

3 Brookhollow Avenue, Northwest

Connecting with Country

Final Report

EVERICK
HERITAGE



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Client: GreenSquare DC

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2	13.10.2025	Alice Steedman	Kylie Christian	Kylie Christian
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Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

Part 1: Connecting with Country Framework

What is Country?

Connecting with Country Framework

Connecting with Country Principles

The Role of Everick Heritage

Traditional Knowledge Holders

Connecting with Country Process

The Use of Cultural Knowledge

Part 2: Location on Country

Location in Country

Country, People and Place

This Country

Part 3: Sharing Cultural Knowledge

Care for Country

Interconnectedness

Responsibility

Reciprocity

Part 4: Connection to Country

Connecting with Country Opportunities

Locality Response

Site Response

Building Form

Colours, Textures and Materials

Landscape

Shared Responsibility

Part 5: Design Response

Design Response and Review

Part 6: Appendices

Consultation Register

Acknowledgement of Country

Everick Heritage acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which we work. This land was never ceded. We pay our respect to their elders, past and present.

In our work in Cultural Heritage, we recognise the deeply interconnected knowledge of ecosystems and how to care for Country. It considers the contributions and impacts of all living things on and in the terrain, in each season and with seasonal variation. We recognise that the world's oldest bakers and the world's oldest astronomers. With deep knowledge of the star system, they mapped Country and passed on this and other complex knowledge through story, song, dance, and lore. We recognise this valuable knowledge system, the teachings that are passed down and encoded in Country and Culture.

It is now that we need the knowledge to care for Country, but first, we must acknowledge Traditional Custodians of Country and assist in reclaiming and relearning cultural knowledge.

Part 1: Connecting with Country Framework

What is Country?

Country encompasses everything. Its exact meaning varies across Aboriginal Australia, but concepts about Country are widely shared and common.

Country exists around us through the earth, waterways, sea, sky, stars, and all living things in our environment. Aboriginal people are connected to Country through ancestral ties and family origins. Country is a highly complex system intrinsically linked to Aboriginal law, place, custom, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family, and identity.

As Country was so specific to sustenance and resources for survival, such as materials for tools and shelter, individual communities were bound by lore to care for “their” Country, and neighbours would seek permission to enter and gather resources from neighbouring land.

It should be noted that Aboriginal peoples never “owned” the Country; they were, are, and always will be the custodians of Country. The boundaries between clans or nations are not linear as in Western culture, and neighbours would also be bound by lore, kinship relationships, cultural protocols, and trade to care for the Country of others and other peoples.

Right: Leaves by Leanne Watson Redpath



Connecting with Country Framework

The Connecting with Country process was introduced by NSW Government Architect as a draft framework in 2020 and trialled on government projects. It was published in 2023 and is now mandated for all State Significant Development and Infrastructure projects.

It forms part of *Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW* which aims to improve development standards across all aspects of the built environment in NSW.

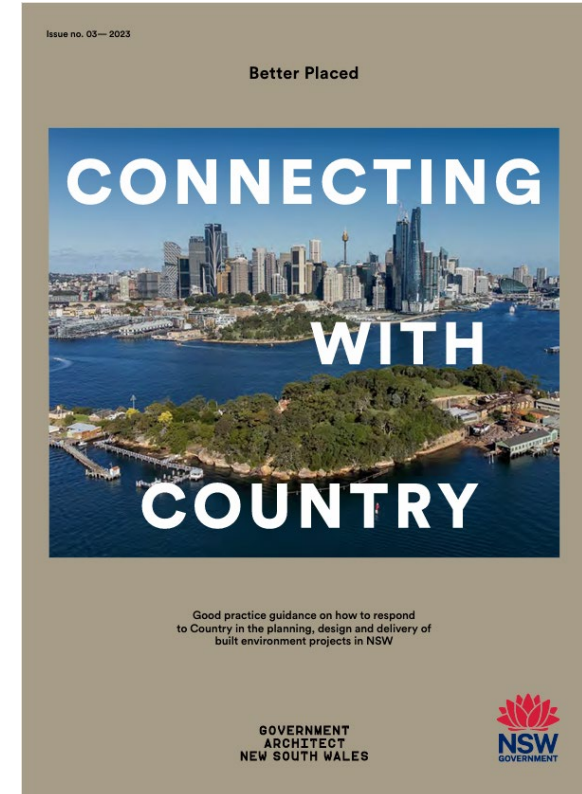
The Connecting with Country Framework is aligned to the delivery of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for which Australia is a signatory.

The outcomes of a Connecting with Country process and the *Better Placed* series are also embedded in the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* as follows:

1.3 (f) ‘to promote the sustainable management of built and cultural heritage (including Aboriginal cultural heritage)’ and

1.3 (g): ‘to promote good design and amenity of the built environment’.

Commencing the Connecting with Country process is an important component of design and should be integrated from the start of a project. Design Review Panels are increasingly looking for proposals to demonstrate an embedded and holistic understanding of Connecting with Country in designs, to understand the context, to understand design process and to see a response demonstrated in each project.



Connecting with Country Principles

Commitment

It is important for all involved to have a clear understanding of the level of commitment by the design team, acknowledging that Traditional Knowledge Holders are asked to share important cultural information that is fundamental to their identity.

Custodianship

Traditional Custodians and Knowledge Holders have ownership of any cultural knowledge shared during the Connecting with Country process. Cultural Knowledge can only be shared with express permission.

Collaboration

Connecting with Country is a collaborative process with respectful understanding and sharing of ideas. Connecting with Country aims to build genuine respect and trust. It is a two-way process.

Awareness

Connecting with Country aims to elevate the authentic voices of Aboriginal people as the spokespeople for Country and give Country agency in the design.

The process aims to increase the designers' awareness of 'place' through the understanding of the Country held by Aboriginal people. This process may include deep listening, quiet observation, pattern recognition, creativity and ingenuity.

Connecting with Country also aims to restore a deeper cultural connection through an awareness of a living culture.

Interpretation

The interpretation of cultural knowledge arising out of the design process should be reviewed and accepted by the Traditional Custodians and Knowledge Holders involved before implementation in design. Ideally, the knowledge shared should be fully-integrated in the design outcome however the scope and quality of the design response is the responsibility of the design team and proponent.

Beyond Design

Connecting with Country can go beyond the design process and include Cultural Awareness Training, Aboriginal Employment in Construction and much more.

The Role of Everick Heritage

As a relatively new construct in design, many architects and designers find it challenging to embed a response to Country in design. For designers who have grown up in Australia, and for those who have come from overseas, an understanding of Aboriginal culture may be limited. Therefore, finding ways to include a cultural narrative in design is a new challenge in an increasingly complex regulatory environment.

Additionally, for many Aboriginal people, an understanding of the design process may be somewhat unknown and their role in influencing design on their Country is a new experience.

Aboriginal culture was passed down through an oral knowledge system which contains vast amounts of information. The information is layered such that the detail of information conveyed is appropriate to the listener. Some stories are reserved for men or for women, some only as cultural knowledge and other stories can be shared.

Everick Heritage has engaged with Cultural Knowledge Holders for this project and records the design process in this report. Everick Heritage aims to act as mediator and collaborator to empower Aboriginal voices in design and assist design teams to embed an understanding and response to Country in design.

The Cultural Knowledge Holders and Traditional Custodians involved in this project have generously shared their knowledge of Country and we thank them.

**For architects and designers,
Connecting with Country is like**

Sustainable Design	➡	Caring for Country
Place-based Design	➡	Design with Country
Site Analysis	➡	Understanding Country
Biophilic Design	➡	Providing for Country

Traditional Knowledge Holders

Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation has been active in Western Sydney as a community corporation for over 40 years. It brings together people from across Australia and around the world to share a wealth of knowledge and experience and foster a deep connection to people and place.

Dharug Corporation educates the wider community about Aboriginal people and culture, cultural sensitivity, language and cultural delivery. It enables Aboriginal people to be involved in the management of their cultural heritage sites and the development of their Country through involvement and input into the care of our places.

There are numerous Dharug artists within the group. Dharug Corporation promotes its artists and assists with sales, copywriting, and royalty management. We encourage recognition of our artists to support Dharug cultural knowledge in our surrounding communities by facilitating workshops and sharing our knowledge.

Language inclusion in Dharug country is a high priority. Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation offer workshops and assists with language for numerous community events and projects.

Participants in this Connecting with Country consultation include:

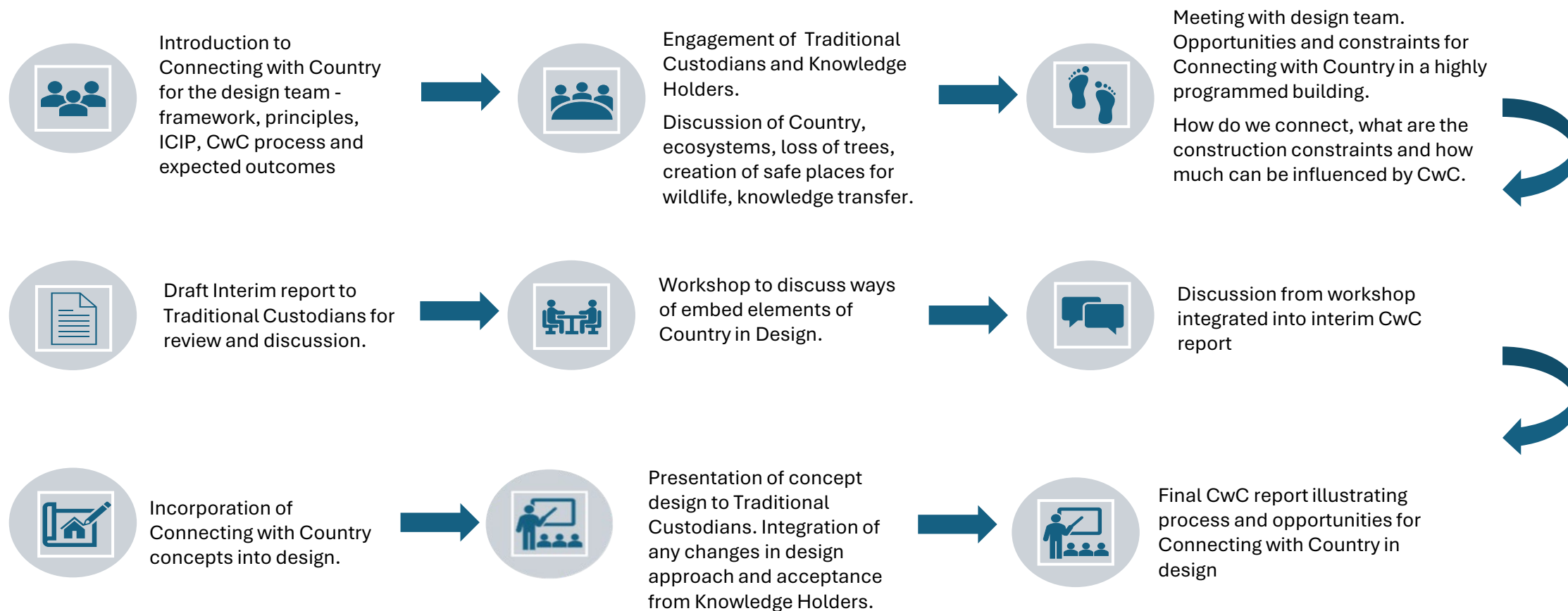
Leanne Watson Redpath is an artist, educator, book illustrator and a Dharug woman commonly known in the Aboriginal community as *Mulgo*, meaning Black Swan. The daughter of Aunty Edna Watson and Uncle Allan Watson, elders of the Dharug community, Leanne was born and raised in Sydney. She started painting at a young age, taught by her mother Aunty Edna Watson and her brother Bundeluk Watson. She is now a mother and grandmother and has spent her life living, promoting and protecting Dharug culture, people and places.

Justine Coplin is an Aboriginal Ranger Co-ordinator at the Dharug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation. She is involved in various roles related to Aboriginal heritage and community services.

Erin Wilkins is a Dharug and Wiradjuri woman. Erin works as an Aboriginal Cultural Educator, consultant and facilitator/trainer.

Leanne and Justine grew up in Kellyville and have lived in the area their entire lives. Leanne has a traditional connection to this place, contributing to a deep knowledge of this Country.

Connecting with Country Process



The Use of Cultural Knowledge

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights are the rights of Indigenous peoples to protect their culture and heritage. These rights are protected by law. ICIP is grounded in the fundamental right to self-determination and encompasses all aspects of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, resources, and knowledge systems.

Architects and designers need to take care when using Aboriginal cultural information in design. This knowledge can be easily misunderstood when viewed through the lens of another culture. Additionally, it should not be presented as knowledge or creative material owned by the designer; it remains the property of the Traditional Knowledge Holders and Aboriginal peoples.

When preparing any architectural plans, models, graphics, or reports, Aboriginal stories and artwork shall not be copied, modified, or included in the presentation in any way without the express permission of the author. The author should also be acknowledged on the page where the content is presented.



Above: Untitled (Leane Watson Redpath)

Part 2: Location in Country

Location in Country



Above: Aerial photograph showing site location (NSW Spatial Services)

3 Brookhollow Avenue, Norwest is located approximately 27 km northwest of Sydney. It is located near Windsor Road, one of the Colonial routes across Country that travels the paths followed for thousands of years.

The site is situated on the lower slopes of gently undulating hills overlooking Strangers Creek. Strangers Creek has been heavily modified by modern development, though was originally one of the primary tributaries of Cattai Creek, 2.5 km northeast.

The site is serviced by the new Norwest Metro Station, and the wider area is subject to ongoing development of the Norwest Business Centre.

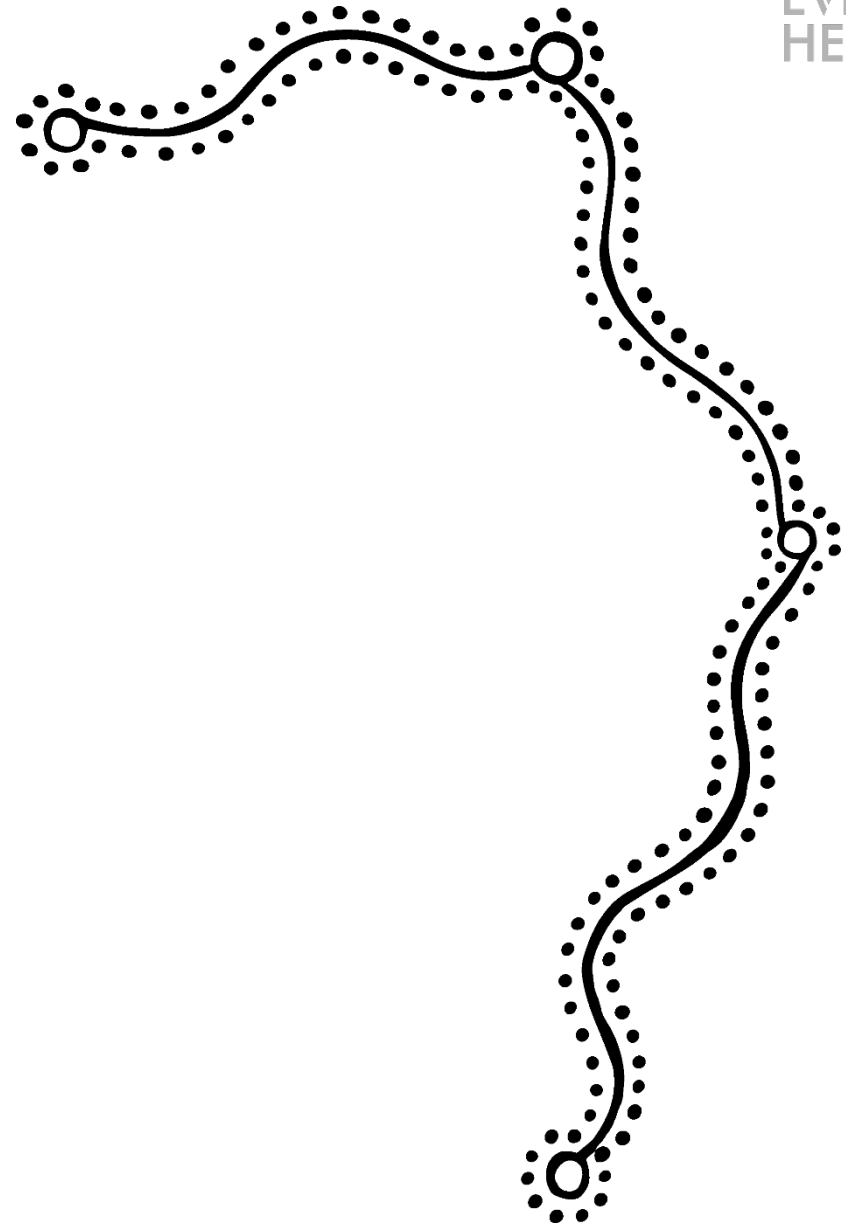
The development will include a large building to the east of the existing development, a new internal road and carparking. The 25m wide band of trees to the perimeter will remain.

Country, Place and People

Sydney Basin is the land of the Dharug language group. The Dharug people inhabited the area between Port Jackson and Botany Bay to the east, the Georges River to the south and southwest, the Hawkesbury River in the northwest and as far as the Blue Mountains to the west. Dharug people were the first impacted by the colonisation of Australia and have been continually pushed off their land. Development such as that which is the subject of this report does not address the generations of loss, among which include Country, culture, children and wages, however the Connecting with Country Framework attempts to reconcile colonial and post-colonial destruction of culture through an attempt to embed cultural knowledge in the design of the built environment.

Country encompasses everything. Country exists around us through the earth, waterways, sea, sky, stars, and all living things in our environment. Aboriginal people are connected to Country through ancestral ties and family origins. Country is a highly complex system intrinsically linked to Aboriginal law, place, custom, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family, and identity. For Dharug people, their knowledge of living on this Country has been passed down from generation to generation. This knowledge of Country is an intrinsic part of their Culture and lived experience.

Right: Pathway (Leanne Watson Redpath)



Country, People and Place

Division of land for British settlement of the area began in 1799. Attempts at farming wheat failed by the 1820s, much of the area had been turned over to cattle grazing and orcharding. In 1831, a 500-acre land grant, including the site, was subdivided and sold. During this time, it is likely that the land was first cleared of native vegetation to be used for pasture.

The land was sold several times between the 1840s and 1930s. An historical aerial photograph of 1947 shows the site was open grazing land, with only a few scattered trees near Strangers Creek and along the side of Windsor Road. The site would remain in this state for another four decades except for the construction of a high-voltage power line across the site in the 1960s. The land was rezoned for the Norwest Business Park in 1987, with the present data centre building constructed in 1994/5. The last major development on the site was the construction of an expanded carpark in 1998.

The effects of past land use drastically changed the character of the landscape across the Hills Shire. Vast areas of native vegetation were cleared to 'open up' the land for pasture and orcharding. Watercourses were dammed or redirected to support agricultural activities, including Strangers Creek. Native fauna had to adapt to an increasingly urbanised environment but need safe places to live and ensured access to water.

Right top: Vineyard, Castle Hill, 1927 / by Robert Johnson. SLNSW Call No. ML 1487.

Right bottom: Castle Hill Government Farm c. 1806. JW Lewin. SLNSW Call No. PX*D 379



This Country

“Cattai” is the Dharug word for the name of the group that inhabited the area prior to colonisation. The language remains imprinted in the landscape with the many street names, water courses and parks retaining the language of Country. Cattai is thought to describe the highland above where river flats are, although at this location, the Creek is set deep in the landscape.

Strangers Creek is a perennial tributary of Cattai Creek. Its course has been significantly modified in recent times, and the construction of the artificial waterbody of Norwest Lake, 100 m from the site, means that the original watercourse is no longer recognisable.

This site is in the watershed for Strangers Creek. The modification of water pathways over the land deprives the landscape of water and leads to pollution of waterways.

Left: Photograph of Cattai Creek (The Hills Shire Council)



Part 3: Sharing Cultural Knowledge

Care for Country

If we Care for Country, Country will care for us and therefore any ecosystem impacts caused by this development, and past development, should be carefully managed.

In Caring for Country, we can focus on:

- **Interconnectedness:** everything within an ecosystem (within Country) is connected. We need to examine the impact on our site and those around us.
- **Responsibility:** we have a responsibility to Care for Country and manage the ecosystem impacts of the new building as well as past development.
- **Reciprocity:** If we take from Country we should also give back

*“If we care for Country,
Country will care for us.”*



Above: *Dharug Country*. Leanne Redpath. 2025

Interconnectedness

The interconnectedness of information is important to this development just as it was critical to survival and knowledge transfer in Dharug culture. Some knowledge was held closely and passed down to only a few people whereas others was shared, bringing with it a shared responsibility for Country.

The development on Country should be considered as part of the ecosystem of the area. The building and hard surfaces will heat up, so it is important to consider everything beyond the site as well as within, and provide a place that is good for people, animals, insects and plants.

Care for the Bogong Moth was widely shared among groups up and down the east coast and inland. People would come together to fulfill cultural responsibilities and care for the Country to ensure the health of the Bogong Moth.

The pathways across Country and camping places nearby fresh water supported people as they travelled to fulfill their cultural duties. The trees around the site continue to support the lives of animals, birds and insects in the area. The site's water should be cared for to support its landscape. The landscape should be cared for to support diversity of living things in a healthy landscape.



Above: The bogong moth talks about the connections between different groups across Country through the Songlines (*Bogong Moth*. Leanne Redpath. 2025)

Responsibility

The development on Country should demonstrate responsibility to Country. Responsibility is to all parts of Country, but key to Country in this area is water. It was an area of tall trees and creeks which were removed during colonisation of land and people.

A large tree can draw 15,000L of water from the ground so don't drain all the site's water way, keep it here and let it naturally filter through the ground and support Country. Use water to keep the place cool.

Hard paving should be limited in area and light coloured. The colours used in the building, paving and landscaping should flow from Country. Its colours should reflect the colours soil, stone, trees and flowers.



Reciprocity

The landscape around the site should be improved to provide habitat for native species. Use plants from the area and create a sustainable and healthy environment. The development should not take from Country but salvage any removed trees to create habitat such as logs, hollows and nesting boxes.

Lights on the building should only shine down like the stars or moon. This will attract insects at night and provide a good feed for the microbats. Provide a place for microbats to shelter during the day. Also provide places for native bees. They will need hives and flowering trees and shrubs all year round.

Paths through the trees would allow people to experience the bush without damaging it. It will need education too.



Part 4: Connection to Country

Connecting with Country Opportunities

The knowledge shared in the Connecting with Country process aims to create better place-based design through an understanding of Country. We should care for Country so Country can care for us.



Locality: This land is connected to all other parts of Country. Design should consider the entire ecosystem and not just within the boundaries.



Site: Keep water on the site to cool the building, filter run-off, support the trees and create a good place for people and wildlife.

The building and its landscape should be considered as one element, each supporting the other.



Building Form: Building form should subtly respond to location. The site is surround by trees. Let trees inspire the form and finishes.



Colour, Textures and Materials: Demonstrate a response to site and surroundings using colours that are represented in the land and sky.



Landscape: Create sustainable habitat within the retained band of trees to support wildlife. Consider the impact of the building on wildlife. All lighting should point downwards to attract insects and provide food for microbats.

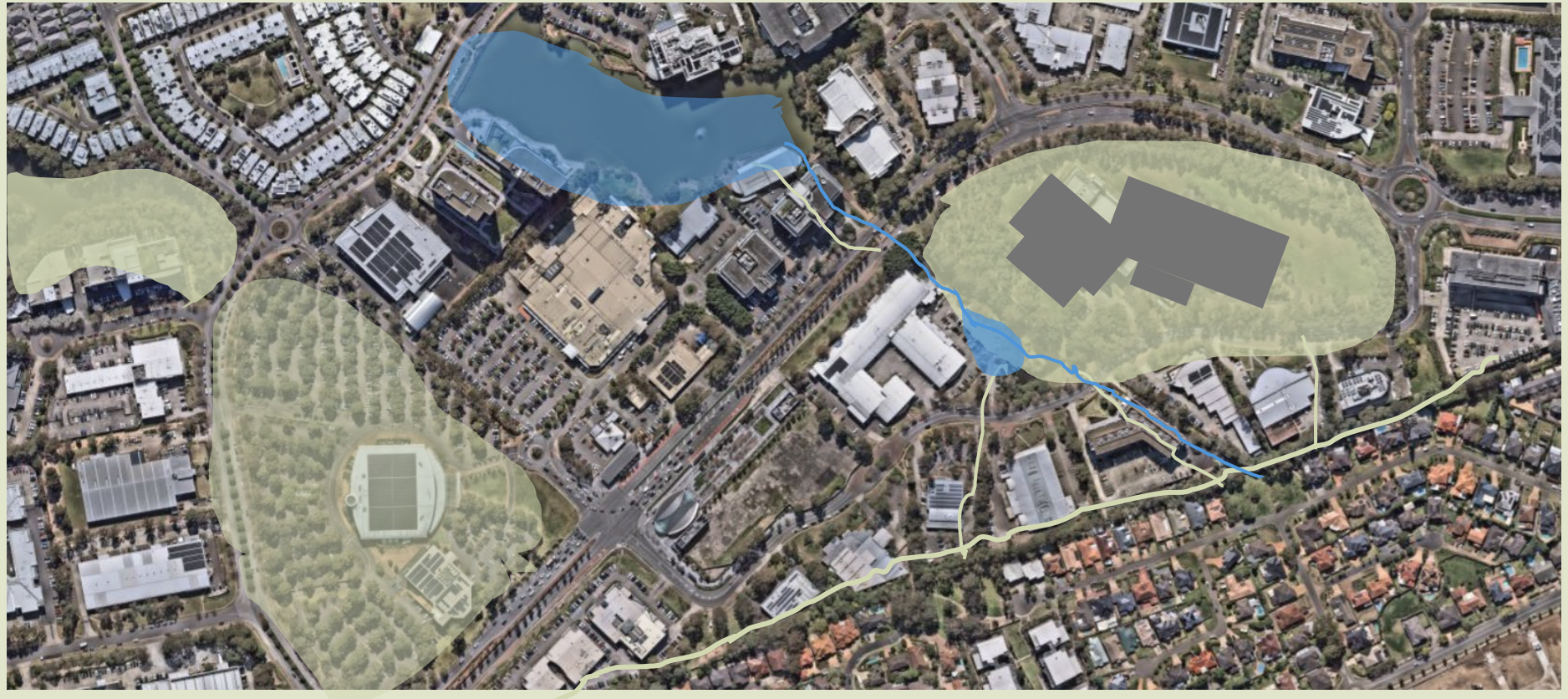


Shared responsibility: Demonstrate shared responsibility and reciprocity through a sustainable development. Provide spaces or pathways where people can experience the bushland and understand its regeneration.

Locality Response

Look at the water and trees in the locality. How can they support wildlife and each other when they are pushed far apart, planted next to roads, and not given access to an ecosystem? Country will be sick if we don't build strong ecosystems to support our wildlife and ourselves.

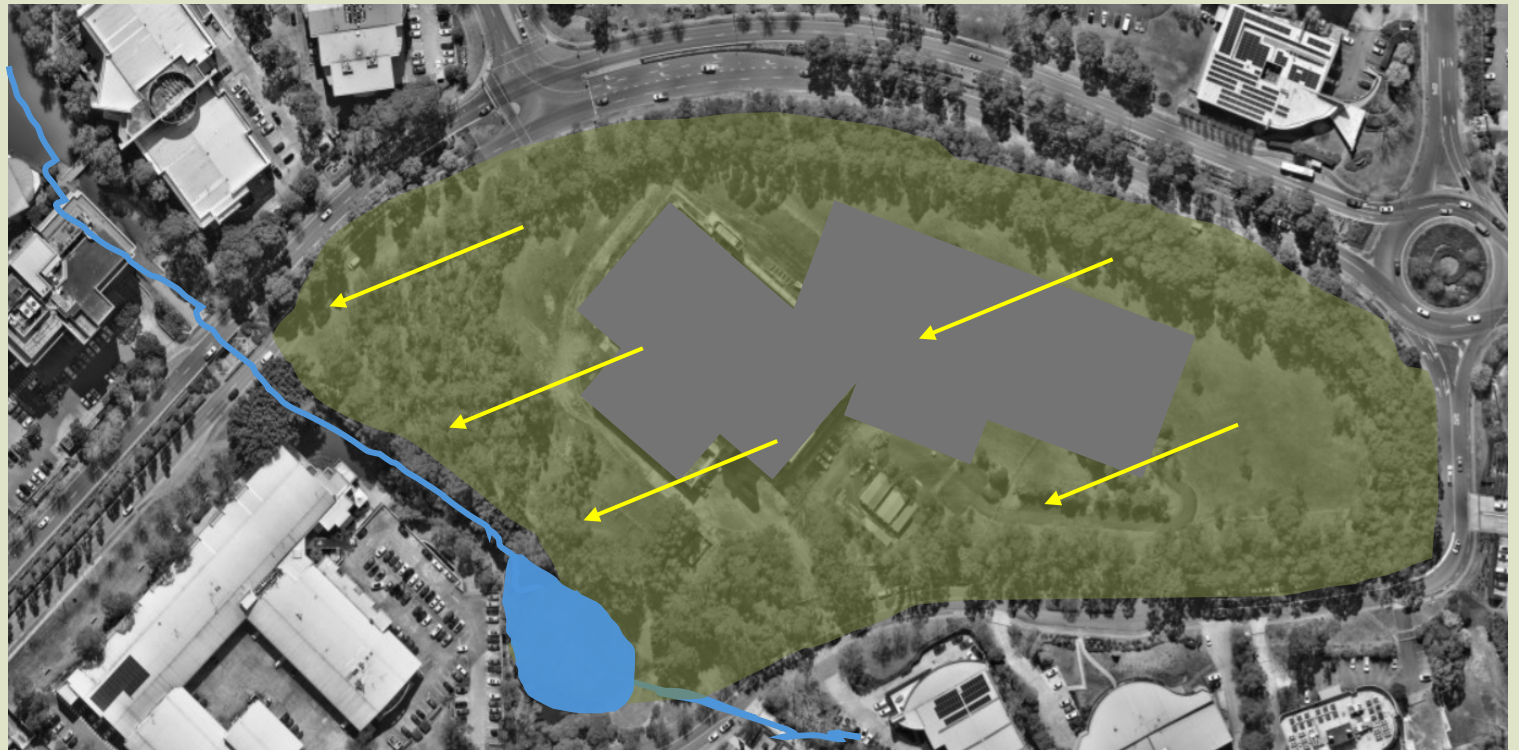
We need to approach design in a way that supports Country and not causes further damage.



Site Response

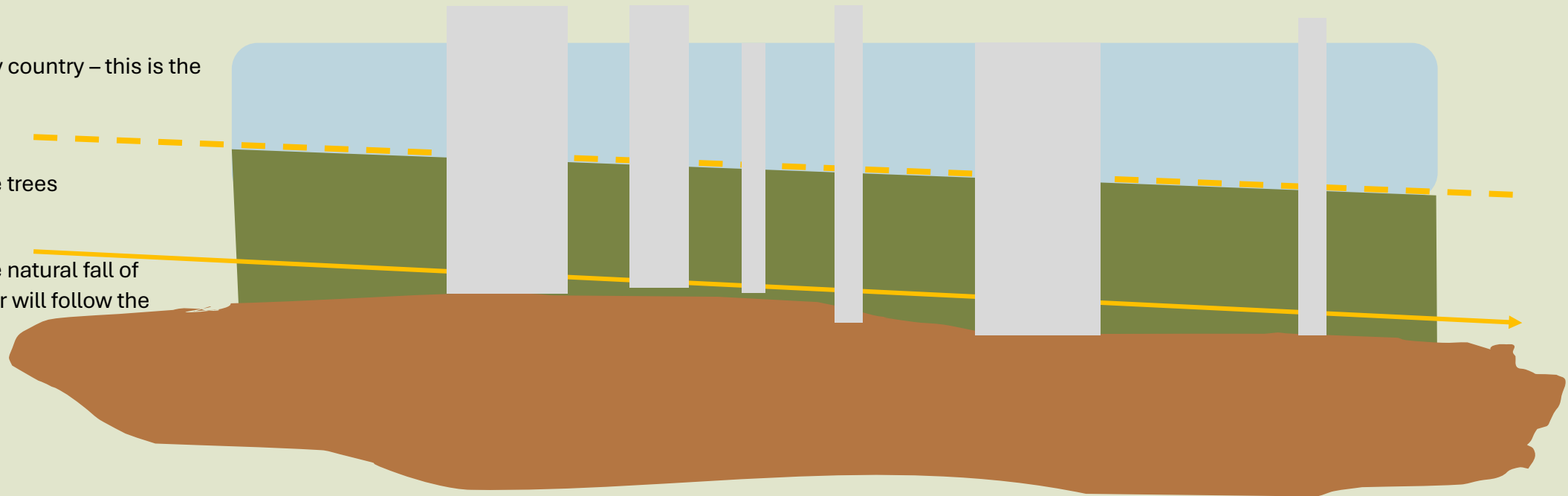
Look at the site. Where does the water go? Water has memory. It will want to fill the Creek and give water back to Country. Its no good if water is dirty on Country, it needs to be cleaned so everything that relies on the water can be healthy.

Keep enough water on the site for the plants and animals. So much water has been pushed underground and channelled away that ecosystems struggle to survive.



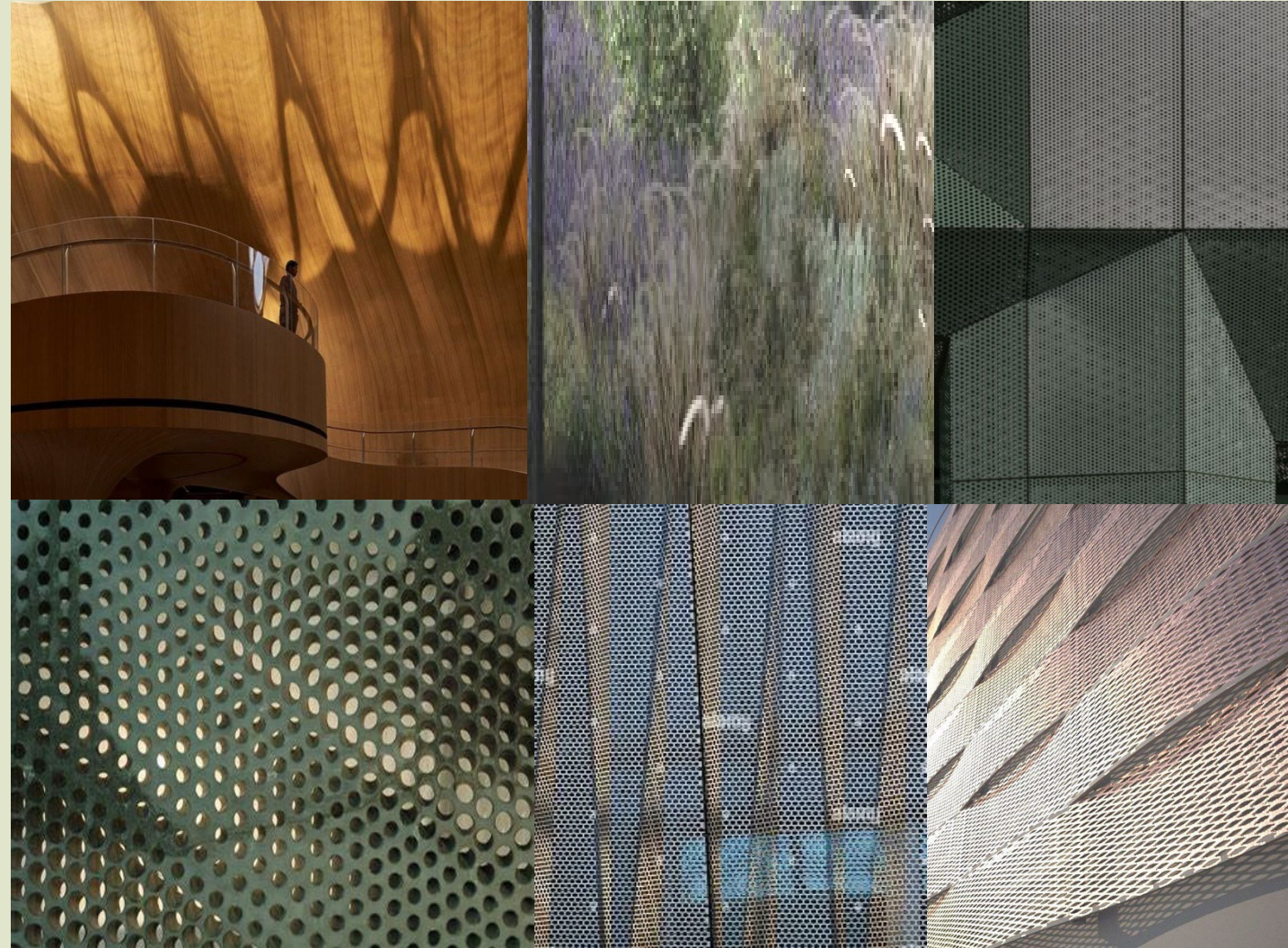
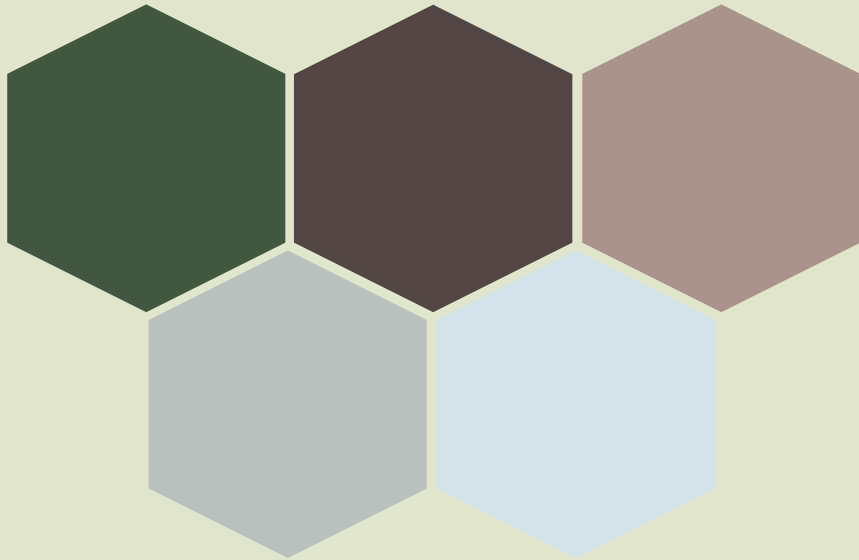
Building Form

- Soften the form to gently sit in Country – do not damage Country with hard edges.
- Break up the façade so it responds to the trees and the rhythms of Country.
- Respond to sky country – this is the home of birds.
- Respond to the trees
- Respond to the natural fall of Country – water will follow the natural path



Colours, Textures and Materials

The colours of Country should inform the building material choices. Each part of the building creates an ecosystem which provides opportunity for individual response – breaking down the mass and creating interesting form. The building should respond to the natural environment and quality of light in the area.

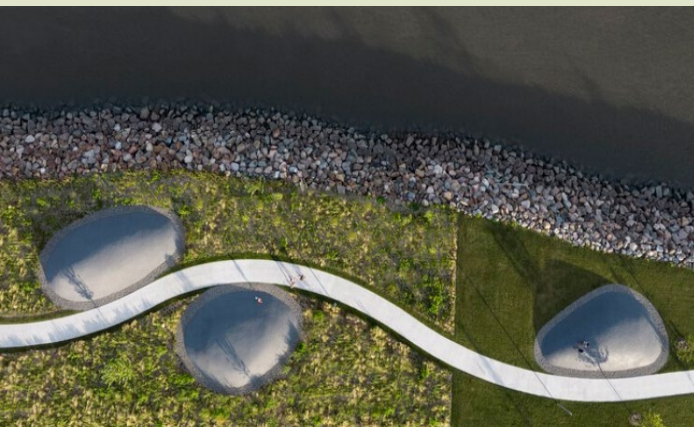


Landscape



Top: Bush Regeneration Sydney . Photography by Ricki Couglan.

Bottom: Promenade Samuel-De Champlain by Daoust Lestage
Lizotte Stecker. Photograph by Maxime Brouillet



Top Right: Dry Creek Bed by Our
Nesting Space Landscape
Design

Top Centre: Holding water in the
landscape. Melbourne garden by
Phillip Johnson

Bottom Right: Roof garden



Shared Responsibility

A shared responsibility can be demonstrated through various sustainability measures. Sustainability incorporates the concepts of interconnectedness, responsibility and reciprocity.

Some ideas for sustainability are listed below. These will help in reducing the impact of the development on the environment both in its construction and in its operation.



Water Management

- Rainwater harvesting - Keep water on and in the site, limit stormwater run-off, include stormwater filtration and storage
- Use water to cool the building
- Recycle water – grey water
- Use water efficient fittings, plant and equipment
- Water in landscape
- Permeable paving – limiting hard surfaces generally
- Rain gardens for natural catchment and filtration

Energy Management

- Solar PVs for onsite generation - PVs could provide shade to plant platform potentially increasing plant efficiency and cooling the building.
- Provide a façade that manages heat load and heat loss
- Consider alternate energy management such as use of heat transfer and natural ventilation options (Venturi principle)
- Vertical axis wind turbines
- Geothermal energy
- Awareness through education and performance analytics (software, monitoring, display, reporting)
- EV charging
- Bicycle parking and shared bicycles
- Battery storage
- Green roofs and walls

Shared Responsibility

Flora and Fauna

- The trees around the site are beneficial to demonstrating Caring for Country although the narrow band of trees needs to be nurtured to ensure it can be a healthy ecosystem and thrive into the future. Management may include:
- Restoration of tree variety and individual tree health
- Underplanting with shrubs and ground covers reflective of a natural environment
- Nesting boxes and native bee hives
- Water to support fauna
- Ecosystem for endangered flora and fauna
- Safety for birds near roadway (place flowering shrubs away from road)
- Retain waste material from removed trees to create habitat for fauna
- Ongoing care and maintenance

People and Community

- The development should consider impact on people who work and visit the facility but also those in the surrounding business park.
- Community Landcare partnerships
- Community & staff wellbeing - participation and enjoyment (pathways through bushland, places to sit)
- Healthy indoor environment
- Education on plants, habitats and environment
- Art

Materials and Construction Methods

- Locally sourced materials
- Recycled and green building materials
- Low VOC and CO2 materials and finishes
- Reduced construction waste material
- Operational
- Sustainability Strategic Plan – examine Environmental, Social and Governance responsibilities and practices – implementation and continuous improvement
- Waste management (waste separation and maximum recycling)
- Lighting management and climate control



Sustainable Construction:
Methods and Benefits



Part 5: Design Response

Design Response and Review

The in-progress architectural and landscape designs were discussed with the Connecting with Country team in December 2025, and it was confirmed that Country was appropriately represented in this document.

The design has identified key landscape forms to be incorporated (see right). These elements provide a strong foundation for expression in the landscape forms and building finishes.

These have been expressed in primary site responses, including:

- Colour
- Materiality
- Form

These elements demonstrate integration, such as where seating provides opportunities to connect with the landscape.



Design Response and Review

The building has incorporated stormwater retention tanks, whilst within the landscaped areas, endemic planting and locally sourced materials have been used to enhance the existing natural setting.

The incorporation of a neutral colour scheme, highlighted with selected tones, aligns with the direction of the Traditional Knowledge Holders to reflect the cultural values of working within the environment and to integrate the building form, minimising visual amenity.



Part 6: Appendices

Consultation Register

Meeting Date: 01.08.2025

Introduction to Connecting with Country

Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage
Ashleigh Smith – Patch Planning
Ella Xue – Greenbox Architects
Setareh Pour – Greenbox Architects

Meeting Date: 12.09.2025

Discussion

Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage
Leanne Watson Redpath – Dharug Custodian
Aboriginal Corporation

Meeting Date: 26.03.2025

Discussion

Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage
Ella Xue – Greenbox Architects
Setareh Pour – Greenbox Architects

Meeting Date: 12.09.2025

Discussion

Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage
Saurabh Wagh - Arcadia Landscape Architects
Annabel Lydon - Arcadia Landscape Architects

Meeting Date: 26.09.2025

Discussion

Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage
Leanne Watson Redpath – Dharug Custodian
Aboriginal Corporation

Meeting Date: 10.10.2025

Workshop

Walt Couston – Greensquare DC
Neil Donald – Greensquare DC
Kaveh Soleimani - Aurecon
Ashleigh Smith – Patch Planning
Ella Xue – Greenbox Architects
Setareh Pour – Greenbox Architects
Saurabh Wagh – Arcadia Landscape Architecture
Annabel Lydon – Arcadia Landscape Architecture
Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage

Meeting Date: 12.12.2025

Discussion

Alice Steedman – Everick Heritage
Leanne Watson Redpath – Dharug Custodian
Aboriginal Corporation

Note: Email reviews were also undertaken of this report by the participants involved in this project prior to each issue.

The Dharug Custodians Aboriginal Corporation endorse the contents of this report.

EVERICK HERITAGE



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