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Dear Kim

Submission - Draft Master Plan for the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain

The City commends the Royal Botanic Gardens & Domain Trust on your preparation and exhibition of the inaugural draft Master Plan for the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney and Domain ('draft Plan') on efforts to engage with stakeholders.

The City welcomes the opportunity to comment on the work and we look forward to further opportunities to collaborate with the Trust on its development.

City of Sydney Context

The Council of the City of Sydney is committed to securing Sydney's future, its prosperity and liveability. Under the Local Government Act, Councils have a responsibility to formulate and pursue their community's vision and ideas, provide civic leadership and represent important local ideas and concerns to other levels of government.

Council has adopted the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Plan to guide and inform the planning and development for a Green, Global and Connected City:

- Green by example and green by reputation, with linked parks, gardens and open spaces, healthy ecosystems, high efficiency buildings and transport systems;
- Global in outlook and attitude, the City will remain Australia's most significant global city and global gateway with world-class tourist attractions, cultural infrastructure and amenities; and,
- Connected physically by walking, cycling and high quality public transport and with communities connected through a sense of belonging and well-being with well-connected spheres of government.

The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney and the Domain

The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain make a significant contribution to Sydney's enviable reputation as one of the most liveable global cities. The Gardens are locally and globally well regarded as a historically significant site for recreation, sport,
culture, a home for biodiversity and an opportunity for retreat and respite from the bustle of the surrounding City.

The City acknowledges the Trust's vision to protect and nourish this much loved institution so that it can thrive, evolve and continue to provide the people of Sydney and tourists from around the world with beautiful gardens and parks to enjoy for a further 200 years.

We recognise that the draft Plan offers an important opportunity to refresh the Gardens and Domain, to build community connections, increase involvement and participation, and to optimise its value to residents, workers, visitors. Many of the proposals have the potential to make a significant contribution to public amenity and to enhance visitor experience and tourist appeal. As such, the City is supportive of many of the ideas and initiatives articulated. There are also a number of recommendations outlined below which we propose for inclusion in the final plan.

Our key recommendation to the Trust is to employ a holistic view to the planning and development of the parklands in sympathy with its primary purpose to inspire the appreciation and conservation of plants and in connection with its urban environment, rich cultural setting, heritage status and surrounding community

Biodiversity and Trees

The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain is one of the key priority areas listed in the City's Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan. This plan identifies the RBG site as a key habitat area due to its relatively high biodiversity value. The City recommends that increase in night time activity and visitation to the Gardens is developed in tandem with management plans to protect the night-time welfare of resident and visiting wildlife.

**Recommendation:** The City recommends careful planning and design to avoid, minimise and mitigate impacts to biodiversity from proposals to increase illumination of the Gardens and Domain after dark and/or associated increased night-time activity. Mitigating factors could include minimising light-spill through careful design, pedestrian scale lighting, sensor controls, or through maintaining a network of dark corridors.

The City supports the planting plans for the Sydney Harbour Landscape Rejuvenation and tidal walk area as a focus for indigenous plants and restored Eucalypt/Bush typology, as stated in the Master Plan.

**Recommendation:** The City recommends that landscaping consider the use of understorey plants from the Coastal Sandstone Foreshore Forest that will maximise potential for meeting biodiversity objectives and environmental heritage values.

The City looks forward to a productive partnership with the Trust to maximise the effectiveness of our Urban Ecology Strategic Action Plan.

The City realises that the draft Plan's proposed works may have impact on individual trees and natural assets. Whilst the City does not take the removal of significant trees lightly, we realise in some cases this may be inevitable to achieve critical objectives.
**Recommendation:** It is expected that proposals within the RBG and Domain precincts will be designed to ensure minimal impact on the existing tree population.

**Recommendation:** That a Tree Management Plan is developed for the sites that identifies the significance of the collection, protection of existing trees and strategies for future replacement planting.

**ESD and Resource Minimisation**

The City's 2030 Plan includes targets to reduce potable water consumption and reduced storm water pollutant loads to local catchments. Studies have identified alternative water sources to reduce the current reliance on potable water in Central Sydney and the significant potential of disused underground storage tunnels beneath the Domain to store rain water which could be used to irrigate adjacent parkland.

**Recommendation:** The Draft Plan addresses the adaptation and reuse of underground tunnel facilities beneath the Domain to provide a non-potable source of irrigation water for the Gardens, Domain and nearby parklands managed by the City (Hyde Park).

**A City for Walking and Cycling**

The City's 2030 Plan emphasises the importance of walking and cycling and anticipates a safe and attractive walking and cycling network connecting the City's villages and city centre, linking streets, parks and open space. We therefore support measures in the draft Plan which enhance access to the Gardens and Domain and improve pedestrian linkage to the Central Sydney and the surrounding suburbs.

The 2030 Plan's targets aim to increase the number of trips made by walking and bicycle - at least 10 per cent of City trips will be made by bicycle and 50 per cent by pedestrian movement. As such the City is concerned that the Draft Plan does not address cycling. A future in which 10% of RBG staff, volunteers, visitors and event-goers arrive by bike requires planning for cycle paths, shared paths, bicycle parking and end of trip facilities.

It is disappointing that the State Government's Sharing Sydney Harbour Access Plan to have pedestrian and cycle access along the harbour foreshore is not addressed by the draft Plan. A previous City of Sydney proposal (communicated to RBG staff) to build a boardwalk or floating walk from the tip of the Bourke Street cycleway along the Woolloomooloo foreshore to connect with the Andrew Boy Charlton Pool is also not reflected in the draft Plan. The City would like to see these plans supported in the draft Plan. This would be a transformative piece of infrastructure connecting the Opera House to Woolloomooloo Bay and beyond. City staff are available and happy to assist in the planning of cycle and pedestrian connections.

The importance of the pedestrian route to the Domain through the Sydney Eye Hospital site also requires particular attention.

**Recommendation:** Consideration is given to create a cycle path (or shared path), particularly along the proposed widened harbour-side promenade and to better connect the site with the network of cycle paths detailed in the City's Cycle Maps.
We support enhanced way-finding measures which will complement the City's own way-finding strategy ('Legible Sydney') to ensure a consistency in way-finding information across the local government area. Local and international visitors would also benefit from educational and interpretive signage which includes measures to accommodate the requirements of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including tactile and Braille elements. Effective signage would also capitalise on the educational opportunities provided by new technologies including apps and web based information and that are also legible after dark.

Public Transport Infrastructure

The City's vision for 2030 anticipates a significant increase in the trips made by public transport. In principle, the City is supportive of the draft Plan's measures to improve public transport connections to the site including the proposed train station and ferry wharf. These public transport facilities have much potential to increase visitation to the Gardens and Domain, the Art Gallery of NSW and nearby City of Sydney parks, recreation, and cultural facilities.

**Recommendation:** The location and design of proposed public transport infrastructure does not significantly reduce or compromise the integrity of green space and provides the maximum benefit to visitors and the wider community by linking with pedestrian and cycling routes.

**Recommendation:** Proposed public transport facilities provide public amenities including toilets, change facilities and bicycle parking.

**Recommendation:** The proposed ferry wharf is designed and managed to facilitate enhanced access to Sydney Harbour for non-motorised recreational water craft (for example pontoons and storage for kayaks).

Cultural Policy

The City has recently launched its draft cultural policy and 10-year plan in which it articulates its role in helping the city's larger cultural institutions re-imagine the connection with their surroundings and how those spaces might evolve to meet the future needs of residents and visitors.

One of the most resounding actions arising from Sustainable Sydney 2030 is the Cultural Ribbon, a foreshore walk linking some of the City’s large cultural institutions and civic spaces. It will follow the foreshore from the Art Gallery of NSW to Barangaroo through a series of connected precincts that invite the visitor into a series of complementary cultural and recreational activities. These activities, day and night, include opportunities for interactive experiences as well as passive enjoyment of the local setting. At its heart the Cultural Ribbon fosters creative places, where connected precincts offer opportunities to engage communities through a diversity of cultural experiences. Public spaces in and around the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Domain can extend the work of the institutions with temporary activities and events, augmented by amenities designed to extend the length of time that visitors spend in the area.

The many capital projects and master plans currently in development provide welcome opportunities to re-energise the city centre, contribute to public amenity, enhance the visitor experience, and strengthen public awareness and engagement with the city's history and heritage.
Issues for precinct development in the inner city include:

- Opportunities for new programming contexts, internal and external activity;
- The relationship between ambitious architecture and the need for human scale and amenity;
- Connectivity to the city and accessible transport solutions;
- Opportunities for new forms of public engagement, including interactive experiences, passive recreation and unplanned or informal uses of public space;
- An appropriate and sensitive business and retail mix including night and daytime offerings
- Wi-fi and digital connectivity
- Interpretation of the history and heritage of the sites.

Night-time activities

In accord with the City’s night-time economy strategy, Open Sydney: Future Directions for Sydney at Night, the City encourages the state’s cultural institutions to develop innovative public programs that will make their sites and collections accessible at night. The programs suggested in the draft Master Plan will meet these objectives and are welcomed by the City.

Site experience and activation

The City of Sydney strongly supports the activation and use of public sites as a tool to improve public experience and also to improve passive surveillance. One of the key new measures introduced by the City of Sydney has been the Sydney Food Trucks Program. The City has enabled this new program, to trade on public land and roads, and would encourage a similar approach in this Masterplan to accommodate this type of business to trade in these spaces.

**Recommendation:** Consider the benefits of Sydney Food Trucks to trade at designated sites and restricted times on road parking areas in the Domain and Royal Botanic Gardens.

Sports Facilities

Within the City of Sydney area, sport and recreation facilities are provided by both the City of Sydney and other key government agencies such as Centennial Parklands and the Botanic Gardens Trust. Locally accessible outdoor sports fields provide a range of important benefits including improved physical and mental health and community building opportunities.

The City’s draft Sports Facilities Demand Study indicates a high and growing demand for local sports facilities. Demand far outstrips the current supply and opportunities to acquire new sites or land to develop for sports are rare. A continuing shortfall of sports fields increasingly results in the inappropriate and unsustainable use of passive open space, or the unauthorised use of sports fields leading to degradation of playing surfaces.

Research has identified many factors which will increase future demand for sports facilities including:
• Significant increase in residential and student population in Central Sydney and a significant increase in the City’s day-time population;
• Changing work patterns and increasing interest in healthy lifestyles creates increased demand for sport and recreation facilities mid-week;
• The use of social media and information technology is resulting in increased casual, spontaneous participation in team sports, (pop-up events, turn-up and play);
• Increasing participation of women and increased opportunities for both sexes to play the same sport (e.g. an increase in women’s soccer);
• Concerns about obesity and healthy living have resulted in increasing participation of older people in sports and active recreation; and
• Increased marketing by sports associations to attract participants.

The City recognises that the Domain must balance a number of civic, cultural and recreational needs and use of the Domain is shared by a range of different individuals and organisations. Currently, the sporting focus of the draft Plan is limited to modest measures to enhance amenities for current sporting users including change-rooms, spectator facilities and lighting.

**Recommendation:** The draft Plan highlights and enhances the use of the Domain to provide for the sporting needs of the community and considers improving the quality of the land dedicated to sport, including the use of synthetic sports fields which would greatly enhance access to sports fields in the local area.

**Outdoor Events**

The City supports a rich and diverse programme of cultural events in the public domain and recognises that the Domain is a significant part of the city’s cultural infrastructure, particularly for hosting outdoor concerts and festivals in the summer months. However, we note that a 2011 review of Sydney’s cultural facilities (Planning Sydney’s Cultural Facilities, co-commissioned by the City of Sydney and Arts NSW) revealed that “many stakeholders including Sydney Festival and Opera Australia argue that the cost of using temporary performance infrastructure in the Domain is extremely high and the informal coalition of presenters using this infrastructure cannot be relied upon in the mid to long term to continue with the existing arrangements”. The report identified that economic improvements to the performance infrastructure in the Domain was a high priority for government.

Although we understand the need and possible improvements that could come from permanent event infrastructure, we have concerns about the impacts on trees and green open space and the proposal should be the subject of very careful investigation and only permitted if the design takes up minimal space, has the lightest touch, and does not compromise the flexibility of the Domain to accommodate other uses including sport and active recreation and does not have significant impact on tree health or significantly reduce the quantity or quality of the green open space.

**Recommendation:** The Trust liaises with the City and other relevant stakeholders to determine the impact, optimal location and design of proposed event infrastructure.
Children's Recreation

The City notes the importance and benefits of child friendly cities. As such, the City supports measures within the draft Plan which provide recreational and educational opportunity for children, including the proposed Children's Garden and adaptive reuse of the Domain Depot.

There are over 90 playgrounds within the City local government area, including facilities provided by the City and state government agencies. The City’s Recreational Needs Study recommends that playground facilities are available within five minutes of walk of all residents. This Study has identified a need for additional children's playgrounds within Central Sydney to provide for the recreational needs of local families and the growing number visitors, including tourists to the City.

**Recommendation:** Consideration is also given to constructing playgrounds and inclusive play facilities for children of all ages including the youth demographic within the Domain. Play facilities should include a balanced mix of traditional play equipment, adventure play, natural play and water play elements.

Eora Journey

The City consulted widely when developing its 2030 Plan. Some feedback called for better recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage. This led to the City developing the Eora Journey Recognition in the Public Domain project, a series of projects which include a walking trail of Aboriginal sites of significance linking Sydney Harbour to the Australian Museum, Hyde Park and Redfern; an Aboriginal Knowledge and Cultural Centre, and seven public art projects curated by Hetti Perkins. These projects celebrate the living culture of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the City’s public domain. The first of the seven projects is now complete with the artwork to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have served their country to be located in Hyde Park South which is now underway. A Monument for the Eora is anticipated to be located in the vicinity of Sydney Harbour alongside other great Harbour icons.

**Recommendation:** The City is examining locations for the Monument for the Eora. The City request the Trust’s support on exploring locations for a harbour side setting, and that the Trust liaise with the City on exploring locations for the Monument for the Eora as part of its masterplanning process.

Domain Car Park and Proposed Hotel

The City notes that re-use of the Domain car park could potentially have a positive outcome for the activation and enhanced appearance of the Sir John Young Crescent streetscape. The City supports the concept of re-use or adaptation of the car park site to the height of the Domain playing fields. Use of the Domain car park to support or enhance the existing sport and recreation facilities is also supported.

The City’s 2030 Plan notes Sydney’s unfulfilled tourism promise and aims to foster effective partnerships for delivering world-class tourism, cultural infrastructure and amenities. The City’s Tourism Action Plan sets out how the City will work to develop Sydney as a destination including supporting new accommodation development. Sydney’s occupancy rates are high and there are significant challenges to new hotel development.
The City’s research into accommodation development and the planning system identified the use of government land as an opportunity to increase supply as it addresses barriers such as the strong competition for development sites and high development costs. The research also identified the need for 3 star hotels to meet visitor demand and diversify the city market.

**The re-use of the Domain Car Park is a valuable opportunity to increase the supply of visitor accommodation in Sydney. The City supports the investigation of a hotel, subject to excellence in design, minimal impact, and with no loss of open space for recreation.**

Other opportunities for the re-use of the car park could include a new public school, an alternative site for the expansion of the NSW Art Gallery and the previously proposed bus layover to support the City Centre Access Strategy.

The Domain is a site currently used by rough sleepers, and any new plans need to work in with homelessness services in the area to manage any unintended impacts in the nearby suburb of Woolloomooloo.

**Recommendation:** It is important that the construction of buildings does not occur at the expense of green open space. The City supports the reuse of the Domain Car Park for a hotel to the height of the Domain playing fields and recommends a thorough analysis of accommodation demand is undertaken to ensure the type of hotel makes a positive contribution to the Sydney accommodation market and the visitor economy. The City also recommends that any building designs carefully consider opportunity for the provision of green roofs and walls.

**Viewing Platform at Mrs Macquarie’s Chair**

**The City strongly opposes the developments proposed at Mrs Macquarie’s Chair, which include structures and infrastructure to facilitate enhanced vehicular access.**

The proposed upgrades would significantly change the character of this renowned scenic site highly valued as a place for passive informal recreation, quiet contemplation and reflection. The City believes that toilets should be located further back from the foreshore at the first road turnaround point and vehicles should not go beyond that point. Necessary pedestrian or cycle access upgrades should be undertaken with minimal disturbance to the natural setting.

The City is also opposes the proposed viewing platforms indicated in the vicinity of the Point which has a detrimental impact on the ecology and natural foreshore character.

**Recommendation:** Upgrades to Mrs Macquarie’s Chair precinct should be limited to low key upgrades which facilitate non-vehicular access and require detailed environmental impact assessment to ensure they do not compromise the existing character or scenic vista of this historic area. Any necessary access upgrades should be undertaken with minimal disturbance to the natural setting and be located away from the point.

**New Visitor Centre near Opera House**

The City recognises the benefit of a well-integrated visitor orientation centre of an appropriate scale that does not adversely impact on the existing vistas and character of the gardens or the interface with the Opera House forecourt.
**Recommendation:** Consideration should be given to an appropriate location for visitor facilities at the Bennelong Point entry to the Park. The form of such combined facility could be recessed into the sandstone escarpment or concealed in green walls and green roofing.

**Trust Archives and Herbarium**

The City supports and promotes community access to information about the history, culture and science of the built and natural environment and we recognise value in the wealth of information held in custodianship by the Trust.

**Recommendation:** That new operating models are developed to enhance public access and exposure to the Trust’s Library containing original books and journals, artworks, photographs and plans. Consideration should also be given to opening the herbarium archives collection permanently or more frequently to the public.

**Public Amenity**

Whilst the City of Sydney is not the consent authority for any future works in the study area, the following general planning considerations need to be considered as projects develop into a design development stage:

- noise impacts of the Master Plan area and proposed uses
- traffic impacts
- public toilets
- public art opportunities
- intergenerational equality of experience
- health issues associated with new restaurants/cafes
- safety and lighting
- construction hours
- waste collection
- wifi/digital connectivity

**Recommendation:** That ongoing consultation occurs with the City of Sydney to ensure the above issues are addressed.

**Public Art**

The City of Sydney recognises the role that creativity can play in creating a high quality public domain. The City adopted the City Art Public Art Strategy and associated Public Art Policy in 2011 and is incorporating high quality public art projects as an integrated part of its public domain planning and capital works projects.

The Trust has an established association with artists working in the Gardens and this could be further developed in the future.

**Recommendation:** That opportunities and a methodology for the integration of temporary and permanent public art be identified and articulated.

**Partnerships**

Implementing our Sustainable Sydney 2030 Plan requires partnerships across government, business and community. The City looks forward to developing active
partnerships with the Trust to explore opportunities to further develop the Master Plan for the Gardens and Domain for the continuing benefit of the community and future generations.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Master Plan. If you would like to speak to a council officer about this submission, or you require further detail, please contact Joel Johnson, Manager City Greening & Leisure on 9265 9333 or at jjohnson@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Monica Barone
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