. The project is currently in stage 4 of the process:

- Stage 1: Research and analysis
- Stage 2: Development of principles and ideas
- Stage 3: Preparation of the Draft Landscape Master Plan
- Stage 4: Public exhibition
- Stage 5: Finalise St Leonards Park Landscape Master Plan

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

St Leonards Park is uniquely positioned at a topographic high point of North Sydney, with spectacular views towards the Harbour and CBD skyline from the south-eastern portion of the park. The park sits to the north of the North Sydney CBD, with Miller Street, located on the park's western boundary, linking to other important civic facilities and public spaces to the south. Educational facilities surround the park, with numerous schools within walking distance. Several of these schools use the park daily for lunchtime and sporting activities. St Leonards Park is an important public open space providing unstructured and informal recreation space particularly for residents living in apartments.

The project team undertook a comprehensive analysis of the site including a review of background materials, desktop research, detailed site observations and mapping. Alongside this analysis work our team undertook a consultation process that included on site surveys of residents and users, staff workshops and stakeholder interviews. 457 surveys were completed over the stage 1 consultation period.

The analysis found that the park's spatial structure and assets including the diverse range of heritage tree plantings and items creates a high amenity park. However, a number of issues were identified related to circulation, amenity, and use.

Conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians on paths is a key issue, particularly on the diagonal path connecting Falcon Street to Ridge Street. Park paths are often degraded, with centrally located light poles affecting circulation. Conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists is evident on Fig Tree Lane and on the North Sydney Bowling Club driveway. Worn lawn and informal paths are evident on the Ridge Street frontage.

Aging park facilities and clutter is impacting on park amenity. Park furniture is in poor condition and seating infrequent. The public toilets located in the north west of the park are dilapidated and in need of upgrade. Noise from busy arterial roads, particularly on the Falcon St interface impacts on some areas of the park. The North Sydney Oval wall provides a poor visual interface to the park.

Use of the park is generally high throughout the day, particularly for open lawn areas. The children's playground while well used, provides play opportunities

for younger children only and does not cater for older children between ages 6 and 12. The Music Shell and lawn area has been impacted by poor stormwater drainage. The lack of standalone practice wicket of 1st grade standard within the park has been identified as an issue by a few stakeholders.

Community consultation in stage 1 found that St Leonards Park is well used and well loved. The survey indicated that the five main reasons why people currently use the park are for walking (56.8%), relaxation (41.6%), bringing children to play (39.8%), walking the dog (27.1%) and meeting friends (22.6%). What people value most about the park was also surveyed, with the five most valued features identified as: access to green open space (59.4%), trees and greenery (31.7%), peace and quiet - an oasis in the city (14.8%), dog friendliness of the park (11.2%) and the children's playground (12.6%).

Key issues and ideas for improvement identified in the stage 1 consultation included:

- Addressing cycling in the park to prevent conflict between commuter cyclists and pedestrians.
- Upgrades to park amenity including lighting, walking paths, seating and tables, toilets, and water fountains.
- Upgrades to the open space areas to reduce conflict between different user groups including sporting groups, school groups, exercise groups, dog walkers and passive recreation activities
- Upgrades to the playground, and providing facilities for older children and young people.
- Improved sports facilities including a longer cricket net run up, resurfacing of the netball/basketball courts, lighting at the courts
- Improve pedestrian safety on Fig Tree Lane and the driveway to the North Sydney Bowling Club/The Greens, as identified in 2 stakeholder interviews and the staff workshop.
- Resolve drainage issues as identified in 2 stakeholder interviews including flooding near the amphitheatre and drainage along Ridge St under the fig trees.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND IDEAS

Following the analysis stage, the design team then developed 4 Guiding Principles and 7 Park Improvement Ideas. These are listed below;

Guiding Principles

1. A Park for All
2. An Historic Park
3. An Accessible Park
4. A Generous, Comfortable Park

Park Improvement Ideas

1. Heighten the Significance of Tunks Avenue and the War Memorial
2. Restore Tunks Fountain and Surrounds
3. Provide new and Improved Pedestrian Pathways
4. Refine and Improve Park Spaces
5. Provide a Separated Cycleway on the Eastern Edge
6. Provide Expanded Playground and Facilities
7. Provide 1st Grade Practice Cricket Nets

Overall, more than 200 people participated in the stage 2 consultation process which included an online survey relating to Draft Guiding Principles for the Masterplan; 5 pop up stalls providing opportunities for people to rate their support or otherwise for 7 Draft Park Improvement Ideas; a community workshop (6 attended); and written submissions (8).

Generally, the Guiding Principles were supported by the community with an average 82.5% of respondents finding the principles very appealing or appealing. Likewise, there was a high level of support for each of the Park Improvement Ideas with over 84% of respondents finding 6 of the 7 Park Improvement Ideas very appealing / appealing. Park Improvement Idea 7 - Provide 1st Grade Cricket Nets - received the least support with almost half of respondents (48%) finding it very unappealing or unappealing.

Eight submissions were received from a range of community members. Common themes included cyclist and pedestrian safety, noise pollution in the park, and accessibility and enhancement of facilities. Feedback from the community and key stakeholders on principles and ideas has informed the development of the Landscape Master Plan.

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

The St Leonards Park Master plan has nominated park wide improvements as well as more detailed proposals to enhance the park structure and elements and improve access. Key improvements are described below.

Tunks Avenue / War Memorial Commemorative Walk

This was developed to;

- Reinforce the historic park layout, re-establishing the significance of Tunks Avenue and restoring it as the primary memorial space
- Frame and reinforce views to the War Memorial
- Reinstate the visual prominence of the Field Gun, as its current location is obscured from the street and hard to see

Tunks Avenue is enhanced as commemorative walk, linking landmarks, and reinforcing the historic Park. The Field Gun is relocated to the northern end of Tunks Avenue, to a visually prominent location and providing an 'anchor' to the avenue's northern end. A single line of figs will be planted along Tunks Avenue south, from Fig Tree Lane to Tunks Fountain, restoring the historic line of trees which were removed in the 1950's. Views along Tunks Avenue will be enhanced by selectively crown lifting. The existing pathway will be widened, with sandstone edging and additional seating and accent lighting. The North Sydney War Memorial surrounds will be improved with expanded paving for commemorative events, and a reflection pool located on the Ridge Street frontage. The reflection pool could integrate interpretive features such as text, imagery and lighting. These ideas related to Park Improvement Ideas 1 which 90% of survey participants found appealing / very appealing.

Restoration of Tunks Fountain and Surrounds

This was developed to;

- Restore the historic Tunks Fountain and reinforce its visual prominence
- Create more attractive surrounds for the fountain, providing additional opportunities to overlook and enjoy the fountain

Tunks Fountain is upgraded and raised within a new garden bed with seating surrounds. The diagonal pathway is slightly reoriented to intersect at the fountain, to amplify its importance and significance. Providing seating and expanded gardens surrounding the fountain will provide opportunities to sit, overlook and enjoy the fountain. Accent lighting will highlight the fountain at night, and seasonal colour in the surrounding gardens will provide interest throughout the year. These

ideas related to Park Improvement Idea 2 which 84% of survey participants found appealing / very appealing.

New and Improved Pedestrian Pathways

This was developed to;

- Improve safety for pedestrians
- Improve the park interface to North Sydney Oval boundary wall
- Reduce informal tracks and degraded lawn areas

This involves improvements to existing paths, as well as additional paths in key locations. The existing diagonal path is realigned south of the fountain to improve sight-lines and provide opportunities for gardens adjacent to the North Sydney Oval wall. Additional seating, including picnic and chess tables, will provide multiple opportunities for gathering along this edge. Upgraded path surfacing and lighting on the path edges will improve circulation. A new footpath and gardens is located along Ridge Street adjacent to parking areas. Fig Tree Lane and the bowling club access road will be upgraded with new surfacing and raised thresholds at their entry points to slow drivers. These ideas related to Park Improvement Idea 3 which 94% of survey participants found appealing / very appealing.

Improved Park Spaces

This was developed to;

- Improve amenity for park users
- Define active and passive park spaces
- Provide a garden edge to noisy and busy roads

Additional seating, including picnic tables, will be provided throughout the park. Park benches are located along the primary paths as well as overlooking the playground and the fountain. Additional picnic tables are in the Palm Grove and southern gardens (adjacent to the southern lawn). New drinking fountains are proposed on the diagonal path, as well as at the playground and adjacent to the netball courts on Ridge Street.

Expanded and refurbished gardens are proposed along park edges, under existing trees and to improve visual amenity in key locations. These gardens provide additional areas for quiet reflection, improving the passive recreation opportunities within the park. A more diverse range of flowering plants will provide seasonal colour and texture, with planting predominantly low throughout the park to maintain sight lines. These ideas related to Park Improvement Idea 4 which 97 % of survey participants found appealing / very appealing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A separated Cycleway on the Eastern Edge of the Park

This was developed to;

- Currently, many commuter cyclists use the diagonal path to connect from Falcon Street to the CBD
- Conflicts are occurring between commuter cyclists and pedestrians on internal pathways

A separated commuter cycle path will be located on the eastern boundary of the park, connecting Falcon Street to Ridge Street. The route does not impact on existing facilities such as Bon Andrews Oval, and would not impact on views towards the harbour and Sydney CBD from the south-east. The placement of the cycleway on the lower edge of the slope in the south-east protects harbour views and maintains the open lawn spaces in this area – a well-loved and well utilised part of St Leonards Park. These ideas related to Park Improvement Idea 5 which 88 % of survey participants found appealing / very appealing.

An Expanded Playground and New Toilet

This was developed to;

- Provide a more diverse range of play opportunities for all park users
- Protect and enhance the existing children’s playground
- To upgrade toilets and other associated amenities including tables, benches and BBQ facilities

The playground will be expanded to the west of the current playground, providing opportunities for older children’s adventure play, along with areas for nature play in the integrated garden spaces. This expanded area has been inspired by the habitat of the park, with the retained trees with hollows and bird nests providing inspiration. A custom play structure based on a series of interconnected cubby houses of ‘birds’ nests’ is designed on multiple levels of an elevated structure as well as at ground level. Activities such as climbing, swinging, hiding, jumping, balancing, and sliding will be provided. The existing playground will be retained and upgraded, building on the existing play offerings for young children. The well-loved sand play and music room areas will be retained and improved to provide additional play items. The existing public toilets will be upgraded, providing baby-change facilities for parents visiting the park with young children. These ideas related to Park Improvement Idea 6 which 92 % of survey participants found appealing / very appealing.

Detailed recommendations have also been developed for park lighting, furniture, planting and paving. Lighting is to be upgraded throughout the park, to improve safety as well as to highlight and celebrate significant park features. Furniture is also to be upgraded, with a greater diversity of seating opportunities with BBQ’s, drinking fountains and picnic tables also provided. New trees are proposed in specific areas to enhance the existing qualities of the park.

Park staging information has been provided, identifying priorities which could guide the upgrades to the park. These stages are as follows:

- Priority 1: North Sydney Oval curtilage paving, lighting and resolving the Music Shell flooding issues
- Priority 1B: Cycleway, diagonal pathway and associated gardens
- Priority 2: Tunks Avenue, Fig Tree Lane, the bowling club access road, memorial, lighting and gardens
- Priority 3: Playground and Palm Grove
- Priority 4: Remaining pathways

Public exhibition of the draft master plan commenced on the 24th October 2017 and concluded on the 2nd February 2018. A total of 70 written submissions were received. Subsequent changes, endorsed by council were made to the master plan including;

- Modification to garden beds on Miller Street.
- Inclusion of the magnolia tree (in the south western entry).
- Extension to the junior cricket practice nets.
- Modification to the junior practice wicket in the northern lawn.
- Addition of an exercise station.
- Modifications to the harbour view lawn.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
INTRODUCTION	P 1
1.0 ANALYSIS	
1.1 CONTEXT _____	P 5
1.2 HERITAGE _____	P 17
1.3 CURRENT CONDITIONS _____	P 27
PARK STRUCTURE _____	P 27
PARK ELEMENTS _____	P 43
PARK USE _____	P 45
1.4 PRECEDENTS _____	P 51
1.5 SUMMARY _____	P 56
2.0 CONSULTATION	
2.1 OVERVIEW _____	P 59
2.2 STAGE 1: INFORMATION GATHERING _____	P 60
2.2 STAGE 2: PRINCIPLES & DESIGN IDEAS _____	P 61
3.0 DRAFT LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN	
3.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES _____	P 64
3.2 PARK STRUCTURE _____	P 65
3.3 PARK MATERIALS _____	P 67
3.4 PARK PLANTING _____	P 72
3.5 PARK SPACES _____	P 74
3.6 PARK ELEMENTS _____	P 97
3.7 PARK STAGING _____	P 101