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Architects

+

psa

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jila



Western Sydney University

**INDIGENOUS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE**

*JCB, PSA & JILA acknowledge and pay our deepest respects to Darug Ngurra, her rights, her kin, her peoples her Knowledge Holders and Elders.  
We are honoured to have the opportunity to develop an understanding of this part of Country.  
Thank you for taking the time to read our SSDA report, as we continue walking together.*



# Executive Summary

The Western Sydney University Indigenous Centre of Excellence proposes to make an outstanding contribution to a place on campus' which not only the University community but also wider community members, can engage with, learn about, and celebrate Indigenous culture. The new ICoE represents Western Sydney University's commitment to nurturing the relationship with the Indigenous community and promote Indigenous knowledge at the core of its institution. ICoE will provide the University with a development that enshrines Indigenous self-determination with a spatial configuration that maximises on its offering to:

- Provide opportunities for the community to connect with Indigenous culture and Country.
- Preserve Indigenous culture, promote cross-cultural learning and contribute to social inclusion and recognition in Western Sydney.
- Provide an accessible educational facility for Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents.
- Deliver a sustainable, high quality development that is visually distinctive, adopts Connecting with Country principles and meets sustainability goals.

The development is anticipated to be approximately 5,550 sqm in gross floor area, and will accommodate the following functions:

- Community + Arrival space
- Care + Support space
- Exhibition + Art Studios
- Performance + Theatre space
- Teaching + Learning spaces
- Academic Workspace
- Library
- Division of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership
- Badanami
- Indigenous Research Institute

Landscape and outdoor areas to support the building functions are identified as follows:

- Indigenous Garden
- Amphitheatre
- Yarning Circle
- Outdoor clinic
- Graduate Walkway
- Outdoor Studio + Exhibition
- Outdoor Lunchroom
- Children's play area
- Outdoor Multi-function Court
- Astronomy Garden

The project is provided by the University in recognition of its 'Western Sydney University Indigenous Strategy for 2020-2025' which set out how the University will position itself as a national leader in Indigenous higher education. The proposed Indigenous Centre of Excellence is a demonstration of the Universities commitment to serving and empowering their Indigenous staff and students, and promoting cross-cultural learning and knowledge sharing, which has evolved through extensive engagement with the Indigenous Australian community.

Through a design excellence process, the team of Jackson Clements Burrows Architects, Peter Stutchbury Architects and Jane Irwin Landscape Architects led by Sarah Lynn Rees were appointed to lead the project.

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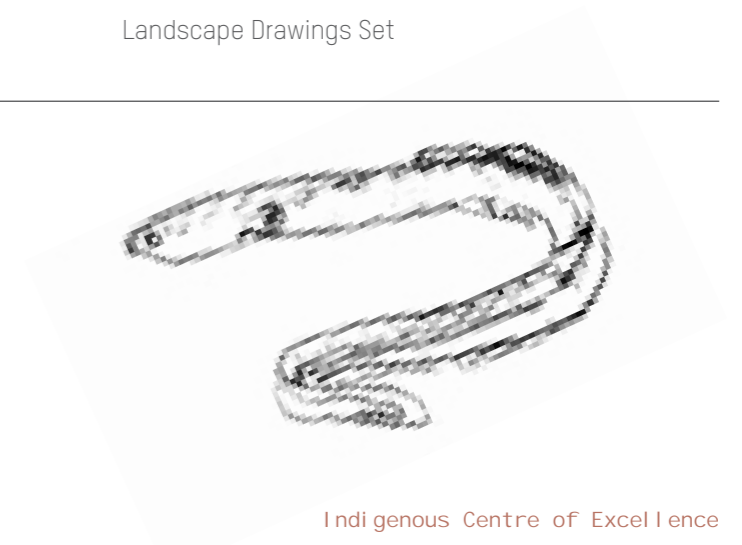
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Rev	Date	Description
1	MAY.2024	SSDA SUBMISSION



# Introduction

Western Sydney University Indigenous Centre of Excellence will act as a place for learning, teaching, research, innovation and truth telling. It will connect Indigenous peoples and cultures and nurture an emerging generation of First Nations leaders.

Our conceptual approach is informed by walking Country, listening to the voices of Indigenous Advisors and absorbing the Cultural Design brief. It's underpinned by the belief that we are living in a time that requires the re-orientation of societal values if we wish to move forward without more harm. We see the Western Sydney University Indigenous Centre of Excellence as a conduit for such change.

Our design engages with the layered physical and experiential histories of the site to create a building that is born from the spatial language of Country and healed through the return of waterway, ecology, and home for non-human kin. The resultant design acts as a canvas within which human and non-human kin can re-connect, practice care for Country and the transfer of cultural and academic knowledge, amplifying individual and collective cultural strength for the benefit of all.

Three key intentions underpin our response:

- to reconnect to the energies, flows and practices of Country;
- for Country to have authorship in the design, and;
- to improve the health and wellbeing of Country.

These approaches are intended to act as a grounded foundation for the cultural, communal, and academic spaces and aspirations of daily life at the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.

Our process has been to regularly visit Darug Ngurra and undertake research. At each stage, team discussions have focused on how the proposed design will have the best outcome for Country. We've focused on how to conceive a design that creates precedent for Indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world, in alignment with the intention that this project can create a ripple effect of change in the built environment. We have also sought to create spaces that strengthen Communities through connection to each other and to Country. To create a project that is a place Communities are proud of and therefore want to visit.

Connection, community, and collective pride will give strength to current and future generations to walk in multiple worlds without losing themselves or each other - this is what success means to us in the strive for collective excellence.

Our aim is to empower Indigenous research and the transfer of Indigenous knowledges by re-establishing the presence of a thriving and healthy Country so that she can be the teacher and guide once more. This diversity of offerings will welcome these communities in whatever way makes them feel safe, then connected, and ultimately find a sense of belonging.

We feel the power of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence design is that it creates an open landscape and permeable architecture that intuitively signals permission to enter and a form that engenders curiosity - which is the first step to learning.

Making a design 'special' or 'meaningful' often results in superfluous adornment. Our approach to create the Indigenous Centre of Excellence without taking more than we need is to create awe through pattern, repetition, volume, and form. With an imperative focus on sustainability, material choices are to be locally sourced, recycled and representative of Country wherever possible.

The experience of Indigenous Centre of Excellence should create a sense of connection -- from viewing the landscape and architecture on approach, to entering through abundant Indigenous ecologies, alongside cleansing wetlands, and places for gathering and teaching. It is an architecture of the mangroves, circulating around the building together with the landscape, dappled light streaming in from above and open rooftops with a connection to sky.

Our design recognises that it is not enough to incorporate Indigenous content into tertiary education. To embolden the sharing of culture and facilitate cultural safety for Indigenous peoples in education, the spaces in which teaching and learning take place need to acknowledge and strengthen cultural connections rather than deny them. Here, a range of spaces support different ways of learning and engaging with culture and academia. These spaces vary on a spectrum from public, visible, outside and embedded within landscape - to inside, private, individual, and quiet.

Standing proud at the front door of the campus, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence is a public expression of Western Sydney University's commitment to Country, culture, and Communities. The architecture and landscape will represent a manifestation of Western Sydney University's values and priorities - in effect an epic chance to walk the talk and set new precedent.



Amphitheatre

Concept Design Development Render

# Intentions Toward Country

After listening to Country, to Western Sydney University representatives, Elders and cultural advisors, as well as absorbing the Cultural Design Brief and Functional Design Brief, walking Country and many yarns within our design team, we have grounded our approach in three key intentions towards Country.

## To Reconnect to the energies, flows and practices of Country

We start this intention by learning about what has changed and what remains, reconnecting the lone paperbark to her ecologies, reintroducing the rise and fall of water to her soils and reconnecting to wider natural systems and practices of Country.



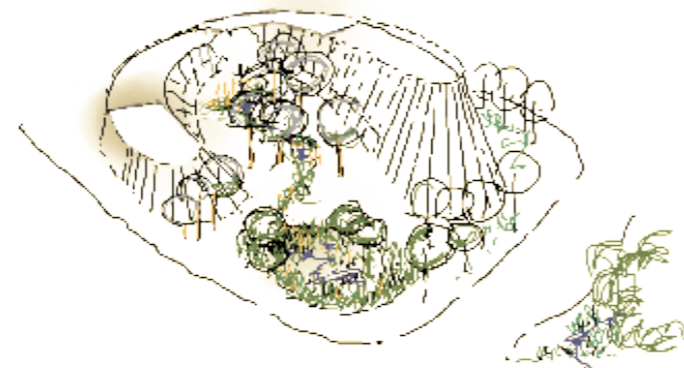
## For Country to have authorship in the design; Mangroves as composer

Our second intention is for Country to have Authorship in the design. Building upon the first intention which is grounded in reconnection, our second intention is grounded in creating a form, space and experience that is learned from the spatial language of Country.



## To improve the health and wellbeing of Country

Our third intention is to improve the health and wellbeing of Country, building upon reconnection and authorship, this intention is grounded in healing, both the areas of Country where the Indigenous Centre of Excellence will come to be and be connected to, but also an ethos-based approach to material selection, sustainability and construction processes to minimise harm to other areas of Country, or other Countries.



"Those who came before us" (2021)

Painted by Allan McKenzie, A Wairadjui-Gamilaroi man from Griffith NSW in partnership with over 120 staff and students from WSU

Concept Design Development Render

Gallery thresholds



The Melaleuca and Her ecologies

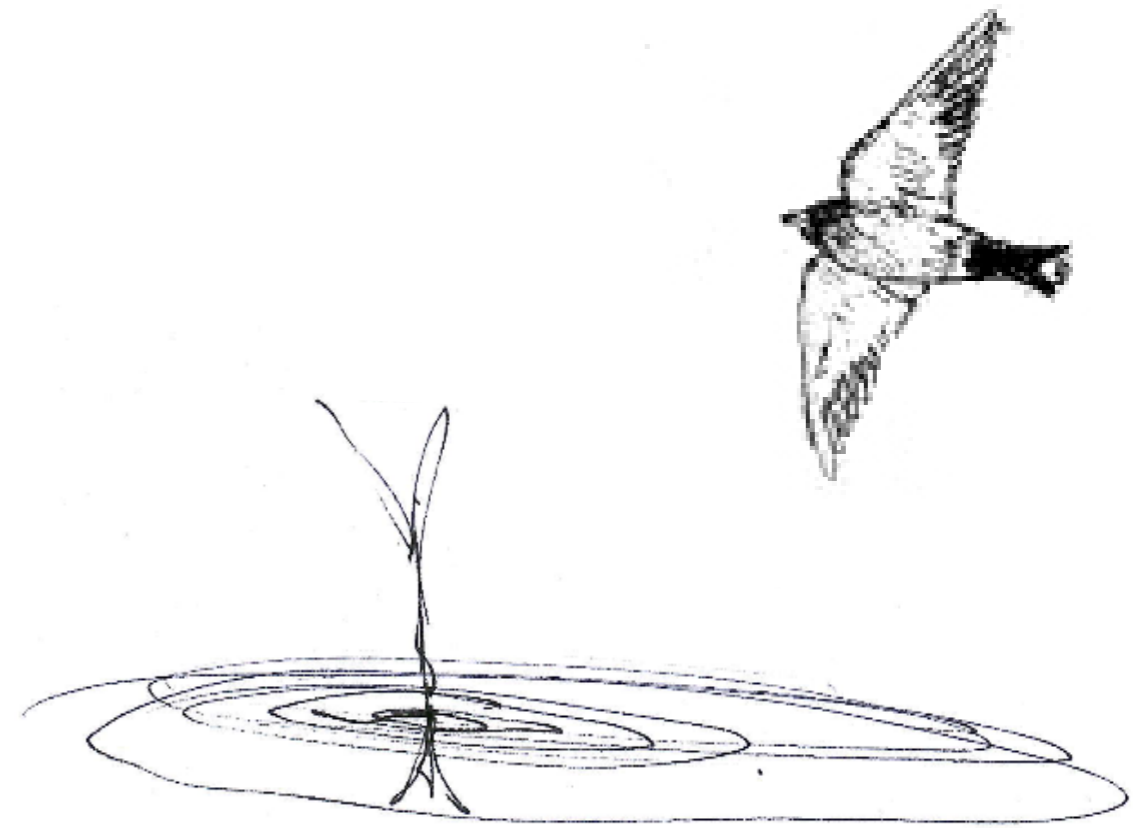
**Centres Country**

Our process has been to regularly visit Darug Ngurra as well as undertake research alongside the Cultural Design Brief and listen carefully to Indigenous Advisors. At each stage and each decision our team has collectively discussed how the changes we are proposing will have the best outcome for Country. Every decision has implications and drawing from our understandings of how this Country has been changed against her will, we have sought to return her systems to her within the opportunities, constraints, and aspirations of the project.

**Cares for Country**

Caring for Country is a practice, however, to be able to enact these practices the markers of Country must be returned. As the first act of care, our design returns water to the site and the soils and with it the ecologies of place and home for non-human kin. Once returned, the cultural practices of caring for Country can be reconnected to place.

Our design physically and emotionally centres around the Melaleuca tree. Changing any conditions, even removing the carpark surface could be harmful to the tree. We have taken care to give room for her roots and we will continue to find a pathway forward that gives the Melaleuca the best chance of survival through design evolution and construction.



Western Sydney University Indigenous Centre of Excellence as creating ripple effects of change

**Excellence and Leadership**

Individual excellence is incongruent with Indigenous ways of being. Even the way Indigenous histories are told focuses on anthropological accounts of Indigenous leaders rather than a holistic understanding that everyone in the community plays a role that leads to collective good. In this light, our focus has been on how to design a building that creates precedent for Indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world in alignment with the intention that this project can create a ripple effect of change in the built environment. We have also sought to create spaces that strengthen community through connection to each other and to Country, to create a project that, as a whole, is somewhere communities are proud of and therefore want to be within. Connection, community, and collective pride will give strength to current and future generations to walk in multiple worlds without losing themselves or each other – this is what success means to us in the strive for collective excellence.

**Workplace of Choice for Indigenous Peoples and University of Choice for Indigenous**

The physical location of Indigenous Centre of Excellence at the entrance to the campus and along a primary road sends a strong message to not just current and future students, and staff but also local, national and global communities that Western Sydney University is committed to a better future for Indigenous peoples. The choice of design for the Indigenous Centre of Excellence must amplify this commitment. We are cognisant of the role of design has to espouse the values of a Country, community and client. Architecture and landscape are physical manifestations of our values and priorities. For the design to be a success in the context of a workplace and University of Choice for Indigenous peoples, it must be an environment where Country and culture are present in both form and the facilitation of life.

Imagine being able to come to University and walk within the central landscape and learn the language of ecologies while within those ecologies, or learn to dance within the amphitheatre with your feet on natural ground, or look out from your workspace and hear and see birds singing as they fly from tree to tree, or to walk around and see young Indigenous people finding themselves in learning academically and culturally at the same time. Our design seeks to create these types of moments and feelings, because not having to leave your culture at the door and finding a place of belonging is what gives the energy needed to grow and succeed.



Concept Design Development Render

Aerial view of the proposed design

**Empowering Indigenous Research and Fostering Indigenous Knowledges**

Indigenous knowledges come from Country and Country is the ultimate educator. Architectures of the past have served only to remove this connection to place and therefore a connection to knowledges in place, leaving only memory. Our aim is to empower Indigenous research and the transfer of Indigenous knowledges by re-establishing the presence of a thriving and healthy Country so that she can be the teacher and guide once more. With knowledge, kin and peoples back in place this will allow Indigenous researchers and knowledge holders to culturally and academically transfer knowledge and create new futures in a culturally safe, culturally inspiring and culturally connected environment.

The visibility of healthy Country, the practices of care, cultural and academic transfer of Knowledges and the wellbeing and success of Indigenous students and staff will prove to universities, the community and ideally the nation, that when Indigenous peoples are allowed to be cultural within academic spaces they thrive.

**Welcomes Community and Embraces Kin**

Daily life at the Indigenous Centre of Excellence has something for every being. It will act as a generator of communities within the University and a meeting place for local and neighbouring communities. It will also act as a point of connection for the wider community. This diversity of offerings will ensure visitors feel culturally safe, in the first instance, then connected, and ultimately a sense of belonging.

From walking the internal landscape and reconnecting with the seasonal life of Country, to attending public events in the grand civic ends of the building or wandering the gallery and storytelling spaces to engage with cultures – the ground floor and landscape are places for all. As you move up through the building staff and students will find places to connect, study and relax away from the public, while still being visually and sensorially connected to Country through aspect, architecture and sky.

By extending the habitat corridor of Vineyard Creek into the inner landscape of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence and replenishing the soils with the ecologies of place, non-human kin can find an abundant home with the resources they need to feel safe and nourished and in turn undertake their own practices of caring for Country once more.



Concept Design Development Render

A porous and welcoming approach

**Shares Culture and Creates Spaces for Learning**

We feel the power of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence design is that it creates an open landscape and permeable architecture that intuitively signals permission to enter and a form that engenders curiosity - which is the first step to learning. Once inside visitors from all walks of life and levels of understanding of Indigenous values, knowledges, cultures, and practices can grow through engaging with dancing, singing, making, yarning, playing, eating, observing, watching, performing, thinking, and exploring. Each of these is an act of learning and an opportunity to share culture on Indigenous terms in an Indigenous space.

The potential impact is broad and far reaching. For students it could be learning about their culture or local cultures in a way that strengthens identity in themselves and their studies, for local community it could give a sense of hope that there is a way forward for the built environment that doesn't have to harm Country, for artists and performers it could be a space to share their works with audiences, for local workers it could be an opportunity to be employed to care for Country as part of their day to day life, for Elders it can be a place to meet with other Elders for important cultural business or to bring their young and teach them about Country.

**Contemporary Culture**

A Darug Elder spoke of creating a place that is easy for Elders to be in and navigate while also having the capacity to support highly technical and varied ways of expressing and interacting with Indigenous learning, teaching, and cultural expression. This approach requires a delicate balance of analogue and digital approaches. Experts in theatre, tech and AV will ensure seamless integration and contemporary best practice tech-enabled spaces. Flexibility will be extended to natural lighting controls, discreet and user-friendly interfaces, alongside analogue and culturally responsive wayfinding.

# Designing with Country



Paperbark



Creek



Confluence

*The Cultural Design Brief invites us to understand Darug Ngurra as a place that has seen epic and self-determined change through the formation of geologies, waterways, soils, ecologies, human and non-human beings. This vast and slow evolution over time is evident in the Knowledges of Burramattagal and the wider Darug community's ways of being in the world, particularly a sense of respect and care for Country being central to life. These protocols and ways of being have given lessons to generations of peoples, each adapting to change with care and deep understanding.*

*The last 235 years have seen the suppression of Darug Ngurra's agency through the arrogance of colonial desires for permanence and control - our intention with the Indigenous Centre of Excellence project has been to seek opportunities for Country to regain agency in the process of her reshaping through her values, form, and health. This intention is driven by a process that centres Country and creates a positive, culturally reinforced future.*

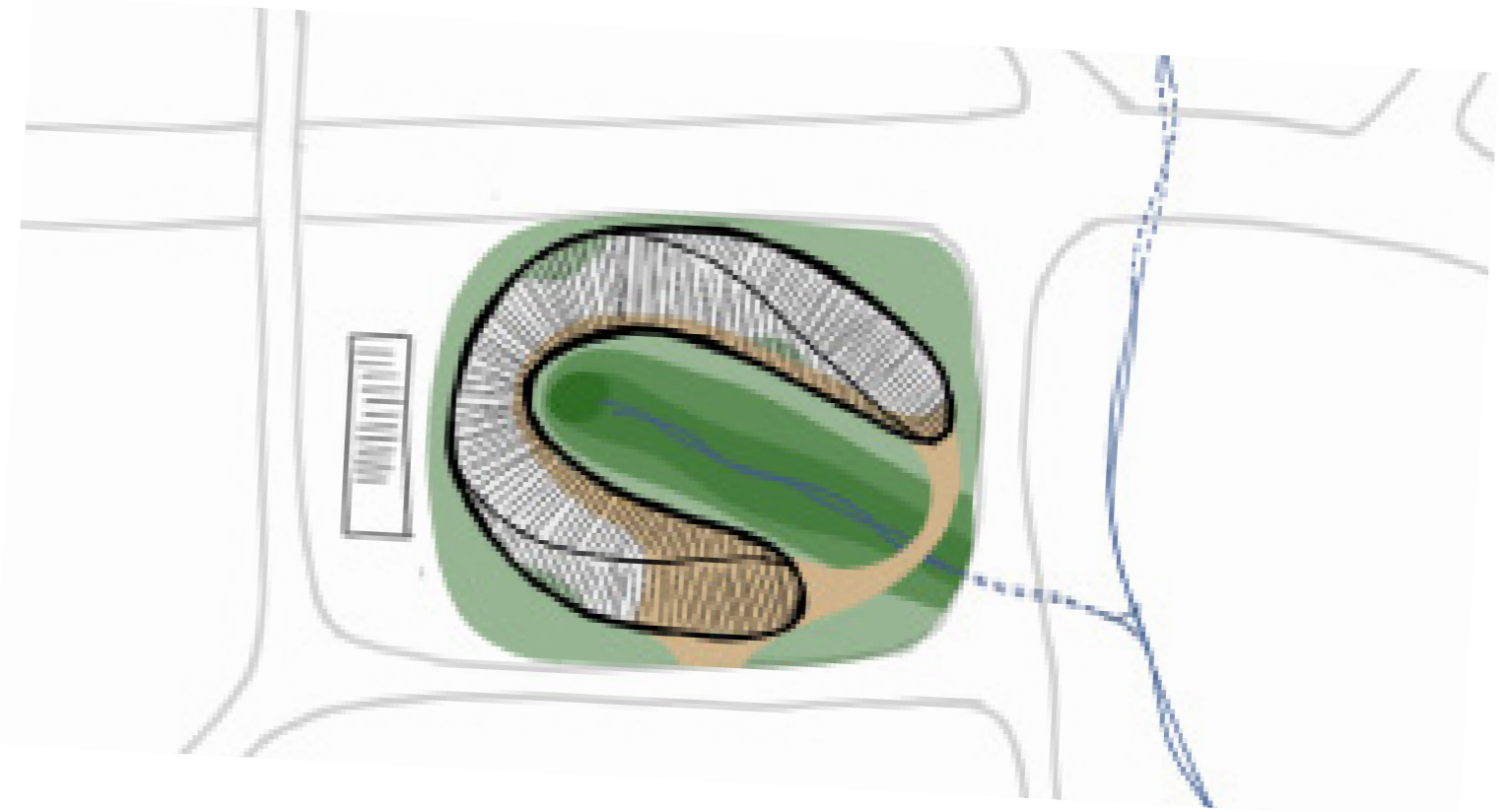
## Connection to Country, People and Kin

Our conceptual approach is informed by walking Country, listening to the voices of the Indigenous Advisors and absorbing the Cultural Design brief. While sitting with these collective aspirations the words of Darug Elder rang loudly through our minds. He spoke of a desire for the architecture to not hold the form or likeness of creators, markings and spirits to ensure that peoples of all nations understand that they don't need permission to enter, he spoke of the deep connections between communities that belong to the extent of the Parramatta river and he spoke of a desire for this project to set a new benchmark for how to build within Darug Ngurra.

The location of the proposed Indigenous Centre of Excellence was once connected to the waterways of Country and hosted many ecologies and lifeforms. More recent times have undergrounded and disrupted the rise and fall of waterways, removed the delivery of nutrients to the soil and erased extensive ecologies - with them a sense of home for many.

Now covered over and rendered a carpark, the project presents a significant opportunity for reconnection between Country, people, and kin.

We feel deeply for the Melaleuca that continues to stand tall and alone, and we propose to reconnect her to her ecologies. If she is still producing viable seed, we propose to cultivate descendant trees so that when her life comes to a natural end in the future, her family continue to live on in celebration of her strength and memory.



## Concept sketch

From the Melaleuca to Vineyard creek, water has been returned to place through an ephemeral creek and permanent wetland, free to rise and fall with the season and giving life to returned ecologies, abundant with locally occurring indigenous flora and materials that reinforce the identity of Darug Ngurra - reconnecting to a sense of home with spaces and resources for cultural practice and exchange. Re-establishing the opportunity to read the seasons of Country here again and to recommence practices of care.

Growing out of this landscape and around the Melaleuca is an architecture composed by the mangroves at the confluence of Vineyard creek and Parramatta river. The gently leaning structure and form of the architecture is drawn from the feeling of protection and respite when walking through the mangroves. The feathering of the façade invites views to the sky as dappled light streams in, as if through a tree canopy.

Grounded in the landscape the building edge creates a sense of refuge for critters, much like the root systems of the mangroves are a nursery for the young.

The program and events of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence will draw people in from afar, and while there, the architecture and landscape reinforce opportunities for connection, incidental interaction and places to be without needing permission.

Movement through the landscape and the building have been carefully curated to encourage connection between Country, culture, people and kin. Animals and insects can move freely through the landscape which extends the habitat corridor of Vineyard creek. Whichever way people choose to enter the building, they are guided in through the thresholds of rich Indigenous ecologies.

A generous internal walkway leads people to their destination with the internal landscape as orientator. Along the path people will find nooks to gather, yarn or perch on the edge where interior and exterior are blurred.

Together the design and function of Indigenous Centre of Excellence has a deeply important opportunity to create a truly Indigenous place within Parramatta that encourages Communities to connect and exchange cultures while being embedded within healthy Country.

# Designing with Country

## Connection to Country and Culture

Our design physically and emotionally centres around the Melaleuca tree and our first act is to reconnect her to her ecologies. This connection, imagined as a diagonal path and brought life as an ephemeral waterway falling towards Vineyard Creek and collecting in a new permanent wetland on-site that cleanses the water before release back into the catchment. Returning water to the site and the soils and with it the ecologies of place re-establish home for non-human kin.

Growing out of this landscape and around the Melaleuca is an architecture composed by the mangroves. The gently leaning structure and form of the architecture is drawn from the spatial language experienced when walking along the mangroves that line the confluence of Vineyard Creek and Parramatta River. The mangrove like architectural structure is protected by a patchwork of clay tile panels. The outer skin erodes revealing the inner layers of the architecture, much like the paperbark peels back to reveal new growth.

Once water, ecology, kin and people are returned, the cultural practices of caring for Country can be reconnected to place. Supported by the extensive opportunities for cultural engagement through the program, this place will be sung and danced and nurtured again.

In return Country will provide a place for Indigenous peoples to find themselves, their community, and their own connection to Darug Ngurra – a recipe for cultural wellbeing.

## Fostering Living Culture

Our design response recognises that it is not enough to incorporate Indigenous content into tertiary education. To embolden the sharing of culture and facilitate cultural safety for Indigenous peoples in education, the spaces in which teaching and learning take place need to strengthen cultural connections rather than deny them. A white box is not good enough.

The proposed design offers a broad range of spaces that support different ways of learning and engaging with culture and academia. These spaces vary on a spectrum from public, visible, outside and embedded within landscape - to inside, private, individual, and quiet. Our intention is to facilitate choice while also encouraging connection and community. This intention has informed our spatial layouts. All users share the internal circulation pathway, and along the way interactive passively and actively with culture through art, performance, food, yarns, landscape, language, and kin. As one moves up the building, they will find private spaces for staff and academics before reaching the multi purpose sports court and astronomy garden on the rooftop.

The visibility of healthy Country, the practices of care, cultural and academic transfer of Knowledges and the wellbeing and success of Indigenous students and staff will prove to universities, the community and ideally the nation, that when Indigenous peoples are allowed to be cultural within academic spaces they thrive.

## Cross-Cultural Learning

Standing proud at the front door of the campus, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence is a public expression of Western Sydney University's commitment to Country, culture, and community. The architecture and landscape will represent a manifestation of Western Sydney University's values and priorities – in effect an epic chance to walk the talk and set new precedent.

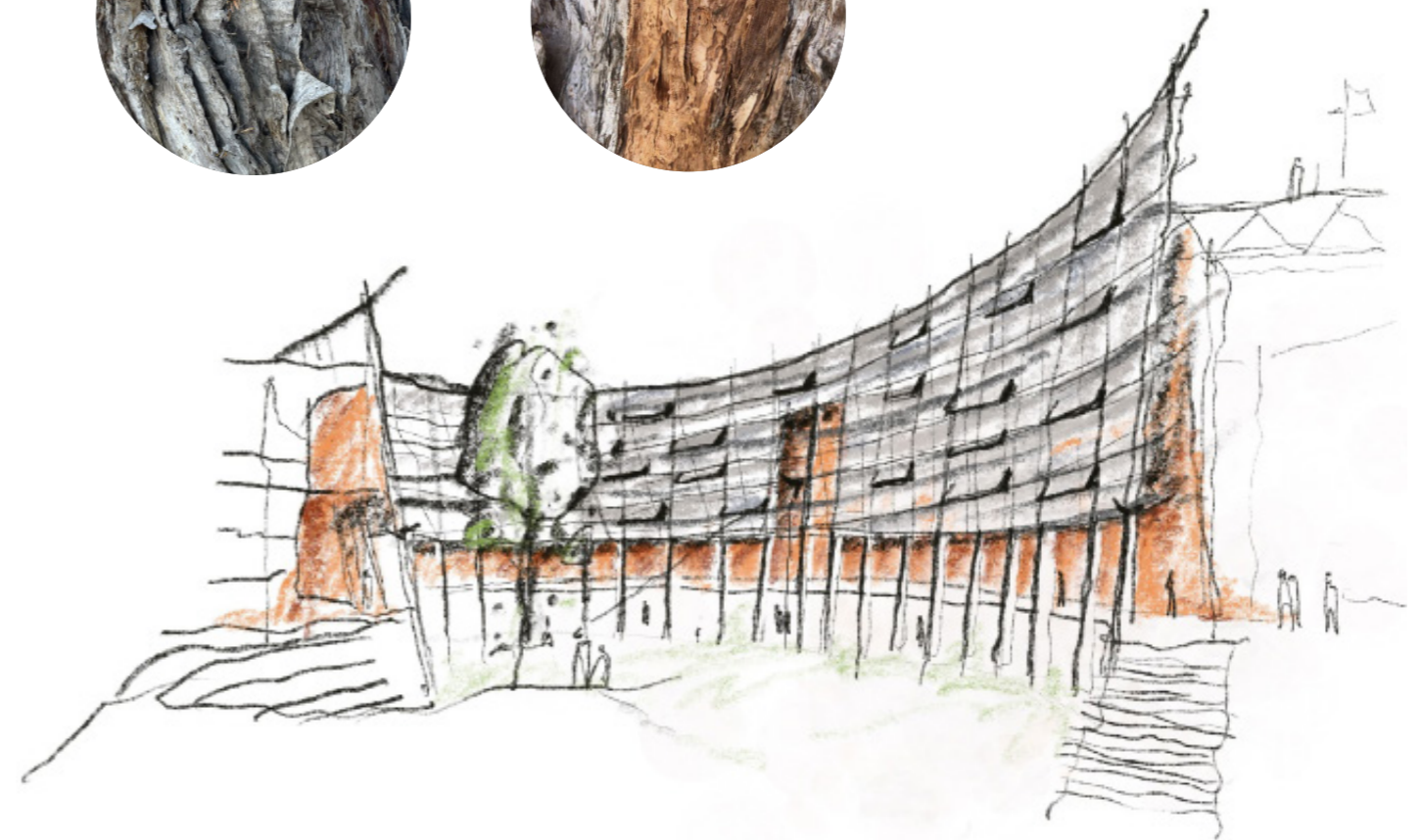
From walking the internal landscape and reconnecting with the seasonal life of Country, to attending public events in the grand civic ends of the building – the open amphitheatre and black box theatre or wandering the gallery and storytelling spaces to engage with culture in various forms of expression, stopping for a bite to eat at the café and wandering through the internal landscape watching fauna dance, scuttle, buzz and fly – the ground floor and landscape are places for all.

The diversity of offerings will welcome communities to the Indigenous Centre of Excellence in whatever way makes them feel safe in the first instance, then connected, and ultimately find a sense of belonging, understanding and respect.

## Benefiting the Community

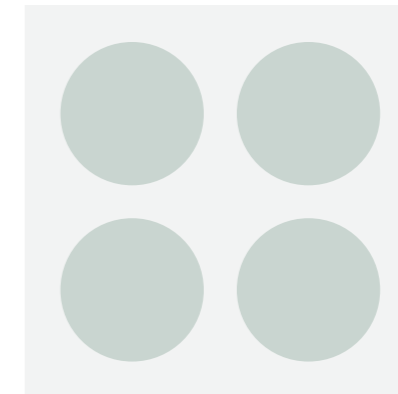
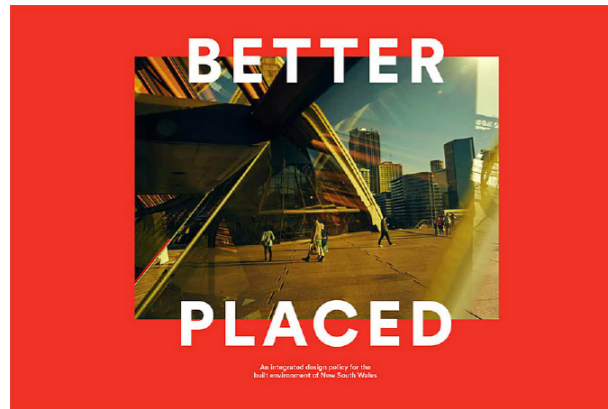
The Indigenous Centre of Excellence project will have direct and indirect benefits to the community. We see opportunities for Western Sydney University to develop procurement, employment and research opportunities related to the design and construction process of the architecture and the landscape

An example could be a direction to privilege the transfer of wealth to Indigenous peoples through procurement, contractor and subconsultant selection by designing in opportunities for Indigenous companies and individuals. Amplifying the stories of these Indigenous businesses throughout the process will demonstrate Western Sydney University's commitment as the design and construction process continues, bringing community along with the project. Another example includes engaging researchers within the Western Sydney University to consider studying the impact of the landscape evolution from its current condition as a carpark, through to a thriving biodiverse environment. Measuring and evidencing impact and understanding of the importance of healthy Country.



Facade concept sketch: learning from paperbark





The following is a summary of how the proposed Indigenous Centre of Excellence responds to the GANSW Better Placed objectives for good design.

**Better Fit**

“Better fit contextual, local and of its place. Good design in the built environment is informed by and derived from its location, context and social setting. It is place-based and relevant to and resonant with local character, heritage and communal aspirations It also contributes to evolving and future character and setting”

- The proposed Indigenous Centre of Excellence seeks for Country to have authorship in the design by drawing from the spatial language and sensory experience of the Mangroves at the confluence of Vinyard Creek and Parramatta River.
- The proposed design reconnects the Melaleuca tree to the ecologies of the site, and extends the habitat corridor of the creek, re-establishing home for non-human kin and re-establishing the capacity for cultural practice and cultural knowledge transfer on site to complement academic learning.

**Better Performance**

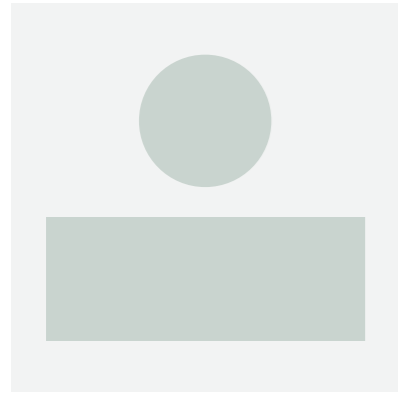
“Better performance is sustainable, adaptable and durable. Environmental sustainability and responsiveness is essential to meet the highest performance standards for living and working. Sustainability is no longer an optional extra, but a fundamental aspect of functional, whole of life design.”

- The project must achieve 5 star Greenstar while targeting 6-star Greenstar.
- Key sustainability focussed measures include: Singular façade system,
- Air-conditioned spaces with opportunity to use natural ventilation.
- Rainwater will be collected for reuse.
- Passive treatments and mechanical systems will be resolved in a 2050 climate context
- PV array will be located at the roof level to provide energy efficiency.
- Mass timber structure to best demonstrate natural sourcing.
- A ‘do no significant harm’ approach to specification will also ensure the project will not use materials harmful to humans or ecosystems in its procurement.
- Where possible internal walls are independent of structure for future adaptive re-use.

**Better for Community**

“Better for community is inclusive, connected and diverse. The design of the built environment must seek to address growing economic and social disparity and inequity, by creating inclusive, welcoming and equitable environments. Incorporating diverse uses, housing types and economic frameworks will support engaging places and resilient communities.”

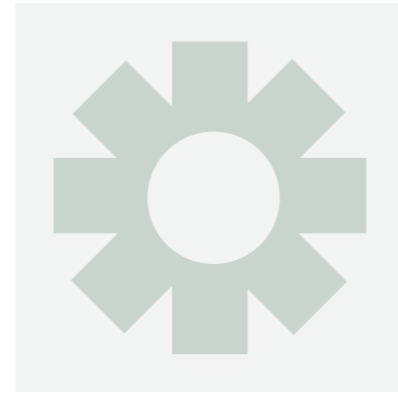
- Intention to use the material and supplier section framework to privilege Indigenous and local economies (Architectural Response Section 6)
- Design is a welcoming and place for the community, permission to just be in the environment as well as program offerings (gallery, theatre, discovery) for the local community and school groups to engage with.



**Better for People**

“Better for people is safe, comfortable and liveable. The built environment must be designed for people with a focus on safety, comfort and the basic requirement of using public space. The many aspects of human comfort which affect the usability of a place must be addressed to support good places for people.”

- The design encourages people to come into a closer relationship with Country and community through spatial planning, form and immersion in an Indigenous landscape.
- The project is universally accessible both from a statutory perspective and from a cultural request to create a place that is easy for Elders to be in. This includes accessible pathways, low tech and intuitive wayfinding and a spatial strategy that keeps you oriented to the internal landscape.
- Please refer to the CPTED report in the appendix of this document.



**Better Working**

“Better working is functional, efficient and fit for purpose. Having a considered, tailored response to the program or requirements of a building or place allows for efficiency and usability with the potential to adapt to change. Buildings and spaces which work well or their proposed use will remain valuable and well-utilised.”

- The Indigenous Centre of Excellence contains program of vastly varying scale within a singular built form. As such the proposed design is highly bespoke. Public spaces are contained within the landscape and ground floor to maximise activation, while the more provide student and staff spaces are on the upper levels.
- The larger scale theatre and exhibition spaces will be purpose built to their environmental and performative requirements, while, smaller scale spaces such as care rooms, academic teaching spaces and offices will be considered with the same amount of care. Whether or not someone is visiting, studying, working or just being in place, the design of each space will be tailored specific to their use and at comfort levels commensurate with lengths of stay.



**Better Value**

“Better value is creating and adding value. Good design generates ongoing value for people and communities and minimises costs over time. Creating shared value of place in the built environment raises standards and quality of life for users, as well as adding return on investment for industry”

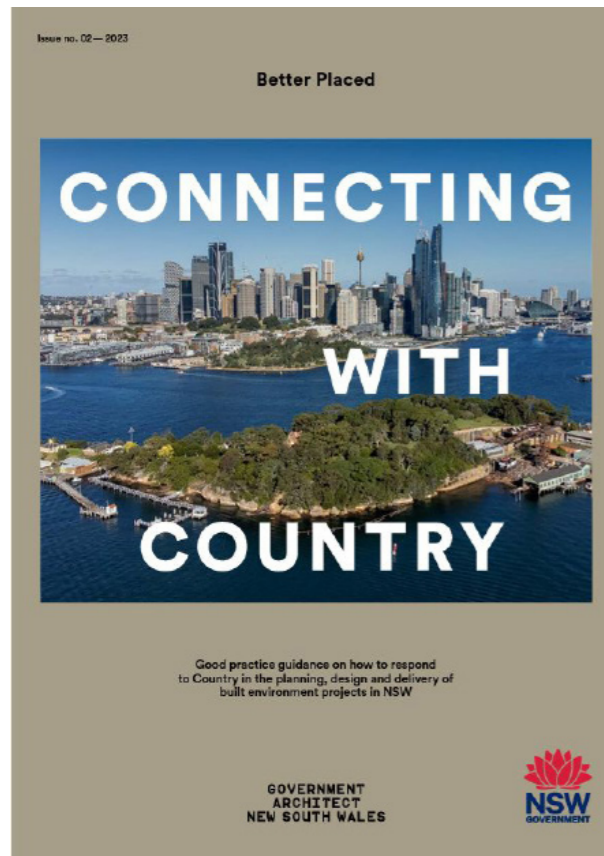
- The proposed Western Sydney University Indigenous Centre of Excellence is an iconic building on the main road to Parramatta. Located at the front door to the campus the mangrove inspired design is sensitive to yet strong in her place on Country and the current urban environment. The project will become a landmark within Western Sydney University and the wider Parramatta region.
- The project design and process is intended to create a new precedent for Designing with Country and development within the Parramatta region. The project hopes to influence better practices of caring for waterways, particularly Vinyard creek adjacent to the site as well as demonstrate how the Identity of place does not need to be removed as part of urban development.
- The most important return on investment for the project is to facilitate the Western Sydney Universities aspiration to be the University of Choice for Indigenous staff and students by creating a place Indigenous people can be strong and proud in, where they don't have to leave their culture at the door.



**Better Look and Feel**

“Better look and feel engaging, inviting and attractive. The built environment should be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing, encouraging communities to use and enjoy local places. The feel of a place, and how we use and relate to our environments is dependent upon the aesthetic quality of our places, spaces and buildings. The visual environment should contribute to its surroundings and promote positive engagement.”

- The proposed design incorporates a range of public and private programme within a singular building form. That is deferential to the creek line and gently leans away from outdoor spaces to create a sense of openness and invitation.
- Further invitation is created by the porous nature of the ground levels façade, including an open amphitheatre to the south and a public theatre to the north, much like the mangroves open to indicate there is a waterway flowing beyond.
- Careful effort has been taken to meaningfully incorporate the materials and colour identities of Country throughout the project. This includes the use of local clay of the façade, reclaimed stone in the landscape, Indigenous plants, locally native timber linings etc. This will be further enriched internally through the interior design.



GANSW Connecting With Country Framework

## 1. Healthy Country

### Healthy Ecology

The project aims to increase biodiversity across the site and reintroduce crucial aspects of healthy Country including prioritising endemic and other culturally relevant and appropriate plant species, materials that are of Country which have limited impact on supply chains, and a curative approach to the ongoing care of the landscape.

Planting is designed to represent the layered and interdependent nature of ecological communities that were once prevalent across the area, and provide habitat for non-human kin. Recycled and repurposed materials in the hard and soft landscape will be prioritised and permeable surfaces ensure water falling on the site is directed into the ground to improve the conditions for plant growth, prioritise infiltration, and reduce heat.

### Form of Country

Stormwater that is captured via the swale will flow to a treatment wetland that will in turn express clean water into Vineyard Creek, reconnecting the site to ancient systems, encouraging a restorative approach to Country that surrounds the site.

## 2. Healthy community

### Strong Cultural Identity

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence is grounded in a Cultural Design Brief created by Djinjama and Ngurra Advisory that embodies the stories, histories and aspirations for Country as told by Traditional Custodians, community and Djinjama and Ngurra Advisory's research. The design responds to the knowledge and aspirations of the project following stated intentions towards Country. These aspirations include to improve the Health and Wellbeing of Country, to reconnect to the energies, flows and practices of Country and for Country to have authorship in the design.

### Cultural Safety

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence project continues to be Indigenous centred and Indigenous led. This approach will direct a proper approach in the creation of spaces that are culturally appropriate. This will result in a building that provides spaces for community to enjoy safe expression of cultural practice, expression, and identity. This will result in an outcome of a sense of cultural safety. Due to the Indigenous centred approach, Indigenous consultants across the project will be working in a culturally safe and supportive environment.

### Reducing load on Community

Western Sydney University has engaged Djinjama and Ngurra Advisory as the Indigenous Cultural Lead for the project. Djinjama and Ngurra Advisory developed the Cultural Design Brief for the Indigenous Centre of Excellence project, and the University is working with Djinjama and Ngurra Advisory on further development of the ongoing cultural engagement plan. Where community input is sought, these meetings will be inclusive and respectful.

### Training

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence will be a testament to Western Sydney University's commitment to advancing Indigenous education, leadership, and reconciliation.

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence will support the education, training, and career development of Indigenous students and Indigenous staff within all schools and institutes within the University.

### Employment Opportunities

As an Indigenous centred and Indigenous led project, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence project will continue to enable employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples through direct employment with the University, and through supporting Indigenous owned business through the procurement of services during the development of the project and beyond. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence will also support Indigenous staff and students in education and personal development, creating future leaders connected to community and Country.

## 3. Protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage

### Cultural Advisors

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence is an Indigenous led project, guided by the University's Elder's Advisory Committee. The University has appointed Djinjama and Ngurra Advisory as the Indigenous Cultural Lead on the project, who have prepared a Cultural Design Brief for the project that aims to protect and celebrate Indigenous cultural heritage throughout the entire development process.

The University has also completed a successful voluntary design excellence competition that has resulted in the engagement of an Indigenous led design team. The Design Competition Selection Committee judging the competition was majority Indigenous as was the Chair of the Committee. The Indigenous Advisory Group that advised the Committee was 100% Indigenous, with the majority of the Group being Darug.

### ICIP

The University is committed to protecting the Intellectual and Cultural Property of its project teams and processes, to the extent that ICIP clauses have been developed and included in project team contracts, and a management plan for the implementation of ICIP protocols is in the process of being developed for the design, construction, and ongoing operation of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.

### Aboriginal Language and Place Names

Western Sydney University has developed a Naming Protocol for the Indigenous Centre of Excellence. The Protocols confirm that the University is committed to championing the continued recognition of Australian Indigenous cultural heritage and language by assigning Indigenous names to spaces, facilities and features throughout the Indigenous Centre of Excellence and adjacent outdoor areas that have meaning and connection to Indigenous Peoples.

### Access to Country

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence will be a University building and as such will be available to Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence will provide communities with access to a cutting-edge arts and culture facility. It will provide an unprecedented opportunity to meaningfully connect with the Indigenous history and culture of the region and beyond, increasing the diversity and depth of cultural activities which are available in the region.

## 4. Cultural competency

### Cultural Awareness Training

JCB has spent many years developing cultural awareness and understanding through training, internal workshops, policies, systems, CPD, RAP and Indigenous leadership and advocacy within the built environment profession. We understand that all individuals within our workplace are at different stages of their own understanding within this space, and we continue to support their ongoing development.

JCB provides opportunities for learning and strengthening personal relationships with Country, truth telling and the impacts of racism. These opportunities arise through the projects that we design and deliver with our clients, consultants, and collaborators, through discussions and forums within our studio, as well as organised training sessions with external Indigenous businesses.

We recognise that the nature of our profession is to re-shape Country and as such we have a fundamental responsibility to design with and advocate for Country in our projects in partnership with our clients and collaborators.

## 5. Better Places

### Connected with Country

The winning Indigenous Centre of Excellence design reconnects the melaleuca tree to the ecology of the creek, in addition to returning ecologies to the site to recreate home and resources for non-human kin and is safely shielded by an architecture that is in the language of the mangroves at the confluence of Vinyard Creek and Paramatta River. The façade evokes a woven like texture casting dappled light internally, like sunlight streaming through the canopy of the mangroves.

Darug language will be used throughout the building and landscape to reinforce future language learning programs. Ecological and geological markers will become evident in the materials of the building, including reclaimed stones in the landscape, timber finishes within the building and the sourcing of local clay for the façade.

### Living Cultural Practices

Engagement with Darug Custodians, local Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders is ongoing to ensure that we understand the way this area of Country should be cared for. This engagement will continue to occur as the design evolves. The program of the building supports a broad range and scale of cultural experiences, practices and ceremonies. This will include the external yarning circle and educational programs. A native Indigenous landscape will increase opportunities for learning about historic uses for Indigenous plants and well as the site's ecologies. A large scale covered amphitheatre as well as opportunities for the sharing of culture knowledges through the theatre and gallery adds to the opportunities that will occur.

### Repair of Original Landscape:

The project team is planning to work with a local consultant to understand in the lone melaleuca tree on site is still producing seed. If she is, the plan is to collect this seed and cultivate descendant trees to join a renewed ecology. The planting is designed to represent the layered and interdependent nature of ecological communities that were once prevalent across the area and is further nurtured by the inclusion of an ephemeral waterway onsite.



Concept Design Development Render

\* Those who came before us\* (2021)  
Rendered by Alex Moloney, A Marooch-Chandlers: map from Griffith NSW in partnership with over 120 staff and students from WSU

A porous and welcoming approach



*"Important to the First Nations engagement for the project was engaging with key Dharug Traditional Custodians to guide the core values of and aspirations for this part of Country and culture, this included through walks on Country and yarnning. The Western Sydney University Elder's Advisory Committee shared their understandings of place, culture and the university. First Nations staff and students – core users of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence – were brought in through a series of workshops to understand how they wished to use, access, be part of, bring community into the new Centre. Together the collated understandings from all these groups, along with cultural research and countermapping, the Cultural Design Brief was authored to guide competitors and the ongoing project."*

- Dr Danièle Hromek, Djinjama

# Cultural Design Brief

Western Sydney University  
Indigenous Centre of Excellence

*Burramattagal Country*



Djinjama

ngurra  
advisory

CULTURAL DESIGN AND RESEARCH

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Furthermore, it is protected by Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights in which ICIP refers to Indigenous peoples' heritage and culture (where heritage includes all aspects of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and resources and knowledge systems developed by Indigenous people as part of their Indigenous identity) and is collective in that ICIP originates from a clan group and is passed on from generation to generation. As such it is not ownable by anyone other than the Indigenous peoples and communities from which it originates.

This document does not contain any secret or sacred information as far as we are aware.

This publication aims to work respectfully with all peoples and protect the rights of Country and all entities of Country.

Djinjama

Cultural Design  
and Research



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ABN: 20 592 113 846

VERSION 01

01.3

## Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property Rights

Indigenous peoples have the right to protect their culture and heritage. This can occur in part through the recognition and respect for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) means the rights of Indigenous peoples to their cultural heritage. Heritage comprises all objects, sites and knowledge, the nature or use of which has been transmitted or continues to be transmitted from generation to generation, and which is regarded as pertaining to a particular Indigenous group or its territory. The heritage of Indigenous peoples is a living one and includes objects, knowledge, data, literary and artistic works which may be created in the future based on that heritage.

Heritage includes: literary, performing and artistic works (including songs, music, dances, stories, ceremonies, symbols, languages and designs); scientific, agricultural, technical and ecological knowledge (including cultigens, medicines and the phenotypes of flora and fauna); all items of movable cultural property; human remains and tissues; immovable cultural property (including sacred and historically significant sites and burial grounds); documentation of Indigenous peoples' heritage in archives, film, photographs, videotape or audiotape and all forms of media.

Built environment projects have obligations to ensure Indigenous culture and heritage are protected, including in the built form, but also the contractual agreements made during the course of projects. It is important that all Indigenous peoples associated with the competition—including Indigenous competitors—have their Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights protected. This needs to occur both in actions and practices within competition teams as well as agreements and sublicences.

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY INDIGENOUS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE | CULTURAL DESIGN BRIEF



DJINJAMA | NGURRA ADVISORY

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WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY INDIGENOUS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE | CULTURAL DESIGN BRIEF

## Cultural Design Brief

While a functional design brief provides details of the needs to be addressed stated in terms of functional requirements (e.g. spatial needs, proposed users, functional needs, location) and performance outcomes (e.g. time and cost), a cultural design brief provides details of the needs to be addressed in terms of Country, culture, community and kin. For instance the rights of Country, the needs of the community, protocols of behaviour, principles and values of culture, etc which guides how the place functions, is experienced, and reflects culture.

*Without the cultural brief, the functional brief is incomplete.*

DJINJAMA | NGURRA ADVISORY

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02. Cultural Design

*Country is known by Indigenous peoples to be alive, sentient, and to have agency. As such, just as people have rights, so too does Country as do those who share Country with humans.*

*Country has the right to be cared for, and it is the role of humans to protect Country. Country must be respected for many generations to come through the building of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence. Elders remind us that we do not own the land, the land owns us. As such, we should not take more than what we need from Country, including for the construction of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.*

*Country is Dharug and Dharug is Country. They are part of a singular being and one cannot be seen as exclusive to the other. Parramatta is a place of strength and equity, which needs to be integrated into the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.*

**The Indigenous Centre of Excellence must reflect the Country from which it originates:** Burrumatta lands in Dharug Country. It should reflect the local identity of this specific Country including the original landscape features, systems, means of care, plants and animals. A layered understanding of Country is to be integrated into the Indigenous Centre of Excellence with story and cultural values ensuring the project is delivered with social justice being integrated into spatial outcomes.

**The Indigenous Centre of Excellence must demonstrably restore the health and wellbeing of the Country** to which it is connected and from which it is constructed. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence should exemplify a Country-positive approach to design, construction and ongoing occupation, ensuring a net-positive impact on all aspects of Country including tangible and intangible. Any damage that may occur to Country that occurs as a result of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence must be minimised and mitigated.

**The Indigenous Centre of Excellence should be perceived as a counterpoint** to the overdeveloped nature of other parts of nearby Country. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence should give a sense of Indigenous peoples not just surviving here, but thriving.

**Elders want to see people physically and spiritually connected to Country**—to the soil and the earth, bringing the outside in. As such, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence should provide opportunities for people to connect, with Country, with culture, with each other.

**Indigenous cultures have the right to be expressed without judgement, and without needing to be invited.** Indigenous cultures have the right to have equity in spaces, despite this currently being unrealised in urban contexts. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence needs to take a role in addressing this inequity and furthermore, enhance opportunities for sharing, collaboration and partnerships among Indigenous peoples.

**Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property must be respected and protected** in how it is used in the design, construction and occupation of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence, Indigenous peoples involved in the design of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence must have their legal and moral rights to their Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property respected, including in agreements. Any Indigenous knowledge that is used must be integrated ethically and respectfully, with Indigenous principles of autonomy followed.

**Indigenous voices need to be privileged** when considering issues relating to Indigenous peoples, their lives and stories, and Country. Indigenous design leadership must enable Indigenous worldviews to be expressed not only in the outcomes of design, but the process also. Their involvement should enable a diversity of voices to be integrated, including those often unheard or not yet known. Likewise, all bodies inclusive of all abilities need to be able to access the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.



02. Cultural Design

**The Indigenous community has the right to a culturally safe space to celebrate and practice culture and connect to Country—regardless whether they are traditional practices or contemporary.**

*Elders have expressed their desire that culture surrounds community, visitors, guests, staff and students from the moment of entering the building and surrounding landscape. There should be repeated moments of connection that impact and improve the sense of wellbeing. Culture should be sensorially experienced and expressed, providing comfort, peace and safety. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence needs to be a mindful place, that is welcoming and positive, sharing the strengths of Country and its people.*

**The Indigenous Centre of Excellence should create spaces where Indigenous peoples can thrive and succeed in their educational aspirations.** The Indigenous Centre of Excellence itself should be a celebration of Indigenous cultures, specifically Burramattagal and Dharug culture. It should enable the transmission of traditional knowledges and stories and support cultural practices to be maintained through the design.

*Elders share their aspirations that there is a balance of recognising the local Burramattagal and Dharug people, and celebrating their neighbours and other communities.*

*Elders need to be considered mindfully in the design, planning and layout of the building, reflecting the structure of Indigenous communities and the status in which Elders are held in communities.*

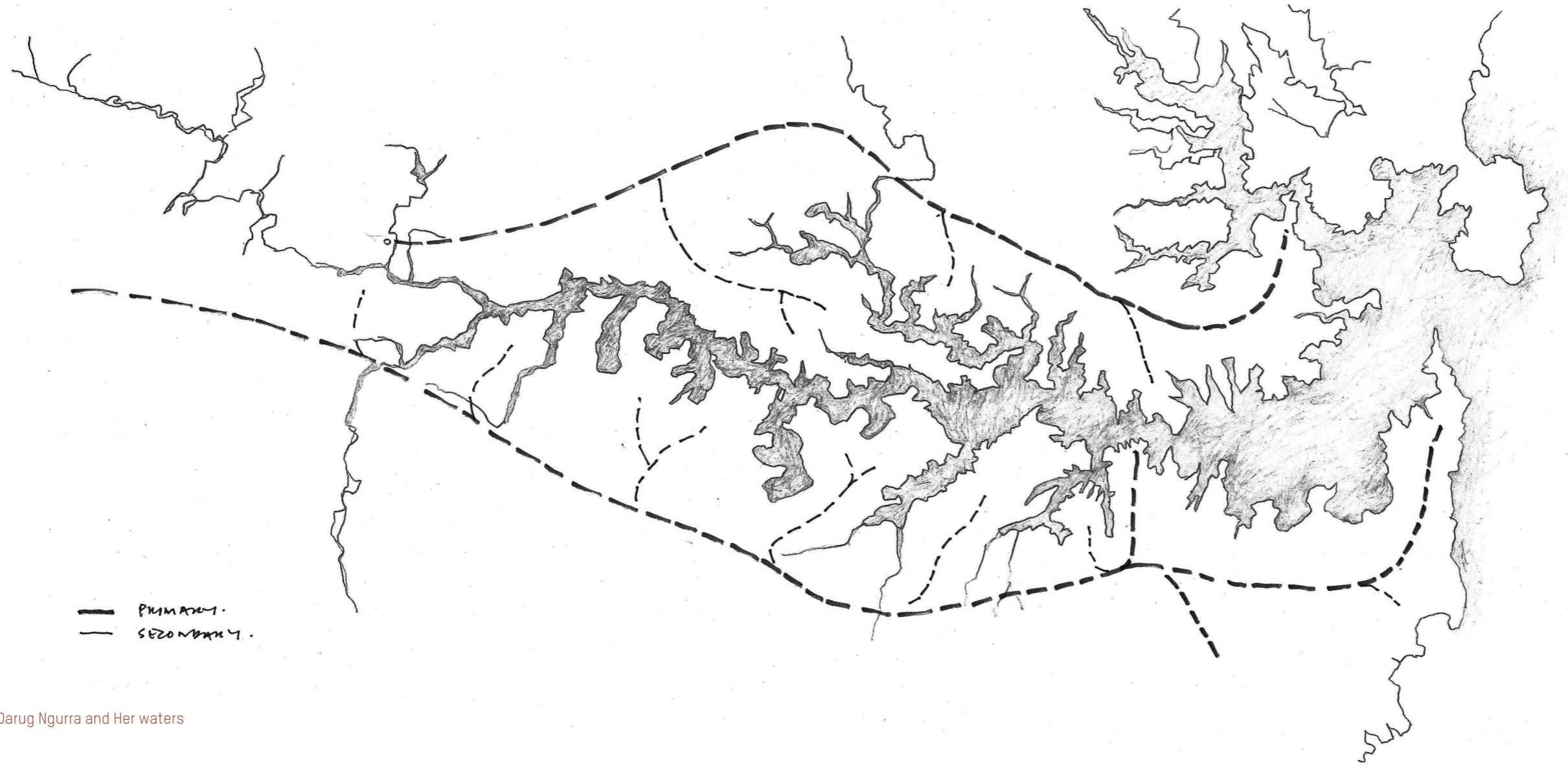
**The Indigenous Centre of Excellence needs to provide spaces for the Dharug to host gatherings to make decisions about their Ngura.** Spaces need to be private and quiet and appropriate for sharing stories and culture, including safe keeping of family histories and stories. Dharug Ngura (Country) and yura (people) should be visible here with the intention of ensuring cultural survival and flourishing.

**The Indigenous Centre of Excellence should embrace local Indigenous narratives in names, languages and cultural expressions.** All Indigenous languages have the right to be learned and flourish, including the Dharug language. As a University dedicated to the region, the University has made a commitment that by 2032 all students will have the opportunity to undertake an Indigenous language course in partnership with local communities. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence should create spaces for Indigenous languages to thrive and be heard.

**Non-human and more-than-human kin who have belonging to this part of Country should be equally considered in the design of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.** The burra or eel, after whom this Country is known, should be considered a co-designer of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence. Reflections of the river should be evident in the design.

**Only original endemic local plant species should be planted** in the landscaping and gardens to ensure local fauna likewise have spaces on Country to live and continue their care for Country responsibilities. This should include plants for weaving and other cultural practices, food sources, and medicines. Soils, waters, geology, and air must be healthy and continually cared for as part of the ongoing responsibilities of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence.





Darug Ngurra and Her waters

*As we walk the river, we walk accompanied by ancestral energies, present in the glint of a tail in the mangroves, the movement of surface water, the not so silence of night - all telling stories, known and unknown, of Country, culture, and people.*

Darug Ngurra was and is a home to many -- reaching from the mountains to the sea, across the alluvial flood plains held by topography that feeds the basin, bordered by moody rivers that define the foothills and flows from distant lands, and nurtured by waterways flowing to the mighty harbour. This home, like all homes needs care: life must be nurtured, water understood, land tended to, systems maintained, stories told.

One imagines Darug Ngurra in the before time - where the practices of daily life are highly attuned to the subtleties of change - a way of being that has been so deeply lost in western society.

Colonialism and the imposition of thinking foreign to Country, has created conflict and disturbance Land has been torn, systems misunderstood, authority misplaced, and the wasteful use of resources evidence senseless acts devoid of intergenerational intelligence. Nevertheless, Mother Earth prevails.

We are living in a time that requires the re-orientation of societal values if we wish to move forward without more harm. We see the Western Sydney University Indigenous Centre of Excellence as a conduit for such change. Supported by like minds, the purpose, presence, and practice of Indigenous Centre of Excellence will emanate positive cultural change through generosity, sharing and care.

The proposed Indigenous Centre of Excellence sits adjacent to one of Sydney's primary feeder roads, at the front door of the campus, and on an ancient alluvial flood plain, the wandering energy of Vineyard creek feeds the Parramatta (Burrumbidgee) River and defines topographies. The surrounding orthogonal patterns of streets and buildings bear little relevance to the strength of the land and her waters.

Placing a building in this context is a measured balance of dual realities. The building deliberately shields against imposing and noisy urban context and opens to connect to the creek, river, and ocean beyond as well as the sky above and the soils below and invites communities near and far to find home here once more.

The soft form of the building is reverent to the ancient land. The building is not crowded with stimuli but rather guided experiences- landscape, entry, hospitality, wandering towards galleries, theatres, landscape - this place invites you to be gently in the world.

Our design is a physical representation of occupying place with the ambition of establishing connections that elongate local knowledge and celebrate cultural practices. All aspects of this Indigenous Centre of Excellence are considered and crafted with ultimate connection in mind.

# Site Context

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence site is near the confluence of several topographic paths focused on The Crescent Parramatta, a recognised Indigenous gathering place at the Parramatta River's historic tidal reach. The site is alongside Victoria Road, an enduring topographic path between The Crescent in Parramatta Park to the west and the Woolwich harbour promontory, refer to site context

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence site is girdled to the South and West by a protective ridge line. The ridge line prospect is marked by the historic Female Orphan School, which overlooks the river and flood plain.

Female Orphan School is part of a suite of state listed heritage items on the Western Sydney University Campus and is not visible from the Indigenous Centre of Excellence site.

## Active transport

The light rail scheduled to open in 2024 will transform public transport access to the Western Sydney University Campus. It will connect to two nearby Western Sydney University campuses, Parramatta City and Westmead. The light rail will dramatically improve existing public transport which currently comprises bus stops at the Victoria Road Campus threshold, ferry stops (1-2km away) at Parramatta and Rydalmere and Parramatta Station.

The light rail corridor includes a share way / cycleway, which expands the active transport connections offered by the Parramatta Valley Cycleway a 20km foreshore share way between Meadowbank and Parramatta Park, refer to active transport.

## Victoria Road

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence site's public address is to Victoria Road. Despite the busy traffic environment, this distinctive topographic path is punctuated by several local centres, schools, churches and stands of trees.

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence building and landscape will contribute a memorable presence along Victoria Road, refer to existing and future character.

## Site



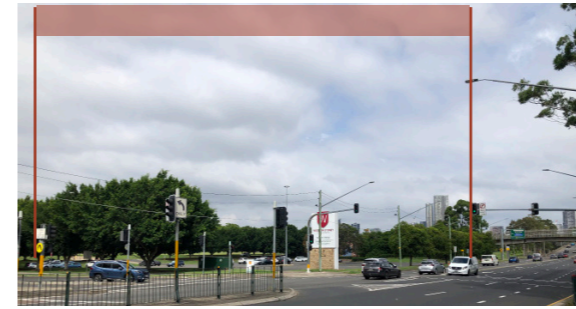
The site from Victoria Road (Parramatta side)



The site in proximity to Vineyard Creek



Indigenous Melaleuca located centrally on the site



The site from the opposite side of Victoria Road



The site as seen from the Bridge Street overpass



Opposite the site, to the North of Victoria Road



Vineyard Creek, east of the site



Vineyard Creek, north of Victoria Road

## Situation



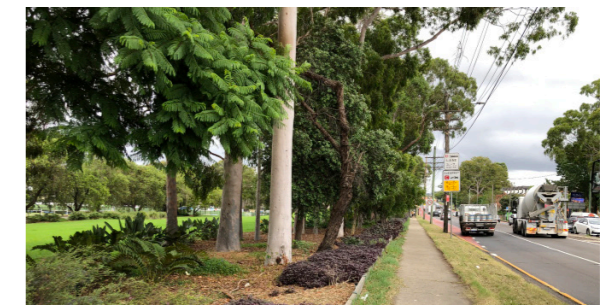
Walking on Country at Parramatta River, under rail bridge



Yallamundi Lightrail stop near Western Sydney University campus



Victoria Road at Silverwater Road crossing, toward



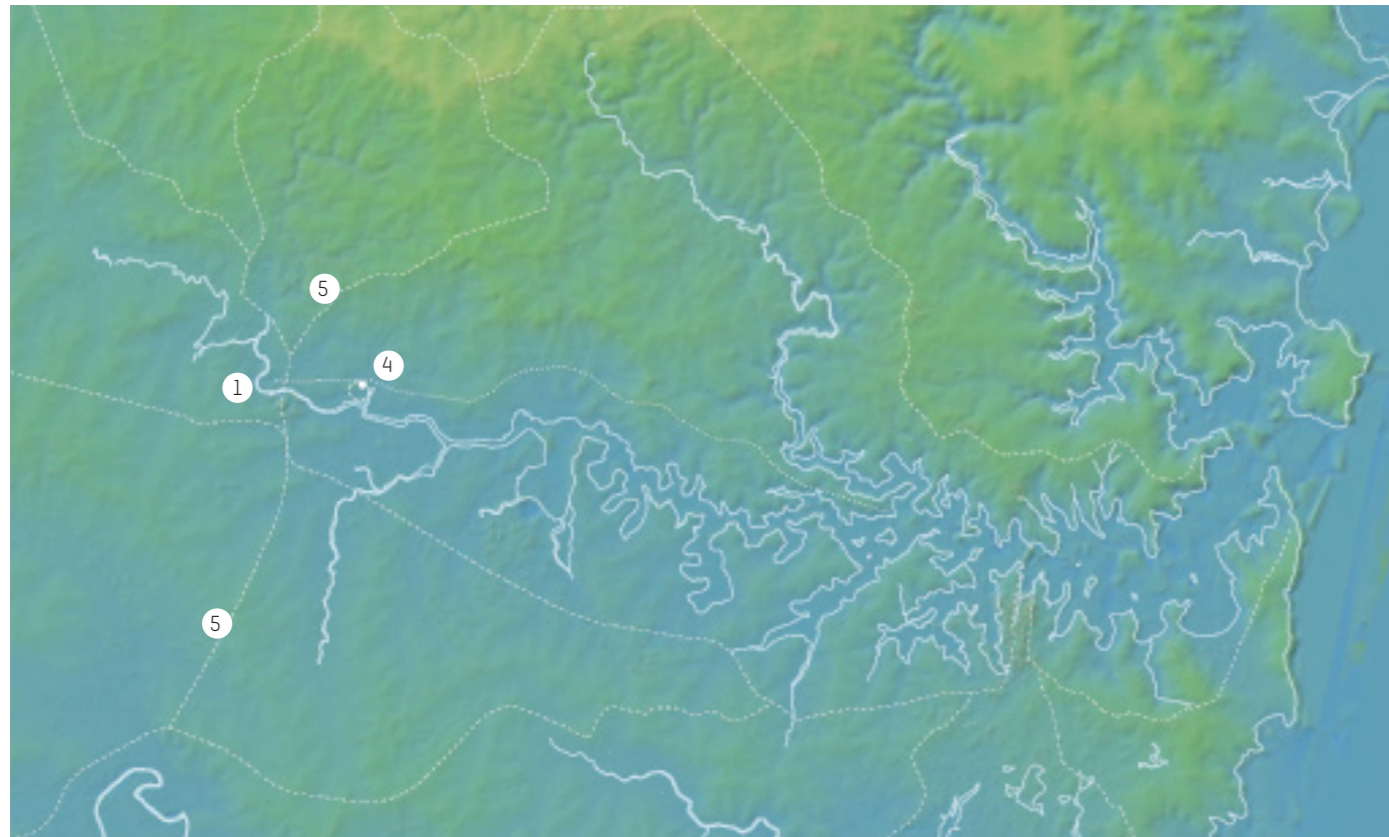
Rydalmere Park on Victoria Road



All Saints Anglican Church, Victoria Road

# Historical Site Context

Pre 1788



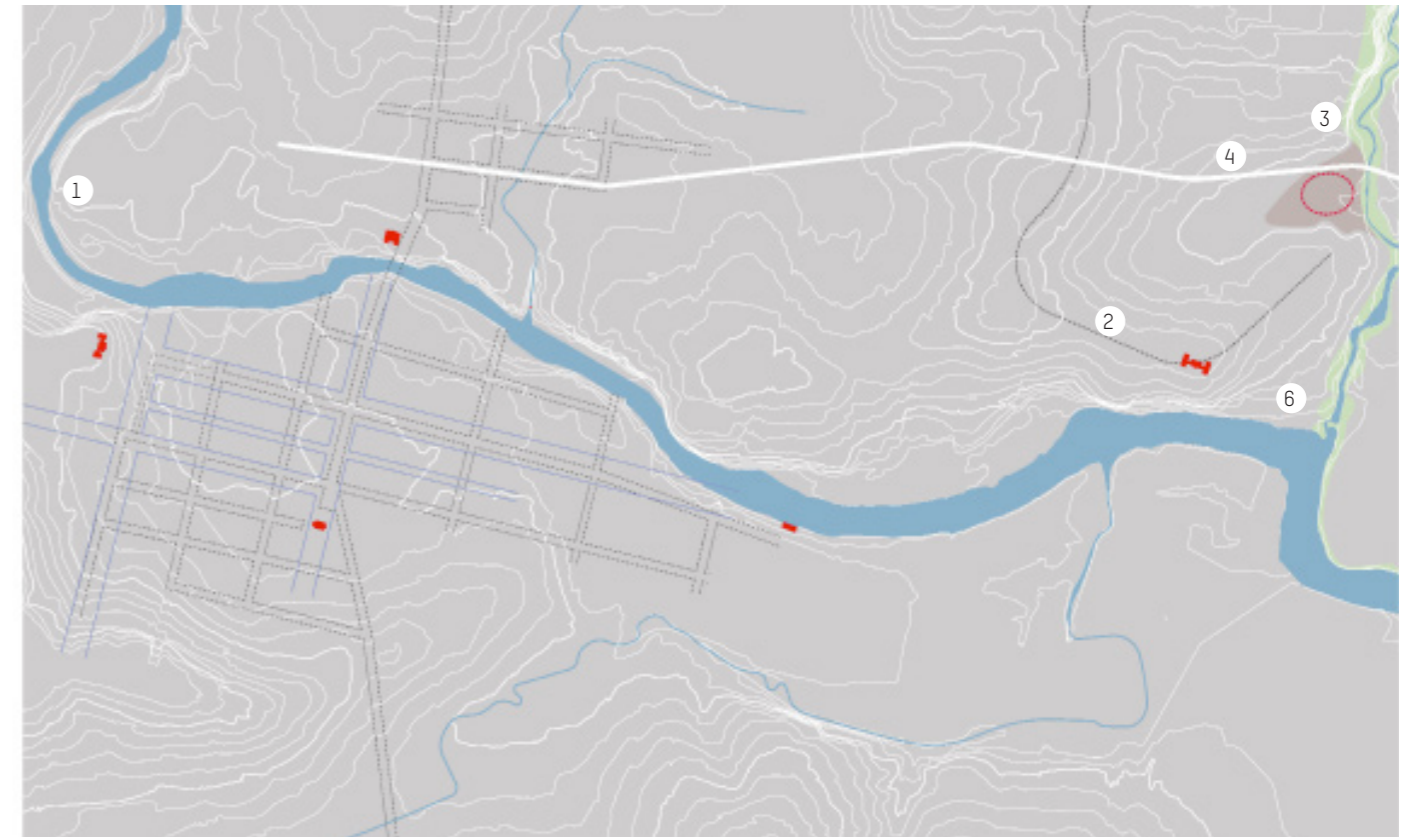
Victoria Road, enduring topographic paths and pre 1788 waterlines  
Nearmap photo base

Today's Victoria Road is part of an enduring topographic path that originally connected The Crescent at Parramatta Park to the Woolwich harbour promontory. The Crescent, a spectacular amphitheatre landform and recognised Indigenous gathering place, is at the Parramatta River's historic tidal reach and at the confluence of several topographic paths including Pennant Hills Road, Old Northern Road, Windsor Road, and Parramatta Road linked by Church Street (likely Indigenous paths)



The Crescent Parramatta 1791  
State Library of NSW DG SV1A.24










1813



By 1813, the ambitious plan for Parramatta, including 60m wide mall connecting Government House to the river landing place and 45m wide cross axis were reduced to 20m wide streets. Key buildings associated with the original cross axis are shown.

On what is now the Western Sydney University Campus nearby, the Female Orphan School built in 1813, was strategically positioned on the local ridge line to enjoy prospect over the river and flood plain. In all likelihood the building appropriated a place that was also valued by Indigenous people.

Legend

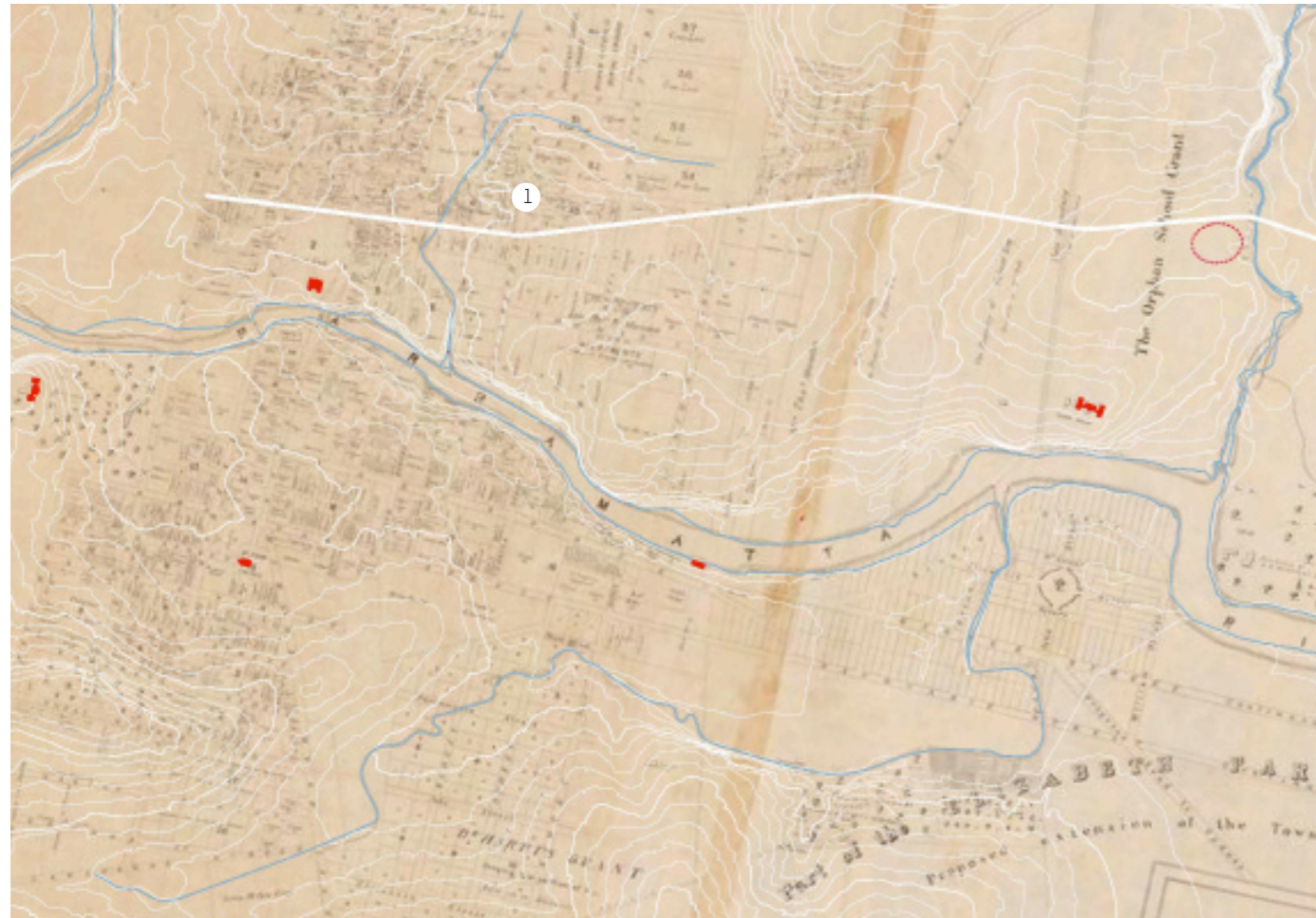
-  Site
-  Parramatta River
-  The Crescent Parramatta
-  Local ridge line
-  Vineyard creek
-  Topographic path - Victoria Rd
-  Other topographic paths
-  Historic buildings
-  Female orphan school



Female Orphan School  
Lycett-State Library of Victoria-30328102131561-13

# Historical Site Context

1844



Town of Parramatta - Brownrigg 1844. Heritage Centre City of Parramatta

The Brownrigg 1844 plan of The Town of Parramatta contrasts the Orphan School complex, set in an open landscape, with Parramatta building footprints and speculative subdivisions that were expanding the Parramatta township eastward across to today's Rosehill and Camelia.

Legend

- Site
- Waterways
- ① Victoria Road
- Historic buildings
- ② Solitary Tree



The Protestant Orphan School in 1870  
State Library of NSW d1\_06132

1943



Six maps 1943

From the 1880's to 1980's, what is now the Western Sydney University Campus, was managed by the Department of Lunacy and later the Department of Health. The institution's built occupation evolved into two distinct groupings, responding to two topographic knolls.

The 1943 aerial photo shows the Campus distinct and set apart from the surrounding development, comprising historic villas, suburban housing and farmland.

The Victoria Road frontage entry near the northwest corner, is formalised with a treelined carriageway. Tree plantings are also on the perimeter of an oval. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence site, includes a tennis court sized footprint beside a solitary tree.



Rydalmere Psychiatric Hospital, around 1890.  
State Records NSW, NRS 5598

# Historical Site Context

2024



2024 Nearmap photo base

The Western Sydney University campus includes additional buildings (shown with red fill) since the 1943 photo. Some buildings have been removed (shown with red outline). The Whitlam Institute occupies the former Orphan School complex. Four large surface car parks are visible.

Western Sydney University campus boundary adjustments have occurred to make way for widening of Victoria Road and James Ruse Drive.

Grade separation between Victoria Road and both James Ruse Drive and the rail corridor, and realignment of Victoria Road northward has adjusted campus boundary alignments. Together these adjustments curtail the Western Sydney University campus' visual catchment and obscures the presence of the campus in its wider situation.

As a result, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence presence will be limited predominantly to its frontage to Victoria Road and the vehicular campus threshold.

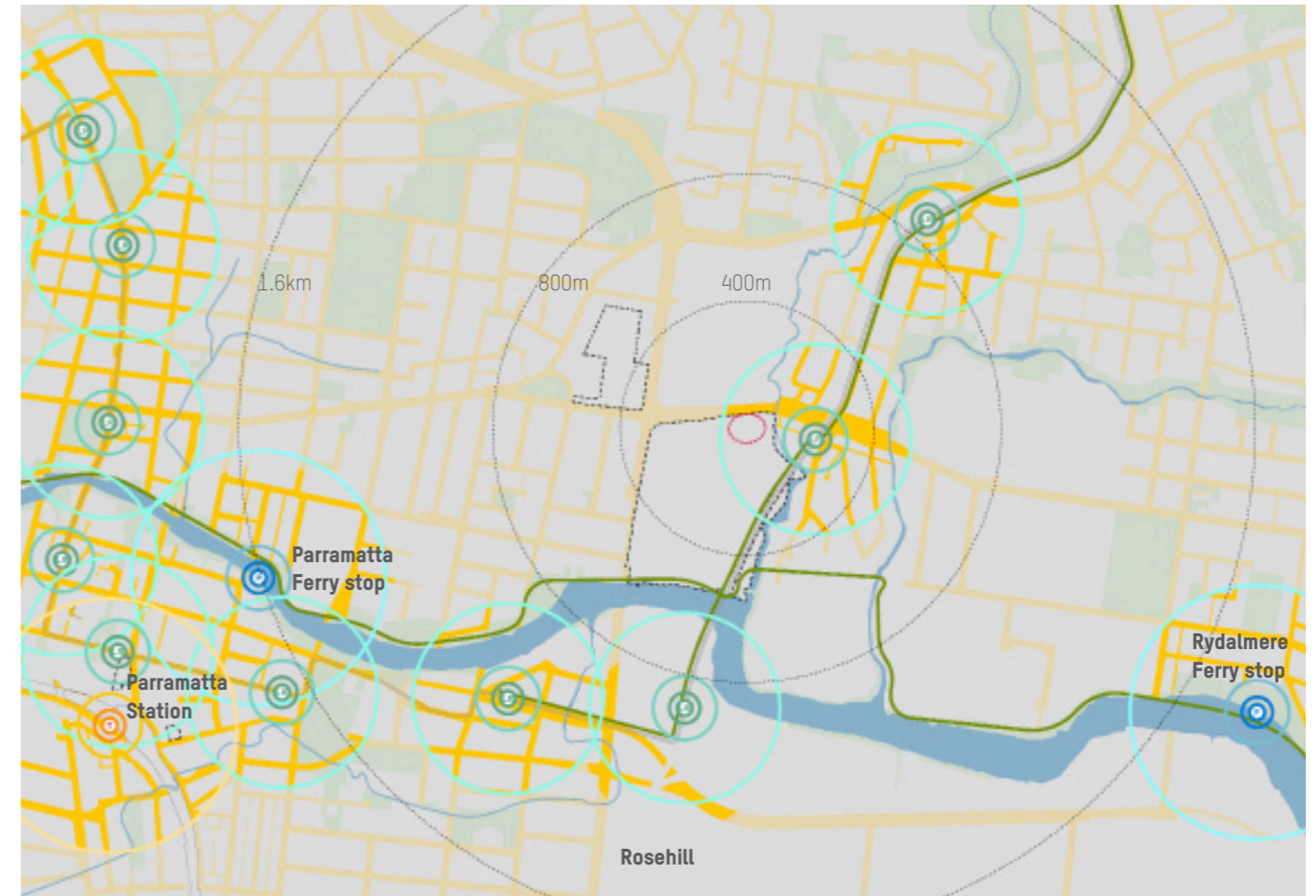
### Legend

- Site
- Waterways
- ① Victoria Road
- ② Road widening
- ③ Road realignment
- ④ Creek straightened
- ⑤ Existing Melaleuca
- Additional buildings (post 1943)



Looking West toward Parramatta. Grade separated Victoria Road and James Ruse Drive.

# Active Transport



The light rail scheduled to open in 2024 will transform public transport access to the Western Sydney University Campus. It will connect to two nearby Western Sydney University campuses, Parramatta City and Westmead. The light rail will dramatically improve existing public transport which currently comprises bus stops at the Victoria Road Campus threshold, ferry stops (1-2km away) at Parramatta and Rydalmere and Parramatta Station.

A new metro station is currently under construction in central Parramatta. An additional station in nearby Rosehill is being considered.

The light rail corridor includes a share way / cycleway, which expands the active transport connections offered by the Parramatta Valley Cycleway a 20km foreshore share way between Meadowbank and Parramatta Park.

### Legend

- Site
- Western Sydney University
- Waterways
- Existing parks
- Cycleways
- LR Light rail stops
- T Train station
- F Ferry stops
- Walking catchment

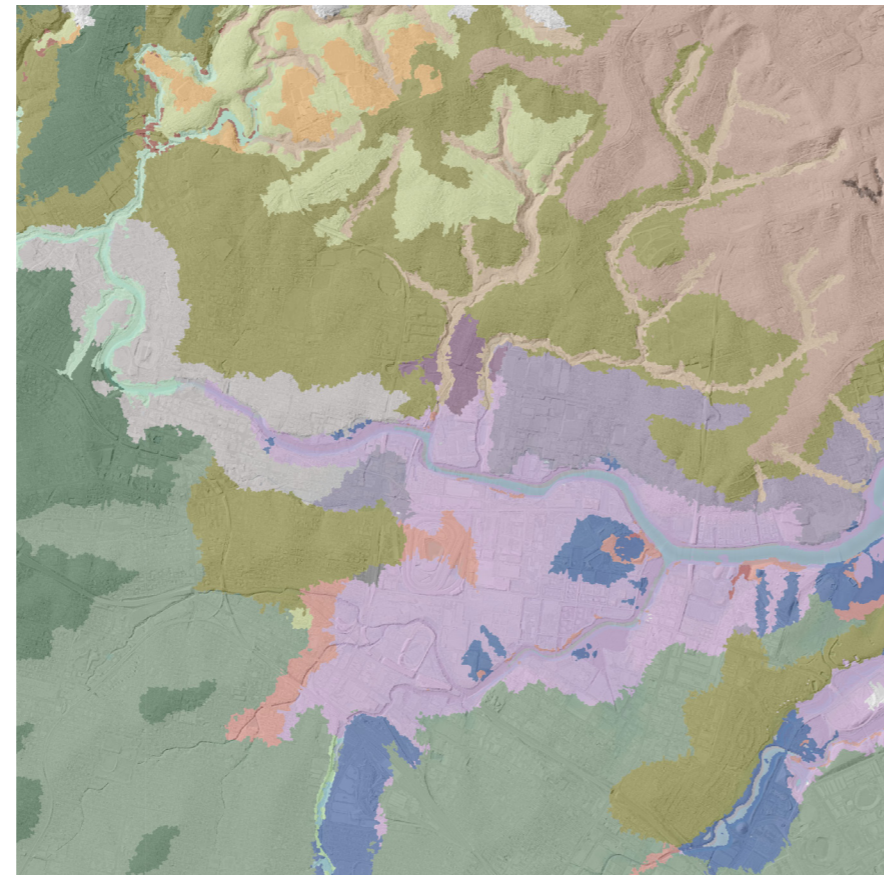
# Landscape & Urban Context

The Cumberland Plain today reflects a fragmented landscape. For millennia the Indigenous curators of the Sydney basin have understood their land and waterways, and the importance of how natural systems support and provide for human and non-human communities. European practices introduced during colonisation demonstrate a vastly different attribution of value to Country, and have led to the degradation of biodiversity in the region, and Australia wide. English writer Louisa Meredith lamented in 1839 that *'The system of "clearing" here, by the total destruction of every native tree and shrub, gives a most bare, raw, and ugly appearance to a new place. In England we plant groves and woods, and think our country residences unfinished and incomplete without them; but here the exact contrary is the case, and unless a settler can see an expanse of bare, naked, unvaried, shadeless, dry, dusty land spread all around him, he fancies his dwelling "wild and uncivilised"'*.

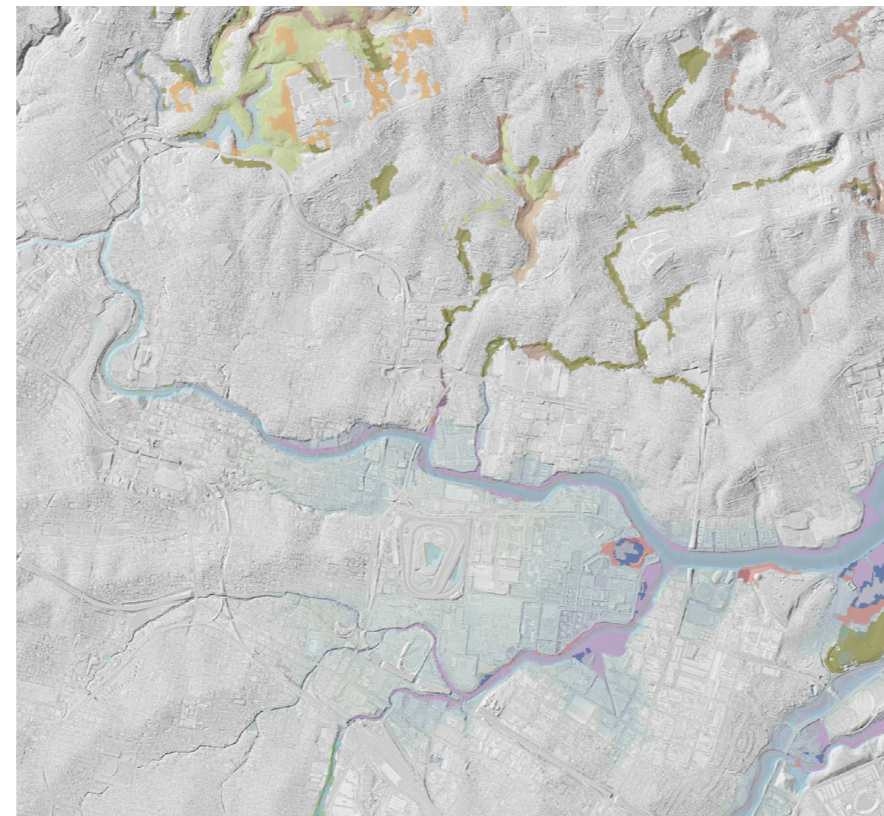
Today less than 10% of the original vegetation extent of the Cumberland Plain remains, much of which occurs on privately owned land. This remnant echo of healthy Country is under threat of further loss and fragmentation arising from residential and industrial development, agricultural expansion, and infrastructure. The Indigenous Centre of Excellence presents an opportunity to educate and inform on the importance of caring for Country. Indigenous peoples understand people to be a part of Country, and impacts upon environmental systems, which in turn affect flora and fauna, are intrinsically linked to impacts on and by people.



Remnant Cumberland Plain Woodland at the Australian Botanic Garden



Plant Community Types - Pre Clearing



Plant Community Types - Current

### Plant Community Types - Pre Clearing

- Sydney Coastal Coachwood Gallery Rainforest
- Cumberland Shale Plains Woodland
- Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest
- Sydney Coastal Shale-Sandstone Forest
- Sydney Coastal Enriched Sandstone Forest
- Sydney Enriched Sandstone Moist Forest
- Blue Gum High Forest
- Sydney Coastal Sandstone Foreshores Forest
- Sydney Coastal Sandstone Gully Forest
- Cumberland Red Gum Riverflat Forest
- Cumberland Ironbark Forest
- Grey Mangrove-River Mangrove Forest
- Northern Paperbark-Swamp Mahogany Saw-sedge Forest
- Estuarine Swamp Oak Twig-rush forest
- Samphire Saltmarsh
- Castlereagh Scribbly Gum Woodland
- Lower North Coastal Hills Red Gum Grassy Forest
- Estuarine Reedland
- Coastal Valleys Riparian Forest
- Cumberland Blue Box Riverflat Forest
- Sydney Creekflat Wetland
- Western Sydney Complex Dry Rainforest
- Estuarine Sea Rush Swamp Oak Forest

### Plant Community Types - Current

- Blue Gum High Forest
- Cumberland Blue Box Riverflat Forest
- Castlereagh Ironbark Forest
- Coastal Valleys Swamp Oak Riparian Forest
- Sydney Coastal Enriched Sandstone Forest
- Sydney Coastal Shale-Sandstone Forest
- Sydney Creekflat Wetland
- Sydney Enriched Sandstone Moist Forest
- Sydney Hinterland Enriched Sandstone Bloodwood forest
- Samphire Saltmarsh
- Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest
- Estuarine Reedland
- Estuarine Swamp Oak Twig-rush Forest
- Grey Mangrove-River Mangrove Forest

Parramatta has long been an important and productive landscape - a strategic location on the Cumberland Plain and an important convergence for the freshwater and saltwater peoples of the Darug nation. The campus straddles a confluence of ancient soil landscapes and was once home to a diversity of vegetation types; from towering sclerophyll forest and wetlands, to Mangrove and Paperbark swamps. Perhaps a lone survivor of these forests, an old *Melaleuca decora* remains isolated on the site; hemmed in by bitumen and long separated from its community.



1943 aerial site image, existing Melaleuca present

Recent surveys of Vineyard Creek on the campus have identified unique examples of some of the original ecological communities that once existed across the Parramatta river catchment. These communities will help inform the landscape character and design approach to the Indigenous Centre of excellence. Refer to section 5.1 for more detail.

*'The fact that this vegetation extent has remained in its current state is surprising considering the extensive history of clearing and urban development in the area. It is one of the last, patches of remnant riparian forest in this part of Sydney. For this reason alone, the vegetation of this part of Vineyard Creek should be managed and protected into the future'* - Bushland Management Strategy for Vineyard Creek, Narla Environmental, August 2018.



# Landscape & Urban Context

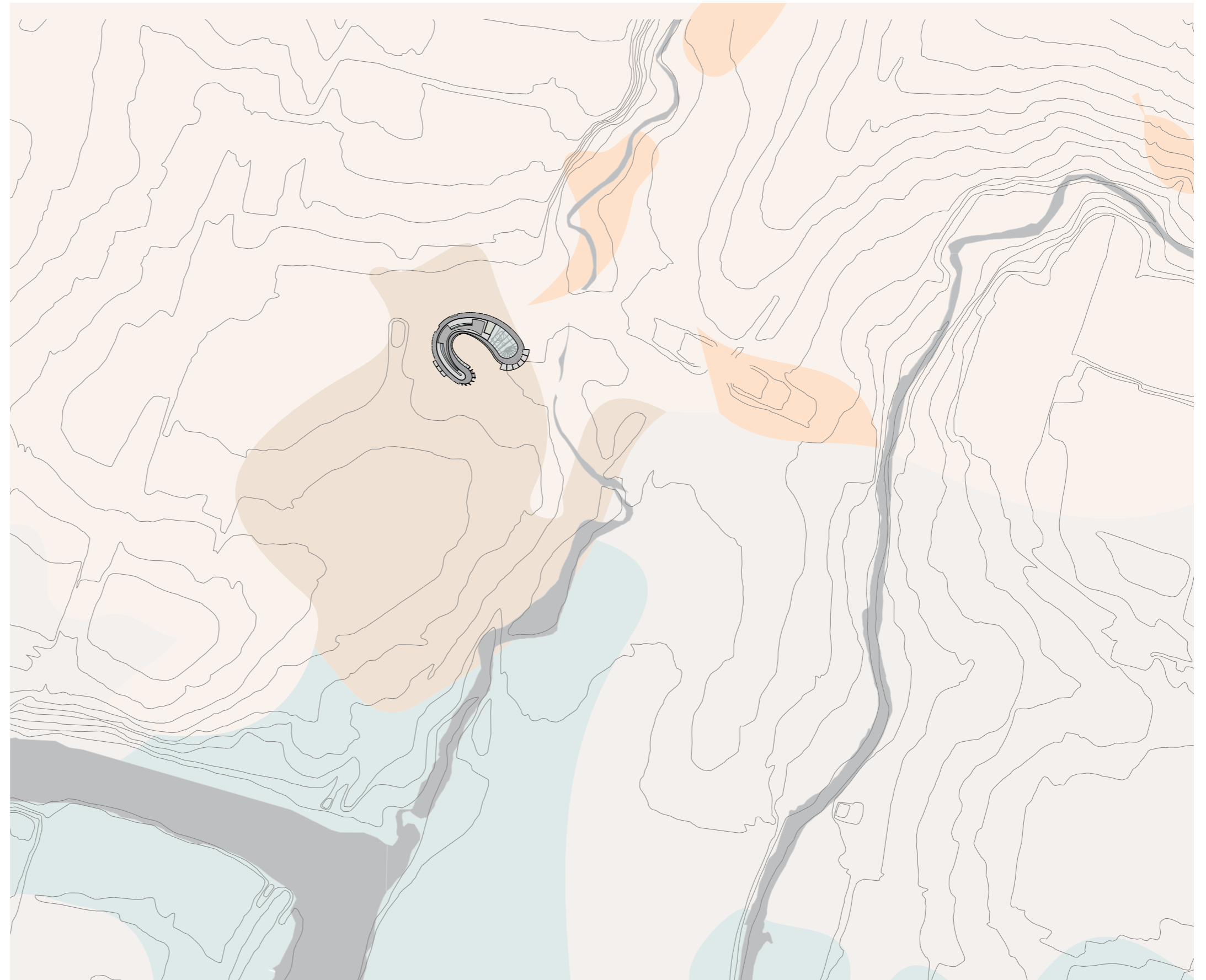
The site plan emphasizes the building within its broader environmental context rather than its immediate built adjacencies. This deliberate approach strips away extraneous details to articulate the building's position in relation to its surroundings and environmental context. Situated at a low point adjacent to Vineyard Creek, the site historically served as a natural floodplain where the river and creek could freely expand and recede, allowing for vital ecological processes to take place.

Rather than viewing the site solely as a constructed built environment, the design approach recognises its intrinsic connection to the surrounding waterway catchment. By understanding the site within this broader ecological framework, the project acknowledges the diverse ecosystems that serve as its direct neighbours. This perspective highlights the site's responsibility to the health and well-being of Parramatta River and, by extension, its role as a small yet integral part of the greater Sydney Harbour ecosystem.

Through thoughtful site planning and design, the project seeks to restore the natural rhythms of the waterway catchment, ensuring that the building harmonises with its environment and contributes positively to the overall ecological integrity of the area. By embracing its role within the broader ecosystem, the project endeavours to cultivate a sense of stewardship and environmental awareness, recognising the interconnectedness of all living beings within the landscape.

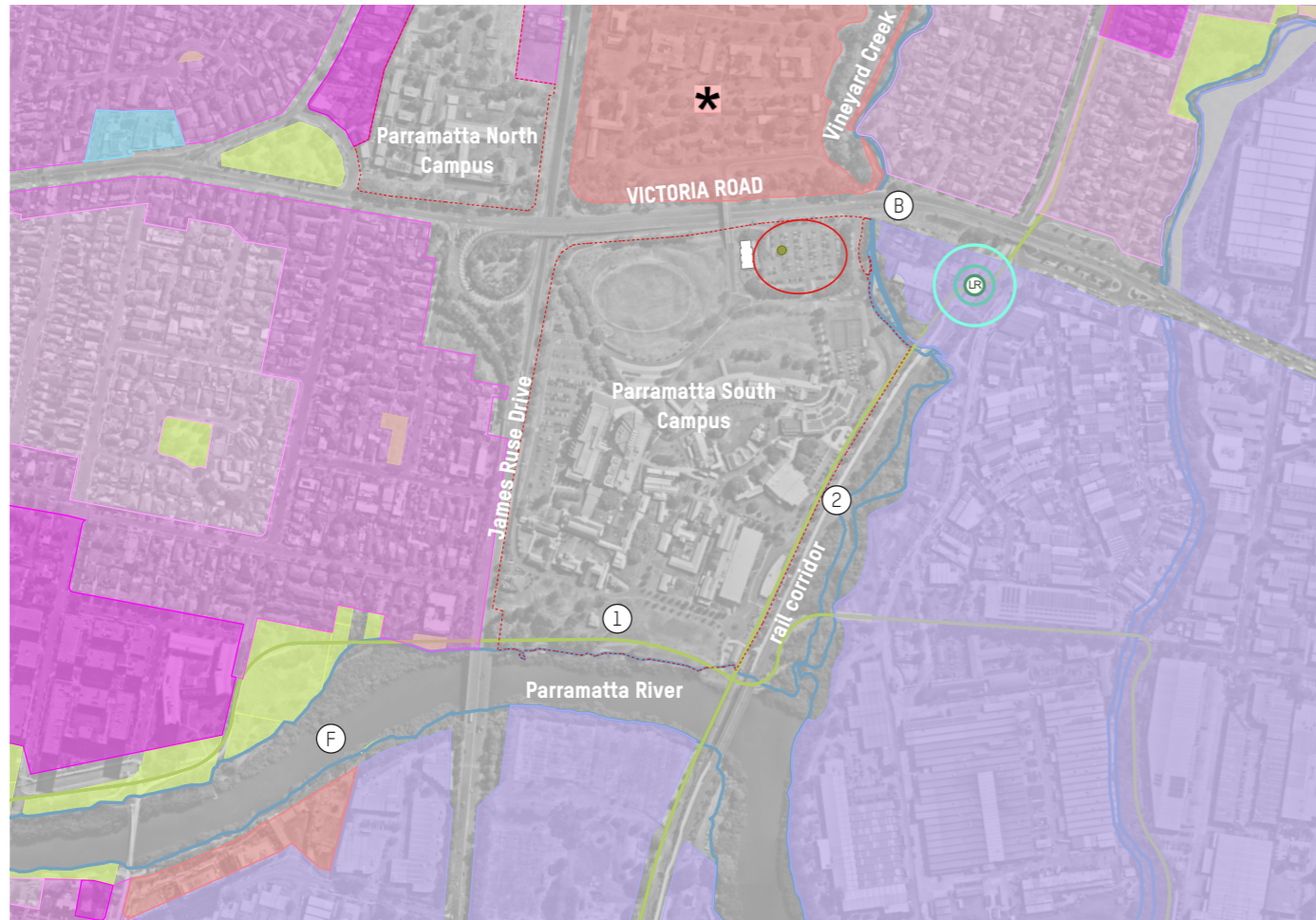
### Pre clearing plant community type (PCT)

- Northern Paperbark-Swamp Mahogany Saw-sedge Forest
- Grey Mangrove-River Mangrove Forest
- Sydney Coastal Sandstone Foreshores Forest
- Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest
- Blue Gum High Forest



# Site Analysis

## Situation



2024 Nearmap photo base

The University campus is distinct and set apart from surrounding development. The new light rail stop has potential to propel built form changes to nearby areas. Increased building height and mixed use built form are possible.

Opposite the site and north of Victoria Road, the former Metro Residences Rydalmere site also has potential for redevelopment.

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence site's primary public frontage is the heavily trafficked Victoria Road, which alienates pedestrians and cyclists.

East of the site, Vineyard Creek, currently a neglected waterway, has potential to become a wonderful high amenity linear parkland and ecological corridor.

### Legend

- Western Sydney University Campus
- Site
- Existing parks
- Waterways
- Existing tree

### Built form

- Detached houses
- Missing middle (up to 3 storeys)
- Apartments (4 storeys and more)
- Industrial sheds
- North Parramatta shops
- Mixed Use land zoning
- \* Former Metro Residences, Rydalmere

### Active transport

- LR Yallamundi light rail stop
- 1 Existing Parramatta valley east west cycleway - Meadowbank to Parramatta
- 2 New light rail corridor paired with cycleway to open 2024
- F Existing Ferry Route
- B Existing Bus Corridor

## Site



2024 Nearmap photo base

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence site address is to Victoria Road, a heavily trafficked arterial road. The site is beside an existing energy plant building. An established campus path is located south of the project site.

The site is gridded by a berm with introduced species. A Melaleuca is located centrally on the site

### Legend

- 3 Existing main campus pedestrian path
- 4 Existing Melaleuca
- Noise



Site approach from east along Victoria Road



Site approach from west along Victoria Road

# Existing Victoria Road Character

3. Context



CommBank Stadium \*

Our Lady of Mercy College

Collett Park

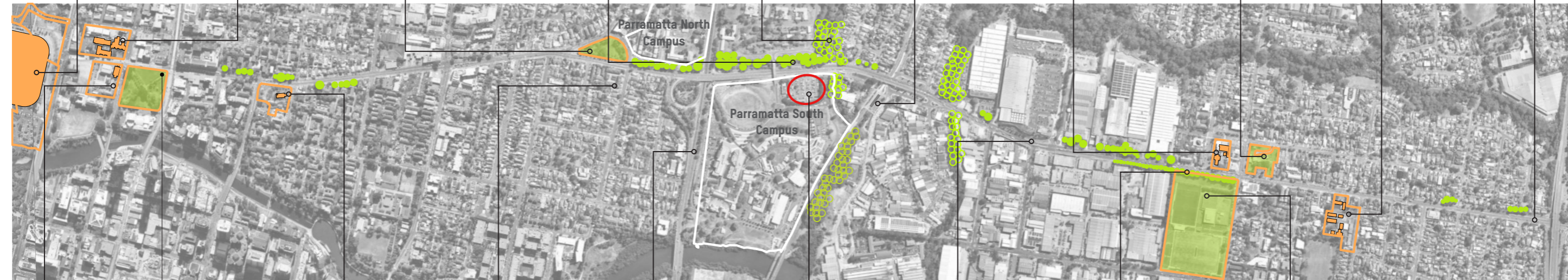
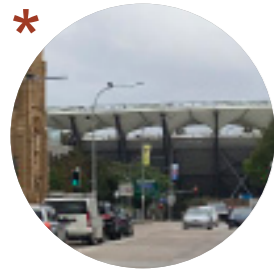
Former Metro Residences Site

Vineyard Creek

Yallamundi Light Rail Stop

St Mary's Catholic Church

John Carver Reserve



PARRAMATTA

NORTH PARRAMATTA

RYDALMERE



St Patricks Cathedral \*

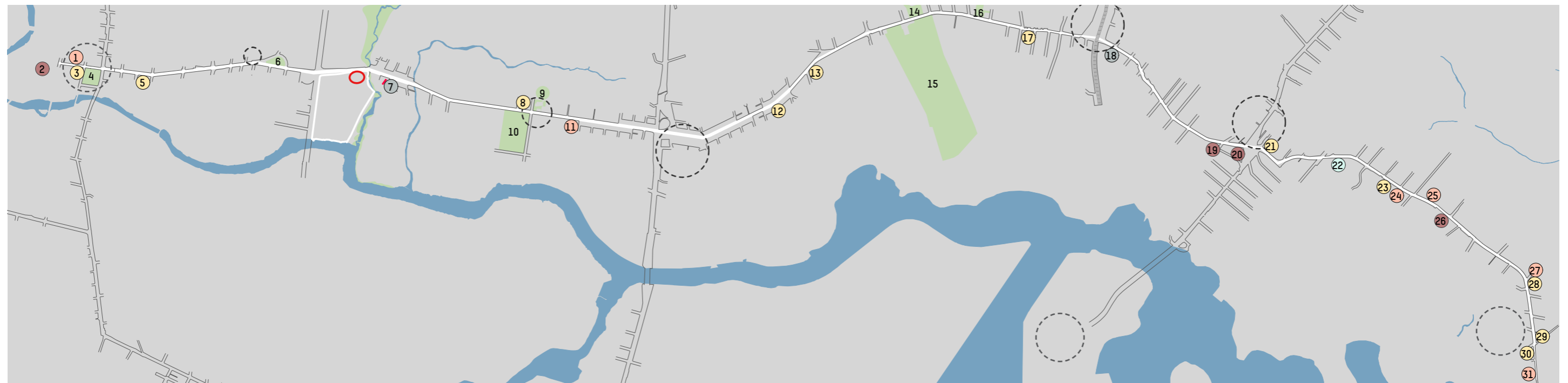
Prince Alfred Square

All Saints Anglican Church \*

Rydalmere Park

- Legend
- Site
  - Significant Trees
  - Significant Trees along creeks
  - Contributory Buildings and Places
  - Highly Distinctive Buildings

# Existing Victoria Road Character



- Legend**
- Site
  - Local Centres
  - Parks
  - Infrastructure
  - Places of worship
  - Educational Institutions
  - Community Facilities
  - Healthcare Facilities
- \* Highly Distinctive Buildings
  - 1 Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta
  - \* 2 Parramatta Stadium
  - \* 3 St Patricks Cathedral
  - 4 Prince Alfred Square
  - \* 5 All Saints Anglican Church
  - 6 Collett Park
  - 7 Rydalmere Light Rail Stop
  - 8 St Mary's Catholic Church
  - 9 John Carver Reserve
  - 10 Rydalmere Park & Bowling Club
  - 11 Rydalmere Public School
  - 12 Sydney Vision Uniting Church
  - 13 Brethren Church
  - 14 Maze Park
  - 15 Ryde Parramatta Golf Club
  - 16 Lions Park
  - 17 West Ryde Baptist Church
  - 18 Metropolitan Board Of Water Supply And Sewerage
  - 19 Ryde Local Court and Former Police Station
  - 20 Willandra - Ryde District Historical Society
  - 21 St Anne's Ryde Anglican Church
  - 22 Calvary Ryde Retirement Community Mary Potter Residential Care
  - 23 St Charles Catholic Church
  - 24 St Charles Primary School
  - \* 25 Holy Cross College
  - 26 Ryde Aquatic Leisure Centre
  - 27 Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School
  - 28 Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church
  - 29 GladeHill Presbyterian Church of St Andrew
  - 30 Christ Church Gladesville
  - 31 Gladesville Public School

Victoria Road is an enduring topographic path between The Crescent in Parramatta Park and Woolwich harbour promontory. Today it forms part of a major arterial road that extends eastward to Ryde, Rozelle and the City of Sydney. Predominantly sited on ridgelines, it gently traverses the topography. The rise can be so gradual that elevated glimpses out to extended prospects, can be surprising and delightful.

There are other moments along the traverse that are made memorable by parklands, distinctive tree plantings and buildings. These elements add to appreciation of place, marking points of difference, aiding memory and navigation, and contributing toward an enriched connection to place.

The drawing above identifies 32 parks, public and community buildings and educational institutions, including the Western Sydney University's, Parramatta South Campus.

Currently 4 highly distinctive buildings contribute strongly to the area's urban fabric: Parramatta Stadium, St Patricks Cathedral and All Saints Anglican Church in Parramatta and Holy Cross College, Ryde.

It is anticipated that the presence and heightened architectural quality of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence, will add to this distinguished collection of buildings.



Urban ensemble; All Saints Anglican Church. St Patrick's Cathedral + Parramatta Stadium

# Campus & Precinct Connections

The proposed building occupies a strategic position at the north-east corner of the Parramatta South campus. Its prominence along Victoria Road offers the Indigenous Centre of Excellence exposure to passing traffic and those entering the campus. The building position and orientation is strategic in providing a buffer between Victoria Road, Railway Street intersection, and the proposed new urban realm and developed landscape.

The development of the site will create a pedestrianised urban realm serviced by the new building and existing campus infrastructure. The precinct will connect to and provide extension to the existing campus pedestrian network. The project takes into consideration the high quality active and public transport infrastructure and services available, including cycle, bus and ferry networks, and the light rail and shared path network.



### Legend

- Pedestrian Path
- Campus Heart
- Shuttle Bus Route
- Bike Path
- Pedestrian Connection to Light Rail
- Light Rail Station
- Tennis Court
- Oval
- Parking

Parramatta South Campus

## Massing & Envelope

The architectural design intimately responds to the axis defined by the Melaleuca tree and the dormant watercourse, embracing and safeguarding them from the auditory impacts of Victoria Road and the mechanical plant of Western Sydney University. The design embraces encircle the tree and the arms extend towards Vineyard Creek.

### Key Formal Moves

#### 1. Existing Conditions

Currently, a carpark, the site is effectively an island made by the surrounding roadways, including the main entrance into the Western Sydney University Parramatta South Campus.

#### 2. Site Reinterpretation

The design considers the site as an endemic landscape, prioritising the restoration of natural features while retaining the mechanical plant to the West.

#### 3. Site Planning

The planning allows for the building arms to reach out towards vineyard creek and shelter the Melaleuca and the protect the re-established waterway.

#### 4. North Expansion

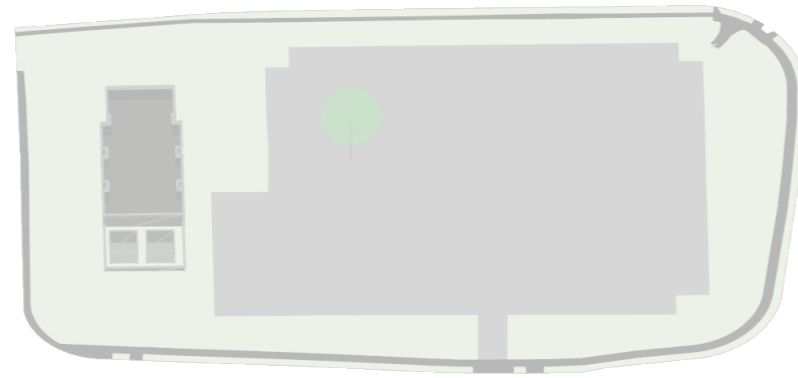
The architectural planning extends vertically to the height of the tallest programmatic element, namely the theatre, serving as the top datum for the building's massing.

#### 5. Volume Differentiation

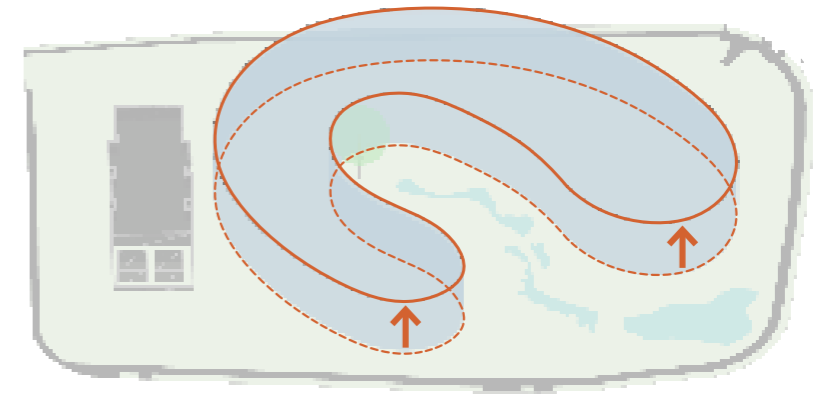
The north tip of the structure is elevated to encompass the volume of the theatre and rooftop multi purpose court, while the southern end is gently lowered while retaining a triple-height entrance void, facilitating natural way finding between large civic spaces and smaller, intimate areas.

#### 6. Gradual Tapering

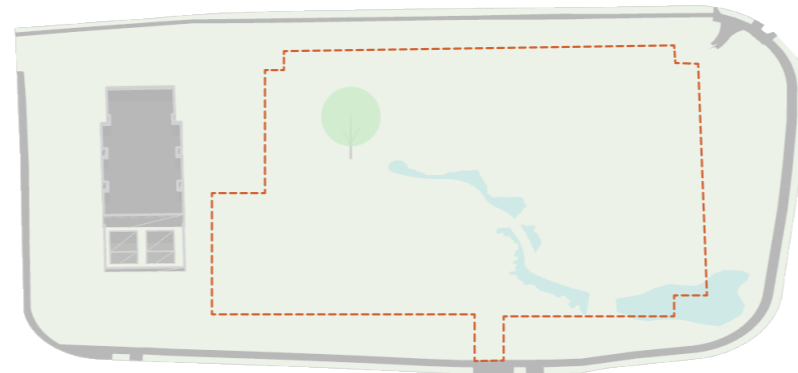
The entire mass of the building tapers inward, giving the Melaleuca tree ample space to thrive and offering expansive views towards the sky. This tapering also serves structural purposes by reducing the required depths of structural elements.



1. Existing Conditions



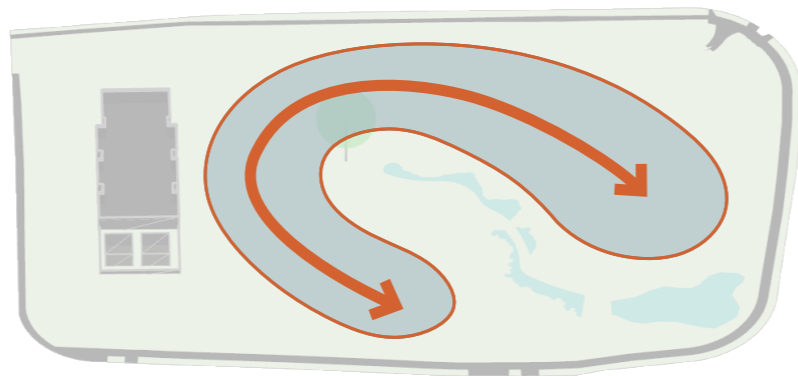
4. North Expansion



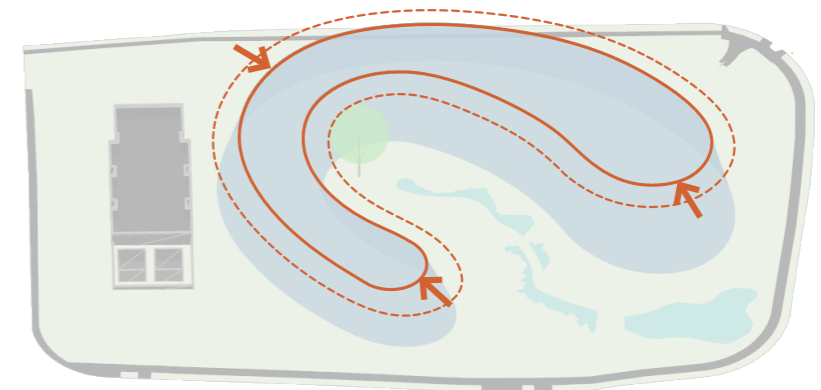
2. Site Reinterpretation



5. Volume Differentiation

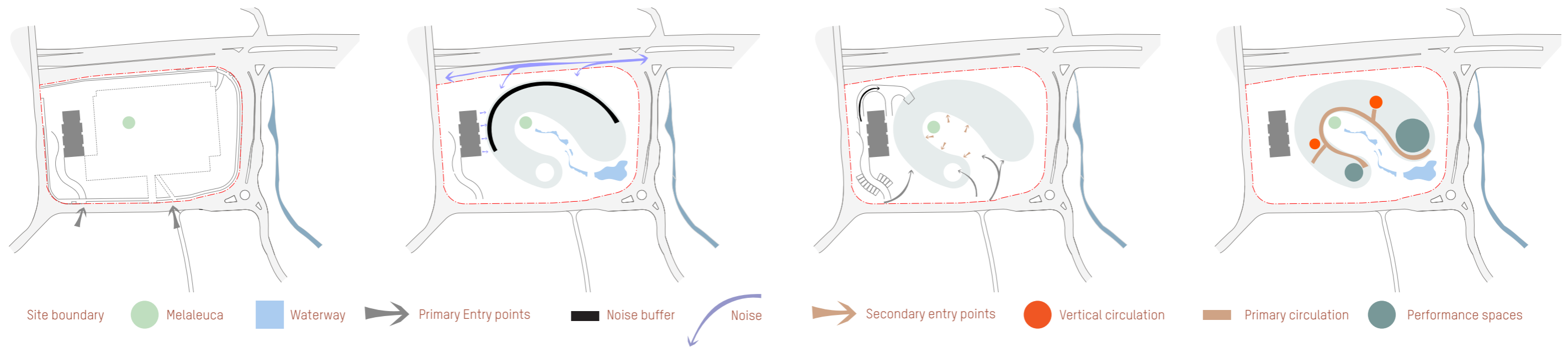


3. Site Planning



6. Gradual Tapering

## Spatial Design & Functional Overview



The fundamental principle of our functional response lies both in an understanding of Country and how the proposed building responds pragmatically to the constraints that define the site currently.

Surrounded by roadways on all 4 sides, the site is somewhat of an island unto itself. Defined by a busy arterial highway to the north (Victoria Road) a mechanical plant to the west, these noisy interfaces present considerable challenges to how a building can open up and engage with its surrounds.

The site's east is defined by the primary vehicular entry to the campus which connects to an internal road servicing the greater University precinct running along the south (Fifth Street). Pedestrian pathways are limited with two key cross-over points to the south and to the south-west both connecting to well defined walkways that service the southern precinct of the campus.

Critically the Indigenous Centre of Excellence is proposed to be constructed in a flood plain - our design has taken care to respond to this reality as both a challenge and an opportunity.

The organising principle of the site lies in a connection between the Melaleuca and the creek. Imagined as a diagonal path and brought to life as an ephemeral waterway falling towards Vineyard Creek and collecting in a new permanent wetland on site that cleanses the water before release back into the catchment.

As an organisational device this diagonal path enables a significant inner landscape sanctuary, around which the building wraps, creating a protective shield to the pragmatic noise constraints to the north. Rising gradually from the southern end around to the north east. The imagined form is sculpturally dynamic and responds to the parameters of its functional requirements and its conceptual driver of an architecture composed by the Mangroves. Crucially we are optimistic that the values and approach to landscape and form of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence will influence future opportunities to improve the health of Vineyard Creek.

Encapsulating the entire form, the primary structures are conceived of as the leaning branches of the mangroves. The structure is formed as a perimeter layer of mass timber ribs that provide the primary support for a flexible and adaptable skin that can be solid, porous or operable as required. The ground plane base to the building is conceived as a simple concrete slab platform onto which the structural ribs are fixed. The level 01 slab has been set at RL 9.00 to provide additional separation from the provided 1% AEP Flood Level + 0.5m Free board level of RL 8.51.

The pedestrian entry experience begins in landscape on the Southern edge of the site adjacent to the existing crossing on Fifth Street. It is imagined as a porous and inviting proposition that is democratic, accessible, and performs as a mental and spiritual threshold through the interaction with an abundance of flora and fauna. The entry experience through the landscape and into the building is enabled by clear intuitive wayfinding from which the user can move to their required destination.

There are multiple ways to enter the building. From the entry sequence it is possible to enter the inner landscape and move directly across to the theatre, or informally into the Southern amphitheatre. A pathway to address a more formal or official entry is also enabled and branches to the west through landscape. As one enters this more formal entry, the primary public activities of the building unfold with a moment of awe as one encounters the grand mangrove like structure of public scale. The entry has been carefully crafted to prepare the visitor for a place that is, welcoming, ceremonial, celebratory and cultural.

The more formal entry also services access directly from the Elders carpark spaces, which are integrated into the Western landscape interface of the site. Internally this entry services Communal programs, Reception and Administrative services. An internalised landscape mediates the experience in a calming way and serves as an important backdrop to Care related programmes.

From the western service road behind, the mechanical plant is a dedicated travel path for trucks servicing general building loading requirements - primarily servicing the Gallery and Theatre. A secure pathway connects the loading bay to the gallery and the theatre along the northern perimeter.

The functional programs are arranged around the inner circulation pathway - with landscape on one side and functional program to the other. From any location within the primary circulation pathway there is a sense of connection to landscape beyond, drawing the user through with the option to venture out into the internal landscape always possible. The Gallery and Discovery programs will be exciting moments of engagement along this path, reinforcing the building as a cultural place for public and social engagement.

Along the internal pathway are two vertical travel nodes incorporating stairs and lifts that service the upper functional programs. They are imagined as open and active spaces, highly visible and important public breakout places that further articulate the circulation pathway in an engaging way as places to informally meet or gather. These vertical travel nodes service the Storytelling and Teaching & Learning spaces on level one and the Indigenous Research and the Division of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous leadership & Badanami programs on level 2. The northern core further services the multi purpose court and Astronomy garden.

The sweeping form is completed at each end by performative programs, a publicly accessible amphitheatre activates the Southern end as an exciting gathering space for, dancing, singing, meeting and curated events. Across the internal landscape and at the opposite end is the theatre with its associated functions culminating as a large and operable foyer and additional gathering space for prescribed events and performances. We see the ends of the building as exciting programmatic opportunities for activating the Indigenous Centre of Excellence. These locations are highly visible and porous to the public, giving the building a civic presence within the greater campus.

# Public Space Plan

The corner site location at the entry to the Parramatta South campus offers the Indigenous Centre of Excellence a publicly prominent position. With the site bound by roads on all sides, the project takes into consideration the network of existing and approved future pedestrian approaches in the development of public space.











Whilst the organising principle of the site lies in a connection between the Melaleuca and Vineyard Creek, there is also careful consideration of the building's orientation to its surrounds and connections to campus.

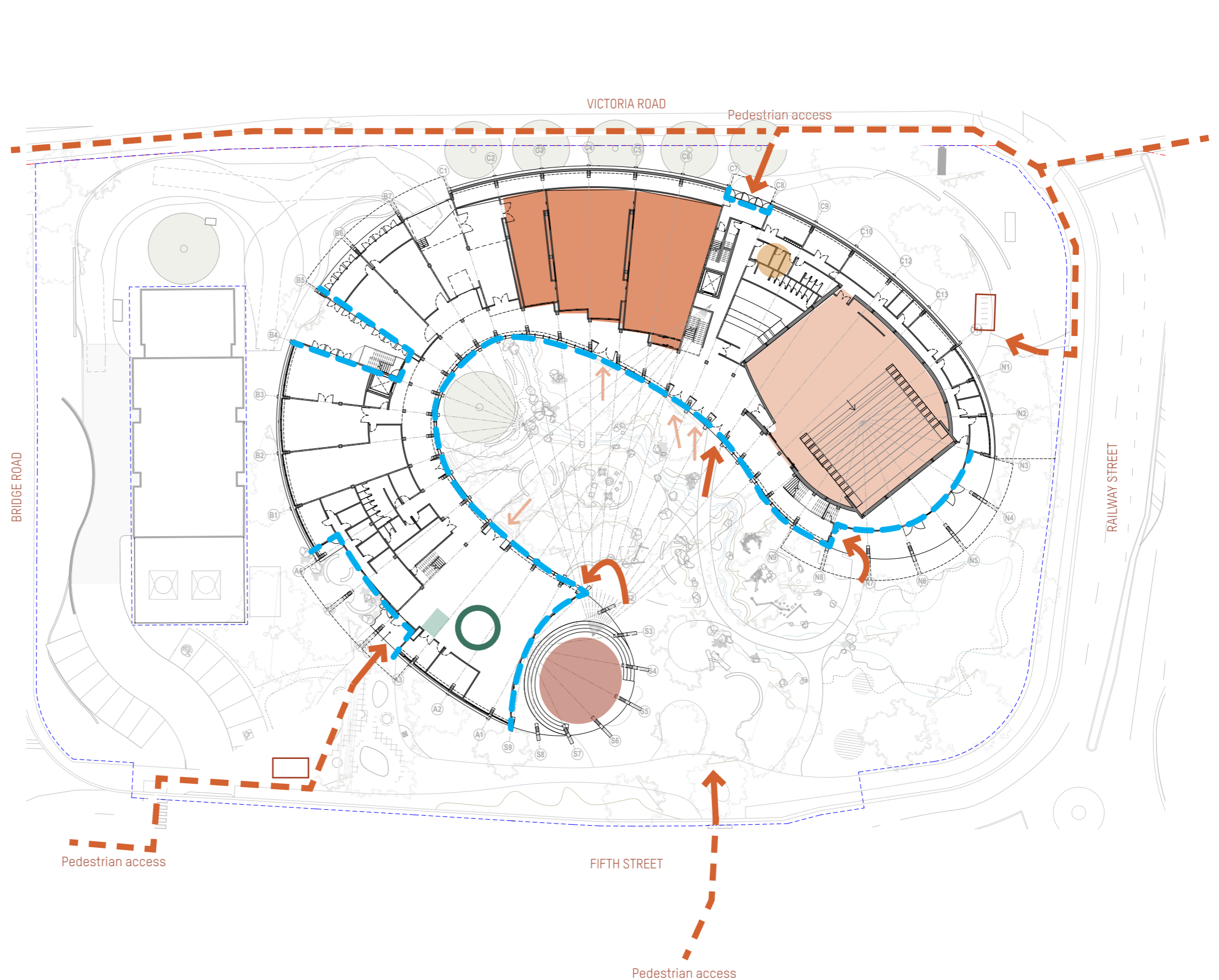
The formal entry to the Indigenous Centre of Excellence is located on the South elevation of the building with direct access from the Elders carpark and pedestrian links from campus. First time users are greeted at this point by the Concierge within the Community space.

Activation of the ground plane is facilitated through various building functions and arrangement of outdoor and landscape functions. Community, Performance and Exhibition spaces are instrumental in this, along with the Outdoor Amphitheatre presence to high pedestrian traffic areas.

Supplementary entries to the building provide important activation along the building perimeter. The continuous inner circulation pathway provides intuitive wayfinding through building and site and offers unbroken connection to the landscape.

## Legend

-  Bike Parking
-  Cafe
-  End of Trip
-  Activated Facade
-  Public Access
-  Secondary / Supplementary Access
-  Performance
-  Exhibition
-  Concierge
-  Amphitheatre Seating



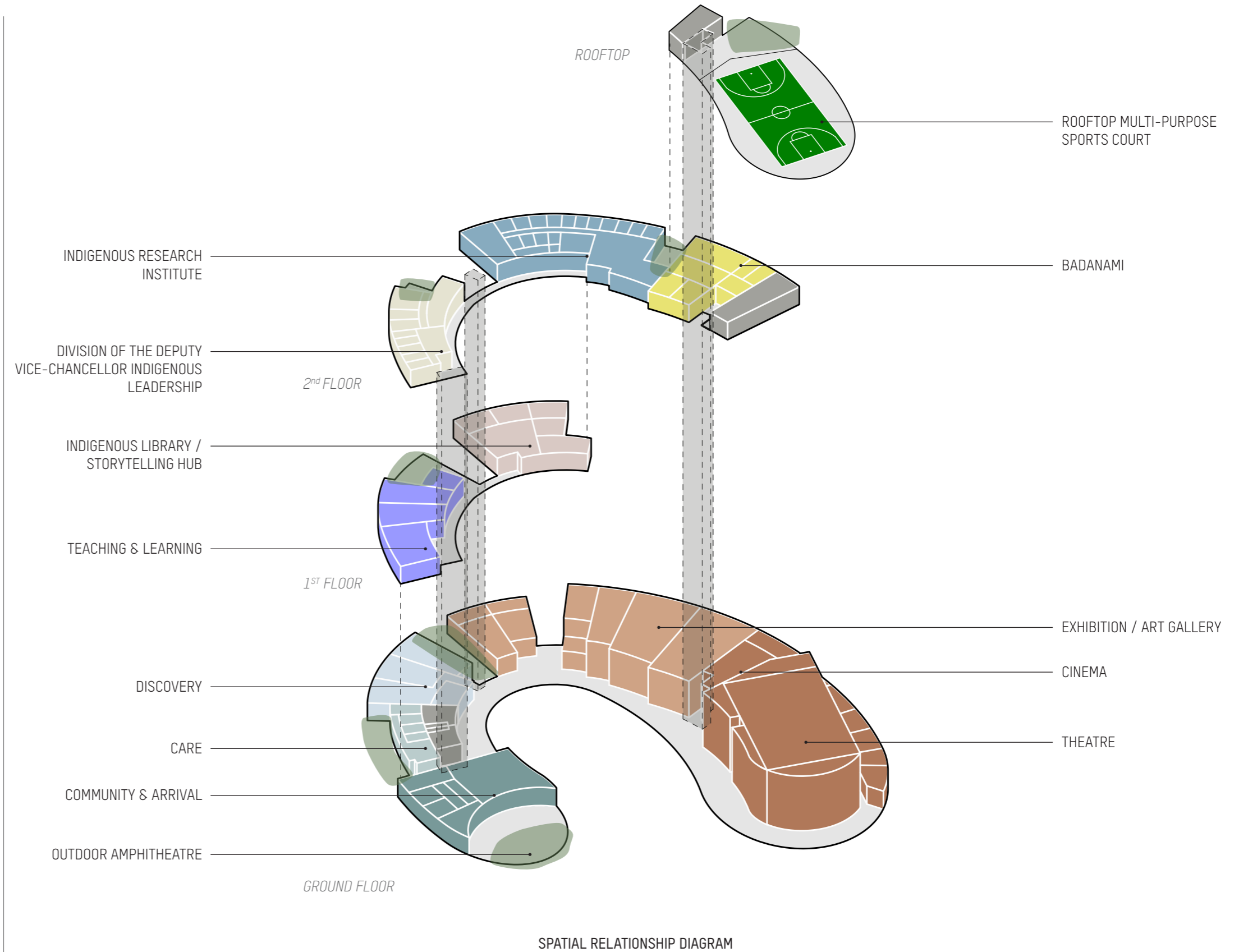
# Spatial & Functional Adjacencies

Through a rationalisation of the site, understanding of Country, and co-ordinated planning strategies our functional response facilitates the curation of functional requirements and emergence of built form.

In response to the site as 'an island unto itself', the building is set back within the perimeter of the site removing bias to street frontages and to facilitate the creation of nuanced landscape space. It ensures an experience through landscape and healthy Country before entering building. The brief identifies a significant amount and area of outdoor space with connection to interior space. The configuration and orientation of the plan, responding to the Melaleuca the reconnection to her ecologies, provides an abundance of opportunity to connect to protected landscape areas and enhanced micro climate.

The arrangement of 'big' building programs and space adjacent to noise sources has been implemented to provide acoustic amenity and amelioration. Big box volumes such as the Theatre and Exhibition Space at ground floor position expansive façade areas along the Victoria Road frontage. Back of House space to service large volumes tucks into the façade as an additional buffering device. Public access and landscape connection is celebrated internally. As the building wraps around to the south, the scale of the building reduces, and the outer façade breaks to blur the line between building and landscape to encourage activity between.

The briefed internal and outdoor areas in comparison to the available site area are significant. Consideration of program which could be elevated and identifying the greatest demand for outdoor space allocation were integral in the overall organisation. The arrangement of the building program sequentially responds to spatial relationships and the scale of space.



# Spatial & Functional Adjacencies

The building is organised into three levels that correspond to the varying heights of the theatre, enabling different programs to stack atop one another based on their functional, programmatic, and cultural connections. The northern section transitions from a triple-height theatre to double-height exhibition spaces, while the courtyard area follows a typical three-level stacking of programs. Vertical transport points are strategically located around the central circulation, providing direct access for each program within the building.

Spatial and functional relationships, as depicted in accompanying diagrams, are summarised as follows:

## Arrival & Care

The main entry provides a comfortable arrival experience into simple singular grand volume housing the Community and Arrival Spaces with connection to the central landscape and Sky Country above. Co-located are Care Spaces discretely accessed from the Welcome Foyer.

The Welcome Foyer leads through to an intuitive internal circulation path that guides you through the building providing a constant connection to the central landscape and allowing visitors to continually orient themselves. As you move around the building from south to north, the building program expands.

## Education

The Discovery and Exhibition Space are located immediately adjacent to one another. The centralised vertical circulation provides access between Art Studios, Art is for Kids Space and the Learning and Teaching and Storytelling Hubs on the level above.

Located centrally in the building the education spaces orient around the courtyard void that divides the ground plane and becomes wayfinding for these education spaces. Enabling external circulation and safe / private landscaped views.

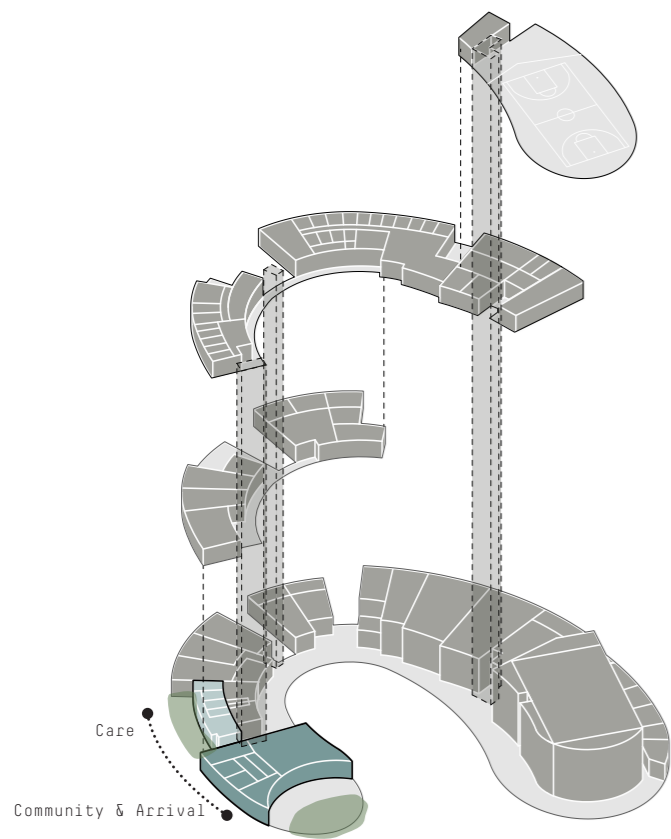
## Public & Civic

Exhibition and Theatre Spaces also share an adjacency. Outdoor functions associated with the Theatre Spaces are located immediately to the south of the theatre and beyond to the Amphitheatre.

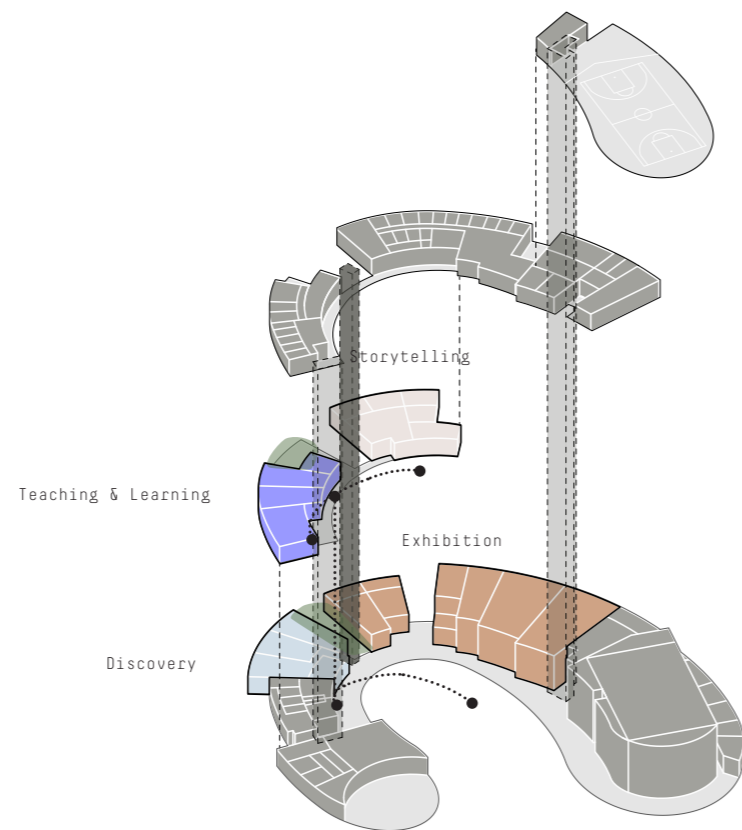
## Staff & Student

The 'big' Outdoor Multipurpose Court is located immediately above the 'big' volume of the Theatre so as not to compromise the sanctuary of ground level landscape.

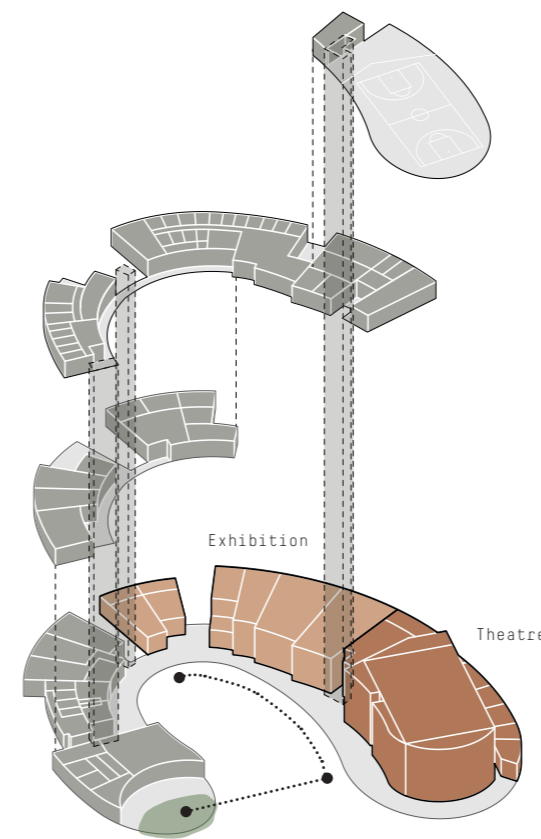
The stacking arrangement allows for discrete programmatic requirements, accommodating the Division of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Leadership, Indigenous Research Institute, and Badanami on the second floor.



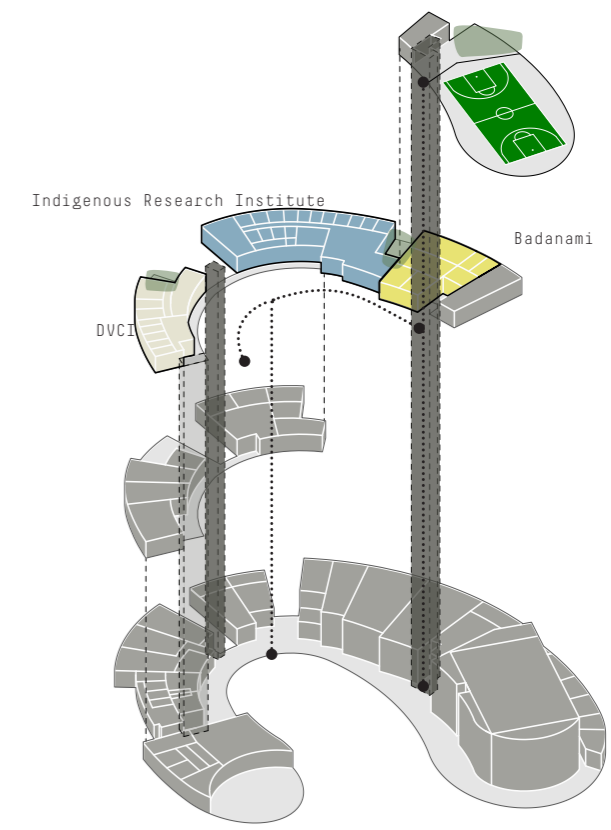
Arrival & Care



Education spaces



public civic spaces



Staff & student spaces