

Proposed Taronga Upper Australia Precinct

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Architecture and Landscape Design Statement



PROJECT SUMMARY AND VISION

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

The new 'Upper Australia' exhibit at Taronga Zoo will showcase Australia's unique flora and fauna in their natural habitat, whether up in the trees, or down in a burrow.

The objective for this exhibit is to showcase native Australian wildlife and landscapes in an unobtrusive manner, whilst conveying an educational message of conservation through minimal intervention. This will be achieved through working with the existing mature landscape and topography along with integration of multi-layered cultural messaging throughout the exhibit.

The main exhibit path will snake through various native landscapes, ranging from lush rainforest through to arid woodland and then up into the tree canopy via an elevated boardwalk to view koalas at their natural sitting height in the tree canopy. The Australia journey then winds its way down through the Blue Mountains rock escarpment and then underground into the Nocturnal House; where a complete refurbishment of the existing building will provide state-of-the-art keeper facilities and unique night-time viewing of Australia's nocturnal creatures.

PROJECT VISION AND KEY REQUIREMENTS

1. ANIMAL PRESENTATION	2. GUEST EXPERIENCE	3. ANIMAL WELFARE	4. ABORIGINAL CULTURE	5. COMMERCIAL
Innovation in zoo precinct and exhibit presentation Provide guests with a seemingly "barrierless" experience to habitats that enable close proximity to animals in perceived natural setting Immersive guest experience that engages sensory perception focusing awareness of animals, the environment and wildlife conservation .	Innovation in guest experience and public realm Pleasurable and Equitable pathways and spaces for guest circulation through exhibits with close proximity to the animals. Maximise Taronga's unique site attributes to strengthen guest experience and precinct presentation. Experience will inspire clear call to action for conservation behaviour.	Innovation in animal welfare and husbandry Innovation in exhibit design and behavioural husbandry that elevates and exceeds animal welfare standards, creates positive perception and strengthens animal presentation.	Innovation in respecting country and interpreting culture Respects country and increases Cultural connection and understanding to continue the legacy of caring for animals and country.	Innovation in commercial edge and competitiveness Development of the "must do" Australian precinct that maximises commercial opportunities that are unique to Taronga.
<i>Taronga Project Vision Requirements</i>				

KEY DESIGN STRATEGIES

The new Upper Australia Precinct will occupy an area of 7,900sqm with a focus on building upon Taronga's contribution to conservation, science, education and enhancing visitor experiences.

The project is multi-layered, dealing with a number of issues, such as:

- re-routing of existing underground services;
- heritage and cultural considerations;
- existing topography and landscape integration;
- engagement and consultation with a number of stakeholders;
- state of the art keeper facilities to allow for continued care and conservation of animals;
- visitor and staff safety;
- animal welfare;
- and providing an enhanced and educational visitor experience.

GUEST EXPERIENCE

The proposed exhibit areas are focused around education, inviting visitors to engage with the landscape and animals. Some key strategies to achieve this are:

- To create an experience where the barriers between the animal and the visitor are removed or the perception of barrierless viewing is achieved;
- To develop world class, iconic and immersive animal exhibits that provides for meaningful animal and human connection;
- Retain and re-use key heritage components pre-existing to provide a connection to Taronga Zoo's history and context;
- Integrate cultural and interpretive messaging into the exhibits and buildings to provide education and connection to country and land.

BULK AND SCALE

The proposed buildings and structures are designed to sit within the landscape to create an immersive experience for guests. The site sits within a dense tree canopy and structures will not be visible from Sydney Harbour or from lower down the hill of Taronga Zoo. The main street frontage on Bradleys Head rd will have a large timber fence/screen to provide the animals with visual and acoustic privacy. The scale of this screen will be lessened by pulling the top edge down where possible reducing the overall scale. The screen will also be softened by the use of natural timbers and with a landscaping strip in front of the screen to help break up the scale and soften the appearance from the street.

WESTERN PAVILION

VISION AND DESCRIPTION

The pavilion will provide the formal entry to the Upper Australia Precinct, it will be a welcoming space inviting visitors to the story of Upper Australia. Key information about the precinct, its exhibits and animals may be on display with the meeting place visible from the main zoo entrance spine, thereby assisting in attracting and guiding guests into the precinct.

BUILT FORM

The pavilion will consist of a large sculptural built element to provide a visual landmark to the entry and provide an area for the interpretive storytelling for the Upper Australia precinct. This place-making element will be a mix of natural recycled hardwood and anodised aluminium coloured complementary to the surrounding landscape. A new Ropes Course bridge of hardwood will span above a steel mesh containment fence at the southwestern edge of the Macropod exhibit.

LANDSCAPE

The landscape setting of the Western Pavilion will build on the existing “wet gully” character and signature paperbark tree. Where possible, existing landscape plantings and pond walls will be integrated with the design of the entrance plaza, taking advantage of the established character of the landscape and heritage elements. Existing planting will be complemented with additional native planting elements and feature paving elements to create an inviting space that draws visitors into the exhibit.

In addition to circulation into the precinct, the entrance plaza will provide opportunities for resting, seating, or meeting up with other visitors.



View along Dingo Rd towards Western Pavilion and precinct entry

MACROPOD EXHIBIT

VISION AND DESCRIPTION

The macropod exhibit is located around the northern precinct perimeter, in the area of the existing exhibit and extending west into the existing ponds area, towards the Western Pavilion. The exhibit will provide the opportunity to meet a range of quintessential Australian animals at close range, such as kangaroos, wallabies and emus. The expansion of the macropod area to the west provides an opportunity to showcase a greater range of animals, based on the different settings .

BUILT FORM

There is to be minimal built form within the macropod exhibit aside from pathways and occasional bench seating. The existing ropes course building borders the south of the exhibit with the new ropes course access bridge to the west. The bridge is to sit within the natural environment and be of recycled hardwood timbers. Existing wetland pond edging will be retained where possible.

LANDSCAPE

The exhibit will build on the existing landscape setting running along the line of the creek that originally ran through this area. There will be a distinct change in landscape character from a moist and shady gully near the precinct entrance, to a dry hilltop setting. The landscape design will provide an immersive natural landscape exhibit that will reflect diverse Australian landscapes, from dry rainforests and hanging paperbark swamps to open woodlands. Trees and other vegetation will be carefully located and integrated with existing established trees to provide a balance of sunshine and shade to meet the animals' thermal comfort needs, as well as refuge. Carefully positioned open grassland "clearings" will provide for optimal animal viewing. Outside the formal circulation path informal bush tracks will invite visitors on an exploratory journey through different Australian forest types.



View along macropod walk looking east towards the Treehouse

TREEHOUSE VIEWING DECK

VISION AND DESCRIPTION

The Treehouse will be the central node within the Upper Australia precinct, connecting Macropods with Koalas and then linking visitors down via the escarpment walk to the Nocturnal House. The deck will allow a shaded space to sit and rest along with commercial opportunities and bathroom facilities.

A key function for the Treehouse is to contain the ticketing for Koala Encounters along with a small 'gift shop'. Internal zoo access to the ropes course will also be provided from this building.

BUILT FORM

The Treehouse will be predominantly a hardwood timber deck open on three sides with a high timber roof above. The design intent is to have the space feel more as a shaded deck than as a building, emulating a 'treehouse' in the forest. Clear polycarbonate roof sheeting above with open structural timber framing will allow maximum natural light onto the deck. The main materials are to be Australian hardwood timbers with both natural and charred finish.

LANDSCAPE

The Treehouse viewing deck will provide views over the existing macropod walk. Situated on a hilltop, the landscape is characterised by mature native trees growing out of rocky hilltop that provides for a variety of micro-habitats as well as animal viewing and refuge areas. This existing landscape setting will be largely retained and will be complemented by new planting and animal rock shelters to reinvigorate the exhibit and reduce the prominence of boundary and containment fencing through additional planting.



View looking out from Treehouse deck to macropod exhibit to the left and koala boardwalk to the right.

KOALA EXHIBIT

VISION AND DESCRIPTION

The exhibit is located in the north-eastern part of the precinct, overlapping with the existing macropod and koala areas. The exhibit takes advantage of the existing level changes between the high plateau at the centre of the existing macropod exhibit and the zoo's boundary fence to create an elevated koala viewing experience. Visitors will be able to experience koalas at their natural sitting height and will permit relatively close access for photographs, while providing koala containment and avoiding physical interaction between guests and koalas. Four private koala encounter bays provide a premium koala viewing experience for paying guests along the eastern edge with borrowed views to the national park behind.

BUILT FORM

The public boardwalks will be of steel structure with natural Australian Hardwood decking and steel balustrade. Minimal roof structures of steel and colour anodised aluminium provide sun and rain shelter in select locations and folded corten steel portals frame the entries to the koala encounter bays. Folded corten steel also provides koala containment fencing at ground level.

LANDSCAPE

The landscape design of the koala exhibit will draw on the established woodland setting of Upper Australia, in particular its trees that are established as koala "homes" and canopy cover. Existing trees will be complemented with new canopy planting to strengthen and renew the bushland setting over time, providing a conceptual link to bushland in the adjoining national park and to ensure an immersive canopy walk experience.

Landscaping on the ground will emulate the forest floor and will include dense ground-cover planting to conceal containment barriers below the boardwalks, that are needed to delineate individual koalas' territories.



View along elevated koala boardwalk with macropod exhibit to the left and koalas to the right.

ESCARPMENT WALK AND KOALA TALKS

VISION AND DESCRIPTION

The Escarpment Walk will provide an accessible path of travel from the Treehouse down to the Nocturnal House and Dingo Rd to allow guests to continue on to the lower part of the zoo. The large ramped walkway will descend the steep site allowing for a snaking path to showcase a final koala exhibit from multiple vantage points. Shaded seating is provided to the west of this exhibit for guests to gather during the scheduled exhibit koala talks by keepers.

BUILT FORM

Steel and coloured anodised aluminium shade structures line the eastern edge of the viewing platform whilst exposed aggregate concrete paths provide an accessible and natural circulation path. Folded corten steel provides a natural and raw containment edge to the koala exhibit.

LANDSCAPE

The landscape design will create a meeting place between extended canopy cover from the koala exhibit and low shrub and ground-cover planting that will showcase the diversity of the Australian fauna. The planting palette will provide sensory interest (colour, texture, sound, smell) along the long ramp that transitions from the koala exhibit to the Nocturnal House, taking advantage of good solar access. Seemingly carved out of these landscapes will be two viewing areas with weather protection where visitors can congregate to attend koala keeper talks.

The landscape design will also assist in creating visual separation between the koala talk area and the koala exhibit, and between the koala talk area and the emergency vehicle access road, perimeter fencing and the Taronga Centre. Dense planting will seek to maximise the feeling of being surrounded by natural landscapes while learning about koalas and their natural habitats.



View up from Dingo rd towards koala talks with Treehouse in background.

NOCTURNAL HOUSE REFURBISHMENT

VISION AND DESCRIPTION

The current Nocturnal House is a subterranean building situated under the Ropes Course and accessed off Dingo Rd. The proposed Nocturnal House exhibit will reconfigure this existing building with a new southern exit and keeper access which will allow for a new innovative, open nocturnal experience that provides guests with a more immersive experience through a range of Australian nocturnal habitats in a simulated night-time/ dusk setting.

Along with the exhibits, the Nocturnal House will also allow for tour groups to get a behind the scenes look at the back of house areas and keeper activities. The exhibits will be a mix of both open and enclosed exhibits, with an emphasis on the more open feeling exhibits, with minimal containment so as to allow for a more immersive experience.

BUILT FORM

The proposed new entry looks to expand the existing entry through removal of existing concrete walls/roof and insertion of new keeper storage access that will provide separation between entry and exit points, allowing for a circular one-way guest movement. The new entry will be built into the landscape as the existing building is, with the finished built form being re-buried where possible to be concealed within the landscape.

LANDSCAPE

The landscape design recognises the significance of the existing Upper Australia planting design scheme. Landscaping around the reconfigured Nocturnal House entry will seek to reinstate existing planting areas that might have been disturbed by construction activities. Where required, new landscaping will be provided to reinvigorate the original planting design and to maintain the impression of the Nocturnal House as a cavernous space below a vegetated hillside.



Conceptual image of outback night sky environment