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Attention: Andy Nixey
Planner
Department of Planning
Andy.Nixey@planning.nsw.gov.au

Sydney Modern, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

The Sydney Modern, Art Gallery of NSW expansion project aims to deliver additional, flexible exhibition space for the gallery's extensive collection and for international exhibitions that the current gallery cannot accommodate. This is vital to the state's position as a leader in the arts and to further develop Sydney's cultural life.

While there is widespread community agreement that the art gallery needs to be expanded to ensure that it can reach its full potential as an international arts institution, there is some division in the community over the location of the proposed development. The resultant loss of green open space would come at a time when space for recreation and green grasslands are being rapidly diminished and population projections show demand for such space escalating, particularly from apartment dwellers where residents have no private open green space.

It is the responsibility of the Department of Planning and Environment to ensure that this project proceeds only if it is in the best interest of the state and its residents and with conditions of consent that minimise impacts: ***central to the final planning determination is whether the proposal represents an acceptable loss to open space.***

Green Open Space

The proposed development is located in an environmentally sensitive area within and adjacent to the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Domain, sitting over what is currently public green open space.

The gardens and the Domain play a vital role in providing open space, green grass and trees at the fringe of the central business district to inner city residents and workers, as well as visitors from the wider metropolitan area, interstate and overseas. People are increasingly living with little to no private open space and rely on public parks like the gardens and the Domain for passive recreation.

Unfortunately, government projects continue to destroy green open space: recently we have lost much from light rail, the Tibby Cotter Bridge and the WestConnex motorway. Loss of recurrent funding to open space means that park administrators are often required to fence-off parklands for ticketed events, alienating them from public use.

Descriptions in the environmental impact statement that describe the land as "underutilised and disturbed" ignore the potential of the site to contribute to future open space needs: grassed land above existing structures is still useful for passive recreation including picnics, sunbathing and walking. Statements that the proposal is consistent with the *Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain*



Trust Act 1980 objects because the project would encourage the use of the land, increase the educational, historical, cultural and recreational value of the land, and disseminate knowledge of plant life of Australia through significant soft landscaping have little merit.

The objects of the act have at their core the protection and promotion of publicly accessible grasslands and vegetation, and encouraging visits to undeveloped land for recreation. The educational and recreational values of the land, and knowledge of plant life are clearly best achieved through maintaining land as green open recreational space. This land is at the centre of Sydney and open space lost will never be replaced.

Of great concern is that no compensation for the loss of green open space is proposed because of qualitative improvements to “biodiversity”, “pedestrian access” and “quality of landscape spaces and embellishments”. The proposed development will reduce biodiversity, grassed spaces and tree canopy with a net loss of landscaped spaces. ***Compensation that results in the provision of new green open space should be a condition of consent for this project.***

I share the community view that there must be no permanent transfer of land currently under the control of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust to the Art Gallery of NSW for this project. Control of the land should be retained under the trust.

Entry Plaza

The Entry Plaza proposes a 1,495 square metre hard surfaced outdoor area under cover for shade and in some areas to protect from rain. Materials to be used are glass and aluminium. It is adjacent to Art Gallery Road with only a small 5.7-metre setback and sits close to the existing classical Art Gallery of NSW building. I am concerned that the design drawings in the environmental impact statement fail to properly depict how big the structure would be.

There is community concern that the proposed Entry Plaza is too large and not sympathetic to its environmentally sensitive surrounds. Outdoor undercover hard surfaces are not appropriate for this heritage garden setting. It will be responsible for the loss of open space, trees and opportunities to plant more trees and vegetation. The proposed Entry Plaza interferes with eastern vistas that would be opened up if it were removed. The proposed Entry Plaza is visually intrusive, particularly from Art Gallery Road when heading north.

There are assessments that the Entry Plaza will likely be windy and this will result in future proposals to enclose it completely from the outdoors.

The biggest reason for objections to the proposed Sydney Modern project is the removal of essential public open space and any final approval should aim to maximise as much untouched grass areas as possible. The Entry Plaza is not an essential part of the proposal, it does not add to the aesthetics of the design and its function as a meeting place could be met if the area continued as landscaped green grassland without a roof, with the open space extended into the Art Garden. This would create a green entry to the building, making it more sensitive to its garden location, while reducing the loss of public green open space.

The Entry Plaza should be removed or at least reduced significantly.

Tree Loss

The project would result in the loss of 140 trees, seven of which are deemed “high retention value” and 91 of which are deemed “moderate retention value”. The project proposes to plant 260 new trees to compensate for this.

There is a great deal of concern in the community about the loss of trees, especially when trees provide rare and significant canopy in the inner city. Trees provide shade, encourage bird life, filter pollution from the air and are visually attractive. The loss of such a large number of mature trees

will have a serious impact on the amenity and beauty of the gardens. It should be recognised that it will take many years for regrowth to again achieve tree canopy, habitat and a local ecosystem. I share a widespread community view that there should be a net gain in *tree canopy* as well as tree numbers as a result of the project. This would help achieve the aims of the NSW Government's draft Greener Places policy and help prevent additional heat sink effects that are expected to cause significant increases in heatwave conditions in Sydney in the future.

Where high and medium value trees are removed, mature trees should be replanted in their place as a condition of consent. The project should also result in a net gain in tree canopy.

Building Design

There is community support for the winning SANAA design which is aesthetically sensitive to its surrounds with low level pavilion forms that step down with the topography. Importantly, the proposed development does not turn its back on any area. The proposal also involves good sustainability measures including solar photovoltaic panels and rainwater tanks.

There is community concern that the greening of the terraced roofs could be expanded. Plans show minimal vegetation with most of the terraced roofs concrete. ***Soft landscaping should dominate the roofs to fit in with the garden setting, protect vistas and reduce impacts from the loss of green open space.***

Art Garden

The Art Garden is an excellent addition to the proposal that has widespread support. It would retain green open space and provide welcome opportunities for public art. There is concern about the proposed hard surfaced area identified in the plans adjacent to the existing gallery building. The purpose and need for such a hard surface is not clear as sculptures could sit easily on grass.

I share the community view that hard surfaces should be minimised to allow for more grass and soft landscaping.

Woolloomooloo Lift

I strongly welcome the proposal for a pedestrian lift linking Woolloomooloo to the gallery and the Domain and gardens. While Woolloomooloo is geographically adjacent to the precinct, the existing stairs are a challenge for many residents, especially elderly and frail residents including those who live in public housing in the region. Visitors to the gallery and the Domain and gardens will also be able to better access the local Woolloomooloo art galleries and food and beverage services.

This link would be a positive contribution to pedestrian access between Kings Cross and the CBD, which the City of Sydney's wayfinding research identified as important. The lift should be designed to allow use with bicycles and motorised scooters.

Lincoln Crescent

An expected 95 vehicle movements are expected to be generated from the operations of the new proposed gallery between 3am and midnight each day, with additional movements during exhibition changeover including 2 to 10 trucks per day for one to two days before and after a changeover along Lincoln Crescent to access the loading dock.

This timeframe includes times when most adjacent residents sleep; they are timeframes usually excluded from heavy vehicle deliveries during approved construction and development. Conditions of consent should impose limits on the use of operational truck movements between late night and early morning hours to protect local residents; truck movements should only be permitted when it is absolutely necessary with a ban on reverse beepers at certain times. Unloading should be restricted to inside the loading dock with closed doors to reduce intrusive noise impacts.

Proposed construction would allow for deliveries of heavy machinery outside peak hours and standard construction hours. Where this occurs, affected residents must be notified in advance and conditions of consent must require acoustic protections and ensure that its frequency allows residents respite.

The Sydney Modern Project proposes a good outcome for the Art Gallery of NSW with a state-of-the-art building and new modernised, flexible exhibition space. The resultant loss of green open space however has serious negative impacts on Sydney's recreation needs and it is important that the two are properly weighed up to ensure the final determination reflects the best public outcome.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AG', written in a cursive style.

Alex Greenwich
Member for Sydney