

NORTH HEAD SANCTUARY DRAFT MASTER PLAN WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Via Zoom, 21 September 2023, 12:30pm – 1:00pm

Kathryn Roberts: I would like to welcome our two speakers today we have Janet Carding our Executive Director of the Harbour Trust, and we have Joe Agius the Design Director of Cox Architecture. So, without further delay I will hand over to Janet and we'll bring up a short presentation.

Janet Carding: Thanks Kathryn. I'd like to begin with an Acknowledgment of Country and acknowledge that we're joining you from the land around Sydney Harbour and acknowledge the Traditional Owners of all the lands that you join us from today and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

So as Kathryn mentioned I'm the Executive Director of the Harbour Trust and just a few words about who we are. We're part of the Commonwealth Government and we manage nine important heritage sites around Sydney Harbour including North Head Sanctuary. In technical terms North Head Sanctuary is the central part of North Head and a round us is wrapped New South Wales National Parks. This master plan that we're talking to today considers the land that we manage at the Harbour Trust in North Head, but what we've tried to do is take what we call a whole of headland approach and so we've worked very closely with the neighbouring manager New South Wales National Parks so that the experience that you would have had when you come to North Head, we hope, is one where it doesn't matter which side of your car you get out of your car on it's there, it's fits for everybody to enjoy and it's one experience. So, I'd like to just thank and acknowledge New South Wales National Parks for their collaborative approach.

What's a master plan? What are we doing here? Well, the draft master plan that we've developed basically does two jobs. It's a really robust analysis of the area to establish what the opportunities are and also what the constraints are, and compared to the concept plan that was put together two years ago, what that means is that we've done a lot more feasibility work, and the grounding of this plan is a lot more based in evidence that we've collected and assessments and studies that we've made.

So that's the first part of a master plan the second thing is at strategic level it's the preparation of an initial design response so that we can understand what those opportunities would look like, and we can take that analysis and we can map it out into a series of steps. A roadmap if you like, for the future and so what this design response enables us to do is that we have a coordinated approach so that soon we get funding in the future, which we will be focusing on once we've completed this process, we'll have a really clear set of actions and guiding principles to work to. It's important in that sense that this isn't a final design. You'll hear in a moment from Joe of the work that we've done, but this isn't the detailed final design, it's very much a future vision of the place.

Now in terms of that guiding principle, I just wanted to say a little bit about what that is at the highest level. You'll see on the screen in front of you, that what we're suggesting is that there is an overall route that takes in that whole headland. It begins at the threshold of North Head when you're at the

stone archway, it comes through the heart of the Harbour Trust site, and it continues all the way to the lookout. Our sense is that following that sort of route through North Head will enable you to see the highlights of the site. You'll also notice that there's a green arrow to either side of this blue diagram and what we're also hoping is that you can feel that as you see those highlights that you'll want to then go off and explore the different aspects of the Headland. So in simple terms what we're looking for is how do we take people through to the highlights of the site and then encourage them to explore in more detail and for me, that's what a great deal of this master plan is about it's not about making wholesale changes to the site, far from it, it's actually about changing the way that the site is used accessed and enjoyed by people. In doing this we've listened carefully to the feedback that we received two years ago with the concept plan, and we've built on that to better encompass what we think the community are telling us that they'd like to see the future of this site. We had a lot of very positive responses for that concept plan, but even so we've taken a step back and we've looked at all of the different comments that we have.

But of course, this overall master plan it actually outlines the full potential of what we think could be achieved here rather than what current funding would permit. So, as I mentioned before we'll be looking to see if we can secure funding to support this plan and future decisions will be made strategically as funding becomes available.

Now after this round of public consultation we'll review the feedback that we've received, and we'll make any required changes. So, this isn't the end of a process, this is the middle of a process. So, any comments or submissions that you make, we will do our very best to take on board. Once we have that, we'll produce a further revision of the plan which will go to our governing body, the Members of the Trust, for their approval. Once the master plan has been approved there'll be further consultation as we go forward with any detailed elements. So, there'll be further opportunities for the community to comment on what's going to be planned and delivered.

As this is a long-term plan, we're thinking at the very least next seven to ten years ahead, so it isn't that after this consultation you'd see something different when you go up to North Head next week, this will take some time for us to put in place and develop the detail around, seek funding and then deliver.

So just to finish up, let's say a little bit about the values of the site. We're very conscious that people are aware of the rich military heritage of this site particularly through the Second World War period the period after that when the Royal Australian Artillery made their home at North Head. But we're also extremely conscious that this is a place of substantial natural value. It's one of the places in Sydney Harbour where you can see the bushland that once would have been right around the harbour, and this is one of the largest areas of that remnant bush land and all its rich biodiversity. And of course, they're on the First Nations values of place and this is an important place. It's part of Country and helping all of us appreciate more about First Nations values is something that we want to do.

So, what you'll hear about in a moment is how we've taken those four key values and how the arterial route that we've mapped out through the site actually allows those areas to be articulated and brought to fruition. So, as a result of it we've actually split the site into three clearly defined precincts, and I'm going to hand over to Joe to talk us through each of those precincts in a bit more detail.

Joe Agius: Thank you Janet, what you can see on this slide before you at the moment is of course the whole of the headland, you can see there identified various uses around its periphery. A green dotted line that defines the division between Harbour Trust and National Parks. But if I draw your attention to

the three white boxes, the Barracks Precinct, the Central Precinct and the North Fort Precinct. So obviously this is one holistic place, but we'll take you through the detail of how we're developing this through the prism or lens of these three precincts.

So firstly, the Barracks Precinct which is the precinct to the northernmost part of the site, if we have a look at it in some detail going to the next slide. The first aspect to it is item number one there, is reconfiguring the entry experience. So, at the moment there is a gateway building, the intent here is to invest in it a gateway function, a formalised entry to this precinct to the Parade Ground, that acknowledges the military use but creates a space and an arrival experience that connects to landscape and gives you that sense of arrival.

We've also looked at reconfiguring the way vehicles move through the site here, with the intent to take vehicles in a sense away from the core of the precinct and elevate both pedestrian and cycling experience. Onto item two, the Parade Ground. The intention is a very light touch improvement to the public realm of this place, so the Parade Ground is essentially unchanged other than some improvements to pathways and landscape. It will remain an event space as it is at the moment with limited events throughout the course of the year and Building 1, which is the main building that you can see there, the intent is for it to be restored for a tenant to be found that's consistent with the heritage and military values of that building and for it to be invested with new life.

If we then look at the third box this is essentially a Makers Place and we're investing in improving that and consolidating maker-type uses through the relocation of the Restoration Workshop, which is a bit further to the south of the site to where this zone is and creating a consolidated place for maker activity to occur. I'll also sort of point your eye to number four, the improvement of walkways, but particularly the main spine as Janet mentioned. Essentially a service spine at the moment, the intent being to make it the major arterial through the site, the artery that connects people to the heart of the place in connecting the three precincts that we noted at the beginning.

And then finally of course habitat and ecological rehabilitation to the east of Building 1 through the oval and the tennis courts and that work has already commenced, and the intention is for it to proceed.

This is an overall image that gives you a sense of personally minimal change, enhancing the positive qualities of the place both landscape, ecological, military bringing an Indigenous understanding to the place. And I'll just draw your eye to the entry experience around the Gate House building and also that spine running through the middle of the site connecting these precincts from entry all the way to the new lookouts that have been recently completed.

If we go to the Central Precinct now, in a sense this precinct doesn't exist or have any great presence. So, it's in a sense new. It has two elements, the first one being this idea for a First Nations cultural space within the heart of the headland at a point that is the uppermost point in terms of its topography. There is the sighting of this there is no design though, so this really heralds the beginning of the journey for the Harbour Trust with the appropriate First Nations people to develop the idea of what the uses may be and indeed what the physicality of its landscape and architectural design may be. The positioning of it though is in a sense fixed within this master plan.

Draw your eye to number three, this is the creation of an ecology and an environmental and educational to some extent centre and zone. This is where a lot of the work that the Harbour Trust currently does in terms of its propagation of native species etc. occurs, and it gives them better

facilities to do that. It also means reusing and repurposing existing sheds that are there, so it's obviously a key element within this Central Precinct.

And then finally, I'll draw your eyes to again that spine that is the linking arterial that connects the Barracks Precinct into this Central Precinct and then beyond to the North Fort Precinct.

Here you can see an aerial image, so we're looking from the south to the north, you can see the ecological zone with its three sheds that are repurposed and then what's suggested as a circular form being the Indigenous place that we've mentioned, all connected and linked by this rejuvenated spine, as you know currently a service road but the intent is to take it from back of house to very much a front of house experience.

Finally, the North Fort Precinct which is the southernmost precinct. It is the terminus of this spine, or a pause point of this spine I should say at number one. The idea here is a 'Defence of Nation' interpretation space, again there is no design here, however the master plan does articulate in a sense an interpretation of the gun emplacements in whatever the built form of this may be. The intention is that it is accessible and that it is a place for interpretation that may use contemporary technology in video and an immersive cinematic experience perhaps. It sits at the top of the North Fort; it may be roofed in a green terrace that is accessible etc. and it connects to of course the gun emplacements and the memorial walk. At the moment that memorial walk is in a sense de-linked. The intention here is to bring it into the fuller experience of, certainly the North Fort, but the whole of the peninsula.

I might also draw your eye to number four, at the moment the sense of arrival in coming from the south into North Fort is somewhat degraded and can be improved, and certainly the intention here is to make it invested with better amenity from a pedestrian and a cycling point of view, and a sense of arrival but also supported with improved food and beverage and of course celebration of the heritage that's there.

The other thing I might mention of course, is that this precinct has the gun emplacements, memorial loop, tunnels and other bits of military structure so the focus in this precinct is to bring that military history story to the fore told through the 'Defence of Nation's interpretive space but also through experiencing visiting all of these places that will have their own form of interpretation associated with them.

Here you can see an aerial image from the south looking to the north, you can see that interpretation space at the top of the North Fort hill. You can see the loop, improved entry, and of course the final thing I mentioned is that at the moment as some of you will be aware, this precinct is largely turfed and the intention here from an ecological and a landscape point of view is to rejuvenate and restore the natural landscape that of course describes the rest of the peninsula.

Janet Carding: Thanks Joe. We want to reinforce that in this proposal we're not at this stage proposing any new walking in tracks, we've had walking tracks in place for a number of years which have really helped to protect the biodiversity but what we're finding is that people don't always know that they're there. And so linked into the idea of the Central Precinct and the North Fort we're proposing that we reconsider how we have these different walking tracks signed, what kind of signage we use for wayfinding.

So just to briefly mention that the green loop would be a wonderful loop for someone to take who was interested in the natural values of site. So, you can imagine that starting in that shed area that has

been reconfigured to the nursery that Joe mentioned and taking a loop through to the Hanging Swamp on the eastern side down to the North Fort and then through the richness of Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub growth on the western side.

From a military perspective by looping in the memorial walk with North Fort we can create the beginnings of a figure of eight where you can explore those areas and then we can also continue and enhance our popular guided tour that will in the future take you from the observation post where in World War Two somebody would have looked for a ship or a submarine out of sea through to the plotting room where the calculations were done to help the guns know where they should be pointing and then through to the gun emplacements themselves. But as Joe mentioned we know that we can't make that walk fully accessible for those who might be a wheel chair user or have a pram, and so that's why we're looking at creating the interpretation space as well.

And then I'll just mention the blue loop walk, which we think is another wonderful way of bringing the headland together so up near the North Fort we have the Third Cemetery from the Quarantine Station but what we would like to do is link that through a walk with signage down to the Quarantine Station and back up again so that people can make the connection between the Quarantine Station and the Harbour Trust side.

So, I think that takes us through a very quick run through of the draft master plan and we've now got a few minutes for questions.

Kathryn Roberts: Yeah, so it looks like we've got a few questions that have come in. We're just going to try and bring up the screen quickly, so thank you and again for those that are asking questions that we can't get to, we've got about eight minutes left now, we'll make sure we add to them on our website at HarbourTrust.gov.au.

This first one I think perhaps Janet if you can take, it's about visitation and increase in visitation, whether that will negatively impact the site ecology and endangered species.

Janet Carding: Well, the aim is that actually we support, and we help to further rehabilitate and repair the biodiversity on the site, and so as I mentioned earlier, we're not planning any new walking tracks and we'll continue with the approach with the boardwalks that have actually protected so much of the site. We'll of course continue with the current cycleway that we have as well at the moment and so with no new tracks or cycle areas I think we can protect the bush that's there. But also, when we've looked at the areas that we plan to carefully re-vegetate and encourage there's actually around 4 000 square meters of area that we will be revegetating with native plants and so obviously that would take us some time. And so, as part of that we're looking at developing some partnerships. At the moment we work very closely with the North Head Sanctuary Foundation who are incredible in the world that they do up at North Head with the nursery and with Bandicoot heaven and we want to enhance that, but we're also looking at forging new partnerships such as with the Royal Botanical Gardens so that we can understand more about what's helping the biodiversity up on North head to thrive. And how we can do more of that.

Kathryn Roberts: Thanks Janet. There's another question that's come through and it might be a useful Joe, if you're able to add to this one and it's about the military significance and obviously that's an important part of the values that we're trying to talk through, and how we're going to protect that national significance.

Joe Agius: The first point to make, is that we as consultants and the Trust, have worked very closely with the military over the last couple of years and certainly the military historians that have been both part of the consultant team but also within the stakeholder realm to really understand the site and understand its significance from a military history point of view both locally and nationally. And that's informed a lot of the thinking and a lot of the decisions through the whole of the site but particularly at the Barracks Precinct and more particularly at the North Fort Precinct through what Janet has just described. I think the issue of moving buildings around, so a lot of the shed structures were constructed by the military as movable buildings, their component structures bolted together, steel frames etc. we are moving some of them around. And our view, the Trust's view, and certainly the advice that we've had from the military historians is that that is wholly consistent with the intent of those buildings in their moving around but kept within the site.

The other thing I would mention is of course the new building that's proposed within North Fort, the stories that will be told and the interpretation that will occur there. Obviously primarily focused on military history. I understand the Trust is in conversation with the Australian War Memorial in developing those stories and that will happen potentially over time. The intent is that that space is not a museum, but an interpretive space, and as Janet mentioned one of the challenges we have to the military history that we have on the site is its accessibility, so for those that can't access the tunnels and the gun emplacements etc. at the plotting room and other spaces, this place is very important to tell those stories to the broader public.

Kathryn Roberts: Another question, and maybe Janet you can take this one, is about bikes and whether we're inviting bikes through the site or something that we're going to try and deter.

Janet Carding: So, the central spine, that arterial route that we've talked about, we see that as a space for cyclists and pedestrians and from that perspective what we're aiming to do is make that a comfortable experience for both pedestrians and cyclists, but at the same time increasingly move cars to the periphery of the site.

We already have a cycle route around North Head Sanctuary, and we want to keep that, but we think that there's actually lots of potential for more people to come and use their bikes at North Head. And so we've begun a conversation, should we be considering something like bike hire or something like that up on North Head. It's early days but these are all things that we can consider as part of the draft master plan.

Kathryn Roberts: We've actually got time for one more question, do you mind if I ask one more and this will be the last one for today. It's specifically about the First Nations cultural space and whether this will be an outdoor space or buildings and what type of activity will be in that space.

Janet Carding: Well but the short answer is we don't know. At this point we've earmarked that space and we've had some initial conversations with Traditional Owners and with Yerrabingin, who are the consultants as part of Joe's team, and we think that that's a great site. Ultimately, we need to have a lot more conversations and build a collaborative co-design process. It might be that it becomes a building that's used for teaching on Country it could be that it's a space that's used for outdoor gatherings, it could be a combination of different things.

One of the things I really think is very positive is co-locating the environmental and ecology elements next to the First Nations area, because my hope is that there will be a strong crossover about the



management of the land and how First Nations communities will get involved in that and caring for Country process in the future. So, we don't know yet, but it's a great place to start I think.

Kathryn Roberts: Thank you that's really useful. Well, I think that draws this time together to a close. I'd like to thank Janet and Joe for explaining a few more details of the master plan, it's been very interesting, and again if your questions were unanswered today, we'll put them online a little bit later.

I really strongly encourage you all to have your say and provide feedback. There is a QR code on screen or else go to HarbourTrust.gov.au and that'll direct you to how to have your say.

So, thank you very much for your time and this will be posted online very shortly. Thank you.