

COCKATOO ISLAND / WAREAMAH DRAFT MASTER PLAN WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Via Zoom, 6 November 2023, 12:30pm – 1:00pm (AEDT)

Kathryn Roberts: Thank you so much for joining us today to listen to the Cockatoo Island Draft Master Plan from some of the project team that were responsible for putting it together. Just a reminder that this session will be recorded so we can make it available through our website another time. We may have a few more participants join us, but those that are unable to, we will make sure that we send an email and let them know where they can see this webinar.

So, I'd like to introduce our speakers for today. We have Janet Carding, Executive Director of the Harbour Trust and we've got Mark Tyrrell, Founder and Director of Tyrrell Studio.

So, without further delay, I will pass over to Janet for the next 30 minutes, there will be an opportunity for Q&A. We'll probably have time for maybe three or four questions. So, if you do have any questions, please make sure you use the Q&A function in the webinar screen. Thank you very much.

Janet Carding: Thanks, Kathryn. And thank you everybody for joining us. I'll begin with an Acknowledgement of Country. The Harbour Trust acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands, waters and sky of Sydney Harbour, including the places under our stewardship. And we respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Sydney Harbour, including those belonging to the Borogegal, Birrabirragal, Cammeraygal, Gadigal, Gayamagal, Wallumedegal and Wangal clans. And a particular welcome to any Indigenous people joining us today.

So I'm the Executive Director of the Harbour Trust and we manage nine sites around Sydney Harbour including Cockatoo Island, and today we're going to talk to you about the draft master plan for Cockatoo Island, or Cockatoo Island / Wareamah I should say as it is dual named, and we'll talk about the vision that underpins that draft master plan, how we've approached developing a master plan through identifying the four layers of history and heritage. We'll talk you through the key elements of the draft master plan.

As Kathryn mentioned, we hope there'll be time for some questions at the end of this and of course we'll provide you with information on how you can have your say as part of the consultation process that's underway.

So, I should say, as we look at the, the six dot points that together make up the vision is that it's important to remember that this isn't a final design for the island. We've done a lot of feasibility work and we've mapped out a vision, but this isn't a detailed design response at this stage.

What it is though, is it's a response to the island's considerable cultural, natural and First Nations heritage values. And so, if you look at these six points, the first of them is to acknowledge the traditional ownership of First Nations people, and establish and interpret those First Nations values of place.

The concern to protect the universal values of place as stated under the UNESCO World Heritage Listing and of course we're cognisant that there are other heritage listings as well for Cockatoo Island. And really starting from a place that develops that vision that is around understanding and enhancing the unique character of this place. This is the opposite of a blank canvas. It has considerable heritage values and we have started from that point to develop its vision for the future.

We're conscious that since it closed as a working shipyard, the site has been more isolated from the city than it has been for many years. And so, reconnecting the island into the fabric of day-to-day Sydney life and having more people visiting there is something that we want to do. And so, both these might be different uses than they were in the past. We do see that this will be a place of vibrancy and visitation.

Now in saying that, we want to put a particular emphasis on the cultural and creative life and the contribution as a World Heritage Site that Cockatoo Island / Wareamah can make to that for Sydney both for visitors to Sydney and for locals, and of course for international visitors.

And it's important that we do look at how this vision will help Cockatoo Island to be economically self-sustaining. There's no point in developing a future which is undeliverable or is possible only with high levels of continuing investment. What we need to be able to do is appropriately raise revenue so that we can carry out all of the heritage and other responsibilities that we have at Cockatoo Island, but this is never going to be a commercial enterprise about making money for the sake of it.

So, if we move on to the next slide. I mentioned, four layers of history and heritage. And here are those four layers and don't worry about the images. We'll see those in more detail as we go through the plans. But what we've identified is that you can look at this island and identify the natural history, this island is built on sandstone that is hundreds of millions of years old. And through careful analysis, we've recognised that there are places where the original bushland and escarpment is still present despite the huge transformation that the island has been through. So, looking at this island as a natural place, the largest island in the harbour, is one of the things that we want to help people do.

Importantly, I mentioned those First Nations values and First Nations Connecting with Country and Caring for Country responsibilities is something that we want to emphasise on the island. So, we want to make clear that this is a place where cultural practice will take place in the future, but also help people understand the First Nations heritage associated with this.

Cockatoo Island is perhaps best known in terms of its World Heritage Listing for the convict use of the site. But at the moment you have to work quite hard to find the convict build structures in amongst all of the other structures. So again, we want to be able to tell a coherent [story] that helps you understand Cockatoo Island from this position of the convicts who quarried out much of the sandstone that was used to build the buildings, built the structures and through their hard labour constructed enormous elements like the Fitzroy Dock.

We also want to recognise and tell the story of the prisoners who came out of the convicts and importantly the stories of the school children who were incarcerated on the island, both the girls in the reform and industrial schools and the boys who were on the ship.

And then of course in the Twentieth Century, Cockatoo Island was a shipyard. And as one of the few remaining places in the harbour where you can really understand how the working harbour worked. We want to tell the story of Cockatoo Island as a system for building ships and for maintaining ships

and help people understand how this was such a productive place where thousands of people worked. And of course, they tell their stories. And we want to tell the stories of Cockatoo Islands during the two World Wars. Importantly, Cockatoo Island was vital in the defence of Australia in both the First and Second World Wars.

So recognising that the island can be an overwhelming place when you first arrive, our aim is that by looking at the island through these four layers, it will help people connect more deeply and will help people decide whether they want to follow one of these layers on their journey all the way around the island, whether they want to jump between the highlights of each one of these threads or whether they want to do a deep dive into each of them in turn. We'll be creating a range of experiences. That help people do that.

So, with that, I might hand over to Mark to take us through the draft master plan.

Mark Tyrrell: Thank you, Janet. So, we've considered a sympathetic spatial response to the island. You can see on this page the draft master plan drawing and we're trying to work with authentic spaces, of which we have many here to enable a kind of expanded visitor experience. So, we're building on what's there and what Janet has just spoken about.

So, at this stage adaptive reuse of heritage buildings and place transformation over time, leads us to a place that weaves the four threads of history and the narrative of place together and it creates these authentic places of activation and activity around the island. And then that's fused with a clearer circulation structure including a new arrival and that pulls those four threads of history together, makes them accessible for people and creates an effortless journey and experience around the island. We've worked with amenity as well to ensure that people can spend that longer day on the island or even overnight and see and take the time to appreciate all the components of this place.

So just going through a few of them on the master plan here. Number one is this idea of a new wharf and arrival at Ruby Steps and that's to do with increasing visitation and increasing the potential of ferry services.

The second is the all-important convict workshop building. And we're thinking about that as it was the first big significant sandstone structure on the island built by convicts and we're thinking that it's perfectly placed next to that arrival point to offer orientation to visitors in the form of a visitor hub.

We then have the Fitzroy Dock, it's full at the moment of water and part of the proposal here is to empty that and expose this unique convict-built sandstone dock to the public and light it and have all sorts of ways to engage with that history with a low impact on the structure.

Then we have the Turbine Hall and many people who visit the island would be familiar with that cathedral like industrial space. We're not changing that; we're just making these more possible to activate.

And then the Eastern Apron, a fantastic large scale event space, which, again, people would be familiar with as a major place for events.

We've got potential cafe and restaurant areas around these key hubs, you could call them, where people can find a range of food and beverage for a range of different price points and times of day and we're doing that just so that we can be sure that we support all visitors in spending a long time here, and working through all these possibilities that the place offers.

Then on the northern side you can see that's significantly greener than the southern side, and that condition exists at the moment, but we're enhancing that condition of a parkland like quality, and we're increasing planting of Angophora trees as well as connecting the escarpment with its original planting and stone back to the water again.

And then there will be new opportunities for camping and staying overnight in cabins in that northern end but that opens up the potential for a larger parkland space for people to engage with.

We're talking about marine ecology reefs. Now these are a technology that you'll see around the harbour and they're part of the push to create a more healthy harbour and rehabilitate the marine ecosystem. And so, this island will contribute to that fantastic project in this way and people will be able to engage and understand that when they're here in an educational sense.

And then I've talked about the recreation and camping, we're not getting rid of tents, we're just proposing that they move to a more suitable and actually a more scenic position on that northwestern end and that opens up the potential for the public parkland.

There're a few others on this slide, so we move up to the top of the plateau and to accommodate that level change we're talking about new lifts and stairs and then new paths, so the superintendent's precinct remains, the silos and tent embassy there is a fantastic and very historically rich experience in that little precinct and so we're trying to make that more accessible from the immediate arrival of the new wharf.

The plateau Industrial Precinct where things were designed and there's a proud history of, maritime boat building and planning there, the Mould Loft part of that. And then the Southern Apron that area to the very south of the upper area will remain with a working harbour component that is taking place there at the moment. Actual ships being serviced and also built by local boat building groups that work on this island and work with heritage and restore in the restoration workshop. So, we're not removing any of that, we're actually enhancing and trying to push this combined history that the island represents and these rich diverse activities.

With that visitation increase that we're hoping for as this place becomes more compelling for the visitor, there will be a range of accommodation types to suit all budgets and people and that secondary wharf as I talked about. So, trying to just extend the amenity of the place, extend the interest of the place, the accessibility and create a better island experience for the public.

Janet Carding: So, Mark and his team have put all of that together into a couple of visualisations or renders where we can see how that all would look. And this visualisation is looking, east, there's the Harbour Bridge in the background. And I just wanted to pick out a couple of those visitor experiences in a bit more detail.

So, if we imagine here, that recreation area with the camping, which as you can see is moved to this headland, what we have next to it in the slipways there is opportunities for kayak use and here we show the kayaks maybe heading off towards Snapper Island or coming back again. We think that the opportunity both of that to be an arrival point for kayak's, but also potentially for kayak hire for those people who are visiting the island.

And next to that we've turned the other slipway, whilst attaining its industrial character, turn that into a filtered water harbour pool which we think again means that this whole area becomes a tremendous

spot where you can arrive, maybe do a tour of some of the Convict Precinct, but also then have a dip and sit by the water.

In terms of, up on the Convict Precinct, it's notable that, this is one of the 11 sites that makes up the, UNESCO designation and we want to be able to evoke what it would have been like to be incarcerated in that convict precinct so we stripped that back to more of its bare elements and looking, at we'll put in fit out here and there, we won't be trying to reconstruct anything in too much detail. But just to give people a sense of what the kitchen was like, the hospital was like, what it was like to sleep in one of the very narrow sleeping areas that were provided and how that went on to be the accommodation for the girls after the convicts. But to tell the stories of the people, the people who came, the people who escaped, the people who arrived here as casualties of the frontier wars and how this was part of a much bigger system in the colonies.

We're looking at using that adjacent Mould Loft as well because that's a great space to dive into doing full scale displays to dive into doing full scale displays. So that's a great space to dive in to do full scale displays. So that's another new visitor experience that we would have.

Also looking at the harbour park. It's just worth noting that here, what we, what we would like to do as part of our Caring for Country responsibilities is that we're looking to develop a partnership with Indigenous rangers so that they could also be educational programs understanding about the natural history of the area and how in fact we're bringing that back and that could extend to that marine biodiversity in the water with those living sea walls.

We go to the next render. Now here's that arrival point that Mark mentioned and you'll see, you know, again, layers of history and heritage, the convict-built workshop at the heart of this arrival square as a splendid building which with its Second World War floor put on the top again represents that layered history really very beautifully. But that we see is a great starting point for your visit to the island so that you can decide what you want to do and understand how you can access the different experiences on the island from that spot, and it's a beautiful building inside to be able to use again so that you can capture that sense of its history and at the same time add in contemporary interpretation.

Just in behind it, you can see the Fitzroy Dock now empty of water. Our aim would be the visitors could actually access into the dock. So, we've ambitiously shown this here. Obviously in practice there's quite a bit more investigation to do, but really you start to get a sense from this visualisation of the of the sheer scale of the dock and what it would have meant to have hollowed that out.

You can also see here that events space and see how there are people just moving through that. But also, it's just worth noting that again in terms of the natural heritage in the island, Mark and his team have dropped in a winding path across that grassy area so that you can understand just how much the island has been changed and how it how altered it is. That's its original water line from the earliest of the drawings that we have.

Now, there'll be lots of educational programs which we want to build on what we already do. We'll also have, we'll be continuing to do our program of events, and this is one of the leading events destinations. But it's that year-round visitation that we really want to increase, so we want more people to be able to come for them to be able to stay longer and indeed more of them to stay overnight.

So, I just want to show you one more render that shows how Cockatoo Island could look in the evening. The thought is here, imagine that you've come for the afternoon, you've maybe spent time on a guided tour. You spent some time by the harbour pool. You have a bite to eat some dinner and then you stay on for the evening program.

Here's where projecting onto the cliffs, we could have projections of how the island would have looked before it began to be altered. We could project onto the convict workshop how it looked before the Second World War alterations when it was a single-story building built by convicts. In the Turbine Workshops you can hear the voices of the people who work there and the noise of the machinery as it created the engines for the ships. And up in the Convict Precinct, the voices of the complex could be heard once more.

And in the empty Fitzroy Dock using the latest technology, we could project a ship or an Oberon-class submarine or even a whale, part of the dreaming story for Cockatoo Island, into that empty dock as part of the evening experience.

So, we think Cockatoo Island could become a very special place to visit both during the day and at night.

So that's a very quick whiz through different elements of the master plan. Kathryn, I'll pass it back to you then.

Kathryn Roberts: Yes, thank you. And we have received some questions, so thank you and please keep them coming in. If we can't answer them now, we will make sure that they're updated on our website.

One of the things that are coming through is about the ferries and the fact that they don't run very often. So how will the master plan manage this increase in visitation? And part of that is about the ferry wharf as well and how that may impact sort of current harbour activity.

So maybe, Mark, if you can answer the first part of that question, and maybe Janet the second part.

Mark Tyrrell: Sure, this image is actually a really good one to talk about that. So, the Parramatta Wharf, is there on the right-hand side of this image, and then down the bottom of this image is this proposed new ferry terminal.

So, we recognise that, even though the island isn't very far away from the CBD, it's very close in fact, it's the frequency of ferries, it's the logistics of parking your car and going down and finding that ferry. And so, we want to make that journey as effortless as possible so in future there are opportunities, various opportunities for, Sydney Ferries, but also potentially other future ferries that the Trust might run.

So that's that arrival point and we think that's an appropriate point to arrive at the island like we talked about because it's right in the thick of all of that history. And it means you can just land, there's a structure there that talks about the potential of a Welcome to Country in language, in Aboriginal language.

There's the square here that talks about former shorelines and there is a thread you can follow that Janet mentioned all the way around the island thinking about that former shoreline.

There there's the convict building here that we both talked about a little bit being this hub of arrival and this visitor sort of engagement and then there's that landmark frame in what is quite a fascinating cranescape that talks about the industrial heritage and the way that that's anchored in that square there.

So, we think that it pulls together all of the threads of the island in this arrival point, which is very important and is going to make the journey around the island that people embark upon, something intuitive and something that can be self-led or directed with an audio guide or similar. And that there'll be these more intuitive stop-offs, more intuitive ways up to the top of the island via two lift points quite close to this arrival and then these paths one a loop around the upper island and one a loop following more or less the original shoreline around the base of the island.

So, we're kind of seeing this opportunity for the circulation system, both the arrival and the way that you move around the island, to tie together those threads of history and make this a really robust and effortless way to experience the diversity of the island and a new ferry is really a large part of that and where it arrives.

Janet Carding: You wanted me to be speak at the second part of the question. Remind me what that was again.

Kathryn Roberts: About the structure and design of the ferry wharf there are a few questions come through about that. Just to clarify where we are at in terms of the master planning stage and not necessarily at the design stage.

Janet Carding: So sure, yes. So, as I mentioned at the beginning, we haven't yet designed this and at this point this is an indicative suggestion of how the wharf would be. So, what we want to do is begin a conversation. We've had initial discussions with Transport for New South Wales. We want to understand what would be the specifications for this if this was to have time scheduled ferries coming in.

We also want to understand how it would work if we were chartering ferries or if we were working with partners who were bringing ferries. And really importantly what we want to make sure is that the ferry wharf allows for a variety of sizes of boats but doesn't interfere with any of the passing traffic and doesn't interfere with Fitzroy Dock. We think whilst we want to present Fitzroy Dock drained; we think it's very important for the long term that should it ever become possible to actually have something in Fitzroy Dock that we had that ability to actually still manoeuvre something into the dock. So, we're looking at a ferry wharf which doesn't impinge on the on the current waterways around the island.

I just mentioned that idea of other boats coming to the island because a lot of people have said to us that it would be great if the experience of coming to come to Cockatoo Island would start on the wharf side so actually the boat ride becomes part of the part of the experience and we want to build on that idea and potentially work with partners to have boats come to the island but also allow for them to be able to do a maritime experience which takes people across to the other dry dock at Woolwich Dock and possibly even circumnavigate the three islands that are there. So, we think there's a lot of opportunity for boating to be part of the experience as well.

So, a lot of work for the ferry wharf to do, it hasn't been designed yet, but we're looking at it doing all those things.

Kathryn Roberts: Thanks Janet. There is a theme of people asking about the hotel, whether that looks like over commercialisation, would you like to address that or comment on that one?

Janet Carding: Yes, so as I mentioned, we're looking at more people coming to the island. We would like those people to have more things to do and that's around the variety of things we're looking at in the visitor experience. And then we think that more of those people will want to stay overnight. Particularly if we introduce that evening experience.

So, we have the heritage cottage accommodation that's up on the plateau and we've got another two cottages that we're currently refurbishing. But there's a finite number of heritage cottages there, so not much that we can do to increase the capacity.

For the camping, we're looking at having everything through from bring your own tents through to cabins so that we've got a range of different options, particularly for schools and families there. But our sense is that over time as visitation year-round grows to Cockatoo Island that we're going to outstrip those, but only when we outstrip those would we then look to bring online a hotel so it's something that's a lot further down the track not something that would be in our initial plans.

But you'll see on this render over on the left-hand side there, there's a 1970s building that was used for submarine maintenance. That building unfortunately can't be easily repurposed, but what we've done there is suggested that a hotel could actually have the same size and configuration as that earlier submarine building. So, it would actually be reminiscent of the footprint of that building but it would provide accommodation. And again, the aim would be to have a range of price points so that we have all the different options covered and Cockatoo Island is accessible for everybody. So longer term and a range of options.

Kathryn Roberts: So, I think we have one time for one more question and it's actually in the theme of what you're talking about. There are some comments about the campground and it being so special, why would you want to change it and move it away from amenities and restaurants and cafes?

Mark Tyrrell: Yeah, well, I can talk to that. I think it's we've got to be clear that we're not taking away that wonderful experience that many Sydneysiders have had, and other visitors that have come to Sydney and have had camping on Cockatoo Island. It's an amazing opportunity to have that run in the heart of a CBD island. And so, we certainly want to keep that.

What we're thinking of doing is upgrading that ageing infrastructure. It's been around for a quite a long time at campground and in that process, we would like to shift the camp ground onto this more secluded, almost an island within an island, at this northwest tip that you see here in the foreground and so the same amount or more tents, and opportunities for bring your own or you know hiring a tent there and then also the opportunity for small cabin.

So, this is that exploration of different accommodation options at different price points and for different comforts and we think that leads to the potential for a greater day-to-day visitation just outside of those big event productions that happen from time to time. So, it's all about just extending the use of this place every day and by moving the tents and things and consolidating them in this place, there's an opportunity to open up quite a large scale harbour park for people on this island, for the general public.



Janet Carding: Just to add it's also an opportunity to upgrade the amenities as well, which are 15 years old now. And so, the aim would be that we would move those there and potentially have food and beverage options of this side of the island as well.

So, I think that there's really great opportunity there to have bit more privacy and use a headland that hasn't really been used the last little while.

Kathryn Roberts: Well, thank you, Janet. Thank you, Mark. I will have to draw this to a close unfortunately, but those that have asked questions which we weren't able to answer during this session we will go away and update our FAQ sheet.

I encourage you to look on our website for our drop-in sessions, to come along and have a chat to the team at the Harbour Trust and our design team. Just a reminder that we're really looking for everyone to provide their feedback over the next 5 weeks, our consultation closes on the thirteenth of December.

So, thank you very much and thanks for tuning in.