



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Nature in Our City

Submission Number: 1

Date Authorised for Publication: 8 August 2018

Australian Garden History Society
ACT Monaro Riverina Branch



The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services
Legislative Assembly for the ACT,
GPO Box 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601.

24th May 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to write to the Standing Committee Inquiry into the importance of the natural environment to Canberra. I am writing on behalf of the ACT Monaro Riverina Branch of the Australian Garden History Society (AGHS).

The Australian Garden History Society was formed in 1980 and aims to develop an appreciation of and concern for the cultural landscapes, parks and gardens which form part of Australia's heritage. The Society promotes knowledge of historic gardens and research into their history. It aims to examine parks, gardens and gardening in their widest social, historic, literary, artistic and scientific context.

AGHS has a broad definition of 'garden' recognising that green spaces – whether they be public or private, whether they be landscape vistas or streetscape trees - all add immeasurably to the quality of life for everyone.

CANBERRA HERITAGE

The siting and development of the Australian Federal Capital is outlined in detail in Ken Taylor's book ***CANBERRA City in the Landscape***. The philosophical, historical and cultural understandings of the original design concepts have been incorporated into the design of and planning for the city, not only by the early urban architects but by those of more recent times.

The landscape has always been the principal element. From the beginning, emphasis was placed on the importance of the surrounding mountains, hills and ridges to articulate the form and structure of the city, whilst the more intimate spaces within the built environment of later periods were developed by knowledgeable and innovative foresters. The natural and the planned landscape, the mountains, hills, trees, gardens, school ovals, playing fields, lakes, wetlands have all contributed towards creating what is now an historically significant place in Australia's heritage.

Our members appreciate the value of landscapes and advocate to preserve and conserve them as they recognise they enrich present day life and provide an understanding of the past. With the expansion of the city there will inevitably be pressures on public as well as private green spaces.

AGHS CONCERNS

It is of great concern to our members that it seems there is still no overarching master plan for the on-going development of Canberra, and the consequent

piecemeal development is resulting in loss of the vision of a city defined by its landscape.

For example, some cityscape views of Black Mountain have been lost and mountain vistas from Commonwealth Avenue are under threat.

Planning for the city has been governed from the beginning by several variations of the Griffin Plan, including the 2004 NCA **Griffin Legacy**.

The **Griffin Legacy** recognised that Griffin created a modern urban form that would deliver to the citizen a healthy domestic living environment; and that *the landscape sets the identity of the city as a distinctive national place* (p35).

This publication included a set of principles which were to govern future development including:

(There needs to be) an abiding presence of nature in the city in its gardens, parks, and nature reserves

The planning and development of Canberra should include preservation and enhancement of the landscape features which give the National Capital its character and setting (P34).

We ask, how are these principles now being applied in the city's intensive redevelopment?

VALUE of GREEN SPACES

The value of having green space and vegetation in the city for the physical, mental and economic health of the residents has been much studied. Research shows that there are also positive environmental benefits (eg filtering pollutants, regulating temperature, bird and small animal habitats) through including green infrastructure when planning cities.

This Inquiry concerns two related but distinct 'landscape' concerns:

Protection of the large scale City in the Landscape concept that characterises Canberra, protecting views and vista, ensuring the conservation of public parks and gardens, and requiring the development of new public green spaces alongside future development

and

Protection of the private 'gardens' and public amenity of street trees and verges which add immeasurably to the wellbeing of city residents.

It is evident that loss of lawn, trees and gardens resulting from intensive development diminishes the availability of green spaces to the community. As residential towers replace low rise development, the few green spaces remaining are overshadowed, resulting in less sunlight, diminished access to northern light, fewer private gardens, and therefore reduced access to public green space.

It is imperative that planning takes account of this loss of private green areas caused by in fill development and compensates through conserving current public parks and providing new green spaces for public benefit.

As an example, Hassett Park in Campbell has been recognised with a **Good Design Award** for use of green infrastructure in an urban environment. The inclusion of a designed living open green space as part of a substantial commercial and residential

development is a good example of cooperative forethought, as green infrastructure was included with the initial architectural, engineering and construction elements.

Conversely, it would appear that there has been poor consideration of green infrastructure as part of the many Northbourne Avenue residential developments.

The previous architect designed low density housing compounds were surrounded by green areas for the wellbeing and enjoyment of residents. Now, there is proposed fragmented high density development along the light rail line, with no 'big picture' vision to ensure residents have access to green spaces to compensate them for those removed.

It is to be hoped that Haig Park will remain a naturally treed green corridor for residents to enjoy, and that it does not succumb to a proliferation of hard surfaces and extraneous structures.

Value of BLUE ASSETS

The Australian Garden History Society has openly expressed concern about the ongoing destruction of Lake Burley Griffin and the foreshores. The Lake has been placed on a ***Landscape at Risk List*** by the AGHS.

The Lake was one of Australia's most successful landscape projects, and although the original vision for the extensive lake and foreshore system was not fully realised, its aesthetic appeal is important not only to residents but to visitors to the National Capital.

Sadly, without an all-encompassing conservation management plan of the whole lake and foreshores, sections of the lake continue to be degraded in an ad hoc fashion.

Recently, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an international non governmental organisation, requested that the planned infill and housing development of West Basin be halted until a review of the area is undertaken. The ***City to the Lake*** development proposal means that the existing public parkland will be covered with blocks of privately owned apartments. Small pockets of overdesigned recreational space will not mitigate the detrimental effects of several blocks of residential housing with their accompanying overshadowing, wind tunnels and heat retaining hard surfaces.

By contrast, the grounds in front of the Southern Cross Yacht Club are a good example of open green space, large enough for extended family groups to gather and engage in casual sporting activities. Large trees now provide shady spots for picnics on the grass and there are extensive water views for all to enjoy. Each weekend and on summer evenings this area is always busy with people enjoying the natural environment.

Acton Park at Weston Basin opposite the Yacht Club has presently lost the opportunity for a similar environment. The ACT Government's Department of Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development's own webpage states:

“Acton Park consists of 10.4 hectares along the foreshore of Lake Burley Griffin's West Basin. It is a peaceful beautiful lakeside park with a historic grove of she-oak trees that were planted in 1927.

Acton Park is popular throughout the week and weekend during daylight hours particularly in warmer months. It enjoys some protection from the prevailing winds. Tourists, particularly those who seek to take a lake ferry ride or hire a small boat or cycle will find it a great place to be. Enjoy also its natural beauty, particularly in the autumn and spring.”

Unfortunately, this ‘peaceful beautiful’ park has been sadly neglected and is now less a centre of activity because of the loss of cycling and paddle boat hire. The stands of trees on the lake’s edge have not been maintained - all in preparation for a private housing estate.

Conclusion

With the increasing densification and resulting loss of green space in the City and along Northbourne Avenue, it is imperative that the natural open spaces on the lake foreshores are retained and maintained as the lungs of the city. Residents and international visitors are attracted to the natural environment not apartment blocks.

Recommendations

The Australian Garden History Society recommends the ACT government upholds the original intent of a *City in a Landscape* as the city expands and areas are revitalised.

The Australian Garden History Society urges the ACT Government ensure that Canberra continues to be valued as a city which gives its residents and visitors a unique experience – a city whose governing bodies value green infrastructure for the economic, health and environmental benefits in a changing world.

The AGHS recommends that existing lakeshore green spaces be retained and revitalised as public parks and that loss of green space through development be compensated by open space available for community recreation and wellbeing.

A black rectangular redaction box covers a signature. The signature is written in blue ink and appears to be 'Sue Byrne'.

Sue Byrne
Chair
ACT Monaro Riverina Branch
Australian Garden History Society
PH: (02) [REDACTED]