

**Waterloo South**  
**Connecting with Country**  
**Framework**  
**April 2026**



Prepared by   
**ngurra**  
advisory





## Acknowledgement of Country

Ngurra Advisory acknowledges that Waterloo South is located on the lands of the Gadigal Nation.

We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and recognise their enduring connection to these lands, waterways, and skies.

We recognise the role of all who live and work on Gadigal Country to care for and respect Country, to listen to its stories, protect its ecosystems, and uphold the cultural values that sustain life. This includes caring for the animals and all living beings that form part of Country's interconnected systems.

This project is guided by the principle that Country is a living system, one that holds memory and knowledge, and that caring for Country is central to creating sustainable and culturally grounded places for future generations.

### **Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property Rights**

We aim to work respectfully with First Nations people and communities to protect the rights of Culture and Country.

This framework has been informed by engagement through discussions with selected stakeholders.

While this work is the copyright of Ngurra Advisory, it is important to note that any Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights remain with those Indigenous peoples or groups from whom it originates.

ICIP refers to the rights that Indigenous people's have, and want to have, to protect their traditional knowledge, resources, knowledge systems, arts and culture

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**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this report is specific to the Waterloo South Redevelopment Project.

It has been prepared based on the unique characteristics, context, and circumstances of this site. This report must not be relied upon or applied to any other projects or locations without appropriate review and adaptation by Ngurra Advisory and the Traditional Custodians, Elders and Knowledge Holders who have been involved in the consultation of this report.



# A message from Ngurra Advisory

As Directors of Ngurra Advisory, we understand Connecting with Country as the essential foundation for any work undertaken on Aboriginal lands. It acknowledges the deep and enduring knowledge systems of Aboriginal peoples—their ways of being, knowing and doing—that have sustained relationships with land, water and community for tens of thousands of years. For us, Connecting with Country is not optional or symbolic; it is the starting point for meaningful design, grounded in listening, learning and building genuine relationships with Country and with the communities who hold its knowledge.

This Connecting with Country Framework sets out how Gadigal and local Aboriginal community members are engaged early and continuously to shape all future work at Waterloo South. It establishes the cultural, relational and governance foundations that guide the Designing with Country Strategy, ensuring that design outcomes are informed by lived knowledge and cultural authority. In this way, Connecting with Country builds understanding and accountability, while Designing with Country translates that understanding into clear design intent, principles and outcomes.

We believe that a genuine connection with Country goes well beyond consultation. It is built through long-term relationships, reciprocity and care, and it must influence decisions well before design concepts are formed. This framework reflects our commitment to trust-building, responsible knowledge-sharing and creating clear pathways for Aboriginal voices to meaningfully influence priorities, directions and decisions across the life of the project.

For Waterloo South, located on Gadigal Country, Connecting with Country ensures that design responses emerge from a deep understanding of the landscape, its waterways and its living cultural systems. This approach enables Designing with Country to move beyond surface expression, supporting places that restore balance, strengthen cultural identity and embed Aboriginal leadership, participation and stewardship over time.

We are proud to present this Connecting with Country Framework with Stockland, City West Housing, Link Wentworth and Birribee Housing, and look forward to continuing to work alongside the Gadigal and local Aboriginal communities to achieve enduring outcomes for Country - now and for generations to come.



**Amy Barnes**  
Managing Director



**Mat Cornwell**  
Managing Director



# 1. Introduction

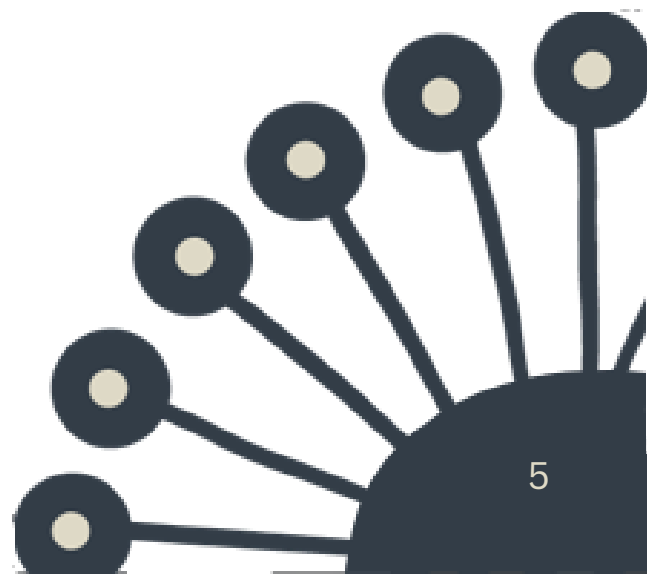
The Waterloo South Connecting with Country Framework sets out how Country, culture and community knowledge will meaningfully guide all future planning, design and delivery associated with the Waterloo South project, located on Gadigal Country. It establishes Connecting with Country as the foundational step in the project's approach—ensuring that relationships with Country and with the Gadigal and local Aboriginal communities are built first, and that these relationships inform all subsequent project decisions.

This Framework recognises that Connecting with Country is not a single engagement activity or a phase to be completed, but an ongoing commitment across the life of the project. It focuses on how Aboriginal communities are engaged early and continuously, how cultural knowledge is shared respectfully, and how Aboriginal voices influence priorities, directions and decision-making over time. In doing so, it provides the cultural, relational and governance foundations required to support meaningful, place-based outcomes.

The Framework is intrinsically linked to the Nguluway Design Inc Designing with Country Strategy. While the Designing with Country Strategy translates cultural understanding into design intent, principles and outcomes, this Connecting with Country Framework establishes the pathways through which that understanding is built. Together, the two documents form a complementary system: Connecting with Country grounds the work in relationships, knowledge and cultural authority, and Designing with Country gives spatial and material expression to those foundations.

Importantly, this Framework builds on extensive Aboriginal engagement and Connecting with Country work already undertaken for Waterloo South. It acknowledges and carries forward the guidance, aspirations and concerns consistently raised by community to date, providing continuity and avoiding engagement fatigue. Rather than resetting the conversation, the Framework consolidates past work and strengthens its application into future stages of the project.

Through this Framework, Waterloo South commits to an approach that respects Gadigal Country as a living cultural landscape, supports Aboriginal leadership and participation, and ensures that future development contributes to stronger, enduring relationships between people, place and Country—now and for generations to come.



## 2. Project overview

The Waterloo South project is a major, long-term urban renewal initiative that seeks to transform the Waterloo Estate into a renewed, inclusive and sustainable precinct over multiple stages. The redevelopment responds to the need for improved housing outcomes, community infrastructure and public spaces, while recognising the deep cultural significance of the area as part of Gadigal Country.

Waterloo has a long and layered history as a place of Aboriginal presence, movement and connection, as well as a more recent history shaped by social housing, community activism and government-led urban change. The redevelopment of Waterloo South sits within this complex context, requiring an approach that balances physical transformation with cultural continuity, social outcomes and long-term stewardship of place.

The Stockland Consortium has been appointed as the development partner for Waterloo South, working in partnership with the NSW Government and relevant agencies to deliver the redevelopment. The Consortium is responsible for leading planning, design, delivery and long-term outcomes across the precinct, including meeting agreed commitments relating to housing, public domain, community benefit and Aboriginal participation.

As development partner, the Stockland Consortium plays a critical role in setting expectations for how Country, culture and community knowledge are embedded across all stages of the project. This includes ensuring that consultants, contractors and delivery partners work in alignment with agreed frameworks, strategies and commitments, and that Aboriginal engagement is undertaken in a way that is consistent, culturally safe and accountable.

This Connecting with Country Framework establishes how relationships with Country and with the Gadigal and local Aboriginal communities will guide all future work associated with Waterloo South. It positions Connecting with Country as foundational to the project—shaping early visioning, informing decision-making and providing cultural, relational and governance foundations that endure beyond individual project phases or design teams.

By embedding Connecting with Country across the full project lifecycle, Waterloo South commits to an approach that moves beyond minimum consultation requirements. Instead, it supports long-term partnership, Aboriginal leadership and shared stewardship, ensuring that the redevelopment contributes to enduring cultural, social and environmental outcomes for Country and community.



# 3. Context of the Concept and Rezoning Application

This Connecting with Country Framework (the Framework) is submitted to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (the Department) on behalf of Stockland and NSW Land and Housing Corporation (the Applicant) in support of a concept State Significant Development Application (SSDA) for the redevelopment of the site within the Waterloo Estate (South) Precinct Area, hereby known as “Waterloo South”.

In this report reference to “Homes NSW” or “the Applicant” shall also be taken to mean “New South Wales Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC)” who is the registered owner of 93 per cent of land within the Waterloo South Precinct Area. Any reference to “Waterloo South” in this report should be read as the redevelopment of land owned by Homes NSW (previously Land and Housing Corporation) and associated public land (such as roads) throughout the Precinct Area.

The concept development is categorised as State Significant Development (SSD) as per Section 26, Schedule 1 of State Environmental Planning Policy Planning Systems 2021 (Planning Systems SEPP) as the project includes housing development carried out by or on behalf of the LAHC, with an estimated development cost (EDC) of more than \$30 million.

The concept, in summary, aims to deliver:

- High quality mixed tenure housing in the context of a rapidly transforming area.
- Approximately 3,300 new dwellings, of which a minimum 30% will be social housing, approximately 20% will be affordable housing, and a maximum 50% will be market housing (measured as a percentage of the total residential gross floor area).
- Publicly accessible open space and public realm activation.
- An authentic mixed-use precinct, with housing co-located with non-residential uses, community uses, essential services, and access to public transport.

The concept SSDA will guide the detailed design of future buildings, open spaces, and the public realm within the Waterloo South site. The concept SSDA seeks development consent for key planning metrics, including maximum building envelopes, building heights, setbacks, vehicular access points and road network, and the distribution of floor area across different land uses and residential tenure types.

A state-assessed rezoning application has also been prepared and submitted concurrently to give effect to this concept SSDA. The state-assessed rezoning application seeks amendments to the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 (SLEP 2012) and the Waterloo Estate (South): Design Guide 2022 (2022 Design Guide) to align with the maximum building envelopes sought in this concept SSDA. Notably no additional gross floor area (GFA) or density is sought under the state assessed rezoning application than is currently permissible on the site under the SLEP 2012.

# 4. What Connecting with Country means for Waterloo South

At Waterloo South, Connecting with Country and Designing with Country are understood as related but distinct processes, each with a clear and complementary role. Together they support culturally grounded outcomes, but they operate at different points in the project lifecycle and serve different purposes.

## Connecting with Country

Connecting with Country is the foundational, relational process. It is about establishing and sustaining relationships with Country and with the Gadigal and local Aboriginal communities who hold cultural knowledge and authority for place. It focuses on listening, learning and understanding before decisions are made. Connecting with Country informs how priorities are set, how questions are framed and how decisions are approached across planning, design, delivery and long-term stewardship.

Connecting with Country is not limited to engagement activities. It includes cultural governance, trust-building, respectful knowledge-sharing and accountability over time. It shapes how the project works, who is involved, when they are involved, and how cultural guidance influences decision-making. As such, it must occur early and continue throughout the life of the project.

## Designing with Country

Designing with Country, by contrast, is the design-led process that translates the understanding gained through Connecting with Country into tangible outcomes. This includes design intent, principles, spatial arrangements, material choices, public domain responses, interpretation and operational considerations. Designing with Country gives physical and functional expression to the relationships, values and knowledge established through connection.

Importantly, Designing with Country cannot occur meaningfully without Connecting with Country. When design precedes connection, cultural responses risk being superficial or symbolic. At Waterloo South, Connecting with Country provides the cultural, relational and governance foundations that guide Designing with Country, ensuring that design outcomes are grounded in lived knowledge and cultural authority rather than assumption.

This Framework therefore establishes Connecting with Country as the first and ongoing step, while the Designing with Country Strategy sets out how that understanding is translated into design outcomes. All project partners, consultants and delivery teams are expected to work across both documents, recognising that strong design outcomes are a direct result of strong relationships with Country and community.

## Consortium Team

This project is a collaborative effort that brings together a diverse team of professionals and cultural advisors, each contributing their expertise to ensure the development reflects the values of respect, reconciliation, and cultural connection.

**Stockland:** Responsible for design, planning, project delivery and overall coordination of the renewal. They're the principal private sector partner contracted by the NSW Government (Homes NSW).



**City West Housing:** Affordable housing specialist who will focus on delivering and managing affordable homes and also supporting tenant relocation into nearby housing.



**Link Wentworth:** Lead community housing provider focused on social housing and will manage new social housing for Homes NSW and provide tenancy support and community engagement for residents.



**Birribee Housing:** Aboriginal housing provider who will manage both social and affordable housing allocations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.



**SJB:** Lead Architect responsible for the masterplanning of the Waterloo South precinct.



**Nguluway Design Inc.:** the Executive Indigenous Architect for the Waterloo South project, leading the development and implementation of the project's Designing with Country Strategy.



**Ngurra Advisory:** Leading engagement with Gadigal Traditional Custodians & local Aboriginal community to embed Connecting with Country principles across the life of the Waterloo South project.

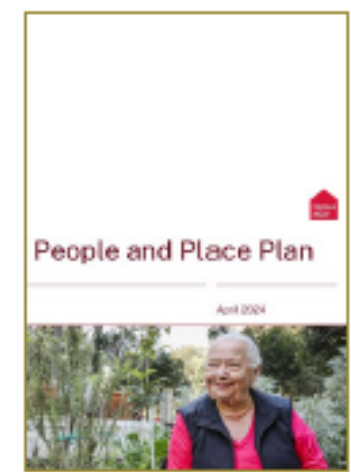
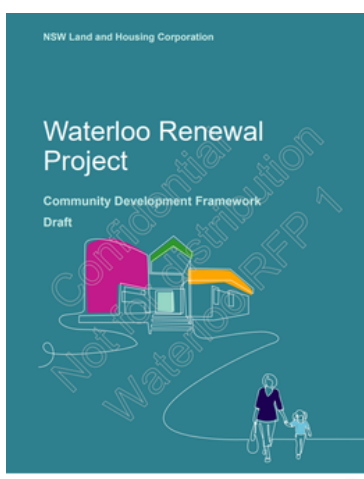
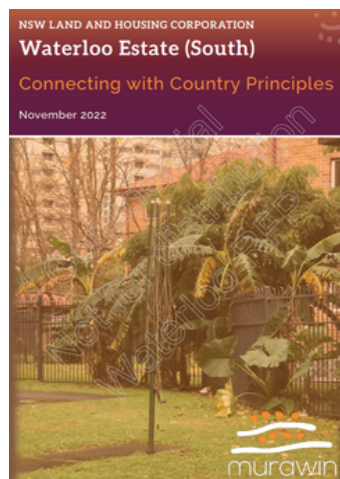
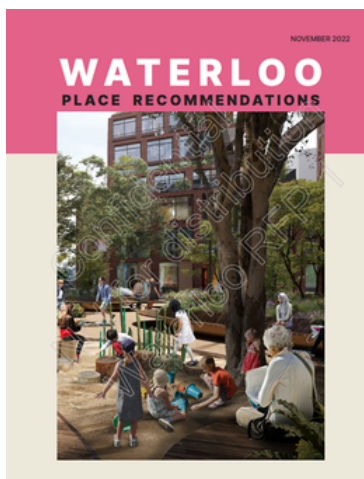


# 5. Building on what has come before

Waterloo South has benefited from substantial Aboriginal engagement and Connecting with Country work undertaken to date. This includes community workshops, advisory input, cultural discussions and the development of earlier frameworks and strategies that articulate community aspirations, concerns and priorities.

This Framework recognises and respects that work. It consolidates key themes that have been consistently raised by community, including the importance of cultural visibility grounded in meaning, opportunities for Aboriginal leadership and employment, care for waterways and landscape systems, and long-term accountability beyond construction.

By building on existing engagement, the Framework avoids re-consultation and engagement fatigue. It provides continuity between past guidance and future delivery, ensuring that previous contributions are not lost but strengthened and embedded as the project progresses.



## Community engagement findings

Across all reports, there is a clear and consistent acknowledgement that Waterloo sits on Gadigal Country and that the Redfern–Waterloo area holds deep, continuing cultural, political and social significance for Aboriginal people. Engagement to date has drawn on a long history of consultation (2017–2023) with Aboriginal residents, knowledge holders, service providers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), rather than being treated as a single, one-off exercise.

Key engagement messages are remarkably consistent:

- Aboriginal community members want to be involved throughout the life of the project, not just at planning or concept stages.
- Engagement must move beyond consultation to co-design, shared decision-making and ongoing governance roles.
- There is strong concern about displacement, loss of community networks and cultural erasure, particularly temporary relocation during redevelopment.
- Maintaining the social fabric of Waterloo as an Aboriginal place is seen as just as important as new buildings or public spaces.

Previous Connecting with Country frameworks (Murawin 2022 and 2023) emphasise that engagement is itself a form of caring for Country, grounded in listening, respect for cultural authority, and recognising who can speak for Country.



## Emerging themes from previous engagements

### 1. Culture as living and visible

Aboriginal people consistently expressed the aspiration for culture to be embedded, not ornamental. This includes:

- Visible recognition of Gadigal stories, language and histories across public spaces, landscape, art and interpretation.
- Design that reflects Country as a living system (land, water, sky, people), not just a heritage layer added at the end.
- Ensuring Aboriginal presence is felt across the whole estate, not confined to isolated “cultural moments”.

### 2. Staying on Country and in community

A dominant aspiration is the ability for Aboriginal residents to remain connected to Waterloo:

- Minimising displacement and supporting culturally safe relocation processes where movement is unavoidable.
- Protecting kinship networks, informal support systems and long-standing community relationships.
- Commitment to Aboriginal housing outcomes, including a minimum proportion of social and affordable housing for Aboriginal people and culturally safe tenancy management

### 3. Self-determination and governance

Community feedback strongly supports:

- Aboriginal involvement in governance structures, not just advisory roles.
- Long-term mechanisms that allow Aboriginal voices to shape planning, delivery and operations over decades.
- Clear accountability so cultural commitments survive changes in partners, contractors and project stages

#### 4. Economic participation and opportunity

The reports consistently reflect aspirations for Waterloo South to deliver real economic benefits, including:

- Aboriginal employment pathways linked to construction, place management and ongoing operations.
- Procurement opportunities for Aboriginal businesses beyond symbolic contracts.
- Skills development, enterprise support and long-term job creation tied to place, not just the build phase

#### 5. Healing, wellbeing and pride in place

Finally, Aboriginal participants spoke to Waterloo South as a place of:

- Healing from historical displacement and trauma.
- Cultural pride, visibility and belonging.
- Intergenerational connection, where Elders, adults and young people can see themselves reflected in the future of the estate



## Considerations moving forward

Future Connecting with Country work at Waterloo must shift from high-level frameworks to day-to-day practice. The foundations are already well established; the priority now is embedding Connecting with Country as core business across planning, design, procurement, delivery and operations. This means translating principles into mandatory processes, protecting Country-led design intent through all project stages, and ensuring cultural commitments are not diluted by staging, value engineering or changes in project teams. Connecting with Country should operate as an organising logic for place, not an optional overlay.

Long-term continuity is critical. Waterloo is a multi-decade project, and Aboriginal involvement must be structured to endure across changing consultants, contractors and partners. Future work should prioritise stable, resourced governance and advisory arrangements, respect cultural authority, and avoid repetitive engagement that re-asks the same questions without building collective knowledge. Aboriginal participation must increasingly sit within decision-making and place governance, not solely within consultation processes.

Ultimately, Connecting with Country at Waterloo must continue to deliver tangible outcomes alongside cultural integrity. This includes safeguarding community connections to place, supporting culturally safe housing and tenancy outcomes, enabling sustained Aboriginal employment and business participation, and ensuring public spaces remain culturally active and cared for beyond construction. Honest truth-telling about Waterloo's past and present, combined with strong accountability for future commitments, will be essential to maintaining trust and ensuring Country remains living, visible and respected over time.

# 6. Country context

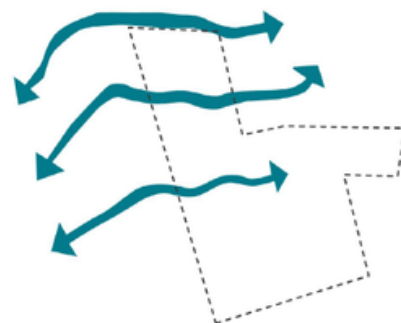
The Country context for Waterloo South has been extensively explored and articulated through the Waterloo South Designing with Country Strategic Framework prepared by Nguluway Design Inc. That work provides a deep, layered reading of Gadigal Country, drawing together cultural knowledge, historical research, truth-telling and contemporary community narratives to inform how place is understood and expressed through design.

The Designing with Country Strategic Framework documents the long cultural history of the Waterloo area as part of Gadigal Country, shaped by waterways, wetlands, movement routes and living systems that sustained Aboriginal life for tens of thousands of years. It traces the transformation of this landscape through invasion, industrialisation and urban renewal, while making visible the enduring Aboriginal presence, resistance and cultural continuity that define Waterloo and Redfern as places of ongoing significance.

Key themes emerging from that work - including water as a defining system, belonging to community, contemporary journey lines, truth-telling and re-storying place - provide an essential foundation for understanding Country at Waterloo South. These themes are not abstract narratives; they are grounded in community knowledge, historical evidence and lived experience, and have been carefully translated into design directions, spatial strategies and implementation considerations.

This Connecting with Country Framework recognises the Designing with Country Strategic Framework as a critical body of work that already articulates what Country is telling us at Waterloo South. Rather than duplicating that analysis, this Framework focuses on how that understanding is carried forward—by ensuring that the cultural narratives, priorities and design logic established through Designing with Country continue to be informed, tested and strengthened through ongoing engagement with Gadigal and local Aboriginal communities.

Together, the two documents operate in tandem. The Designing with Country Strategic Framework provides a detailed cultural and spatial reading of place and sets out how Country can be expressed through design. This Connecting with Country Framework ensures that the relationships, governance structures and engagement processes required to uphold that vision remain active across future planning, design, delivery and stewardship phases, including as new project partners and design teams come on board.



**WATERWAYS**

*Nguluway Design Inc Designing with Country Report 2025*

# 7. Community engagement snapshot

## Who we engaged

Engagement for the Waterloo South project involved Gadigal Custodians, local Aboriginal community members, Aboriginal service providers, artists, youth representatives, Elders and residents with longstanding connections to Waterloo and Redfern. Participants reflected a broad cross-section of cultural knowledge, lived experience and community leadership, ensuring that both cultural authority and contemporary community perspectives informed the work. Engagement prioritised voices with deep local connection, while also recognising Waterloo as a place shaped by many Aboriginal families, mobs and organisations over time.

## When & where

Engagement was undertaken across multiple stages of the project to inform both the Designing with Country Strategy and the Connecting with Country Framework. Sessions were held at key points to test emerging ideas, surface aspirations and concerns, and refine directions before decisions were finalised. Engagement took place through a mix of on-Country conversations, community venues and facilitated workshops, ensuring accessibility and relevance while respecting cultural protocols and participant availability.

## How we engaged

Engagement was delivered using culturally appropriate, relational methods that prioritised dialogue over presentation. This included yarning-based discussions, facilitated workshops, design conversations and iterative feedback loops that allowed ideas to be tested, challenged and strengthened. The approach emphasised listening first, transparency about how information would be used, and accountability in carrying community guidance forward. Rather than one-off consultation, engagement was approached as an ongoing process that continues to inform governance, design, delivery and long-term stewardship of Waterloo South.

# 8. Community engagement summary

Community engagement undertaken for the WaterlooSouth project brought together Gadigal Custodians, Aboriginal community members, service providers, artists, youth representatives and residents with deep and enduring connections to Waterloo and Redfern. Engagement consistently reinforced that Waterloo is understood as a place of movement, gathering, activism, culture, sport and survival, and that any redevelopment must honour both the long Gadigal history of the area and its contemporary Aboriginal community life. Designing with Country was described not as a design exercise, but as a cultural, social and historical responsibility that must shape the project from its foundations.

Across all sessions, community and Custodians articulated strong aspirations for Waterloo South to be recognised and expressed as a living cultural landscape. Truth-telling emerged as a central theme, with participants calling for visible acknowledgement of Gadigal Country alongside the more recent histories of social housing, activism and cultural resilience. Community emphasised the importance of spaces that support connection across generations, including culturally safe gathering places, Elder-led learning spaces, youth-focused areas and flexible community facilities that enable everyday cultural practice. There was also strong support for storytelling through art, naming, interpretation and digital tools, ensuring that local stories, heroes and creative expression are embedded throughout the precinct.

Long-term Aboriginal participation was identified as a critical priority. Community stressed that employment, training and mentoring pathways must be genuine, reliable and sustained over time, rather than short-term or compliance-driven. Participants highlighted the need for mentoring to be embedded, for second-chance pathways to be supported, and for partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations and training providers to be prioritised. Avoiding duplication of existing programs was repeatedly raised as essential to strengthening, rather than undermining, trusted local services.

Alongside aspirations, the community identified clear concerns and safeguards. These included the risk of tokenistic design, broken promises and unclear accountability if commitments are not embedded contractually. Participants expressed concern about segregation or exclusion through design and emphasised that spaces should bring people together, not divide them. Strong Gadigal-led cultural anchors were seen as essential to avoiding loss of cultural identity, particularly as the precinct changes over time.

Overall, the engagement reinforced several non-negotiables for Waterloo South. Cultural knowledge must shape decision-making from the outset, not be added late. Elders and youth must be centred in governance and design processes. Aboriginal leadership, accountability and long-term stewardship must be embedded across the life of the project. Designing with Country and Connecting with Country were consistently understood as the primary mechanisms for achieving these outcomes - ensuring that the past is honoured, the present is strengthened and the future of Waterloo South is shaped with pride, respect and cultural integrity.

# 9. Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles reflect the aspirations, concerns and priorities consistently raised through the Waterloo South Designing with Country and Connecting with Country engagement with Gadigal Custodians, Aboriginal community members, service providers and residents. These principles are grounded in lived experience and are intended to guide decision-making across all stages of the project and inform future Aboriginal working groups.

## **1. Country as a living cultural landscape**

Waterloo South is recognised as a living cultural landscape shaped by Gadigal history, contemporary Aboriginal presence and ongoing community life. Design and delivery must make this history and continuity visible through truth-telling, landscape, materials, naming and interpretation.

## **2. Early, ongoing and transparent engagement**

Aboriginal engagement must occur from the earliest stages of planning and continue throughout design, delivery and operation. Engagement is undertaken transparently, with clarity about how community input will be used and how decisions are made.

## **3. Cultural authority, integrity and accountability**

Gadigal Custodians and recognised cultural knowledge holders provide cultural authority for Country. Cultural guidance must be respected, documented and translated into clear actions, with commitments embedded contractually to avoid tokenism or unfulfilled promises.

## **4. Avoidance of tokenism and duplication**

Cultural expression must be meaningful and grounded in community guidance, not symbolic or superficial. Programs and initiatives should strengthen existing Aboriginal organisations and services, avoiding duplication that undermines trusted local providers.

## **5. Inclusive places that bring people together**

Spaces should foster connection rather than segregation, welcoming people of all backgrounds to learn from and engage with culture while respecting cultural protocols. Mixed-tenure development and shared spaces must support social cohesion.

## **6. Centred roles for Elders and youth**

Elders are central to maintaining cultural integrity, story and protocol, while young people are essential to shaping spaces that support future community life. Both must be prioritised in engagement, design and governance.

## **7. Long-term pathways to employment, training and mentoring**

Aboriginal participation is understood as long-term capability building, not short-term compliance. Employment, training and mentoring pathways must be reliable, supported and connected to real jobs, particularly for priority cohorts.

## **8. Celebration of local stories, heroes and creative expression**

Local artists, storytellers and cultural leaders should shape how Waterloo South expresses its identity. Art, interpretation and storytelling must reflect both historical and contemporary Aboriginal leadership and creativity.



### **9. Care for water, landscape and sensory experience**

Waterways, wetlands and ecological systems are central to Gadigal Country. Design should reintroduce native species, acknowledge lost waterways and create sensory experiences that allow people to feel Country through sound, texture, shade and movement.

### **10. Intergenerational stewardship and legacy**

Decisions must consider long-term cultural, social and environmental outcomes, ensuring that future generations inherit places that support pride, wellbeing and a strong connection to Country.

These principles guide governance, engagement, design and delivery, ensuring that Connecting with Country remains a lived commitment rather than a procedural requirement.

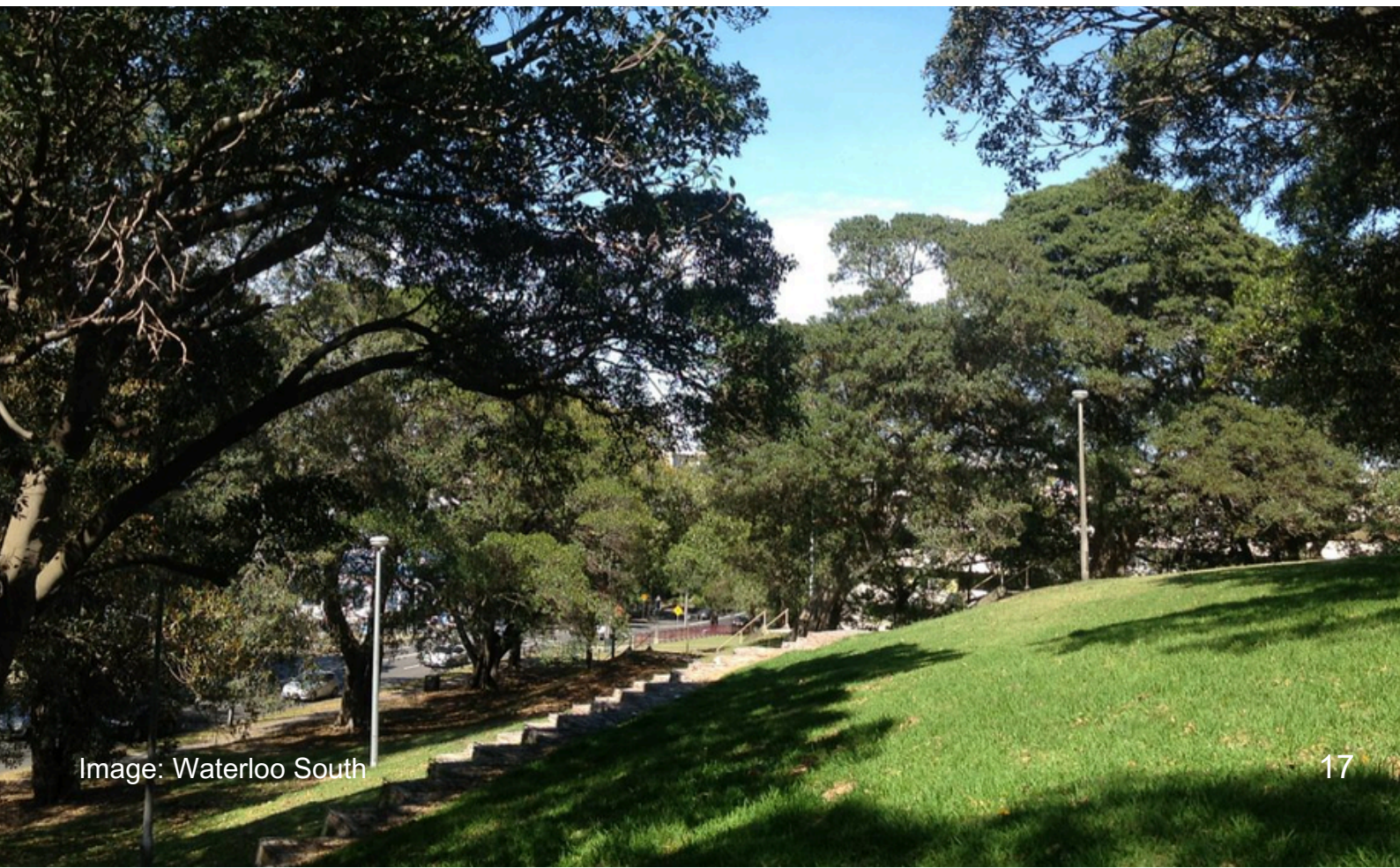


Image: Waterloo South

# 10. Governance and cultural decision, making

Strong and effective cultural governance is essential to ensuring that Connecting with Country is more than an aspiration and is consistently embedded in decision-making across the life of the Waterloo South project. This section sets out how cultural authority, community guidance and accountability are structured to inform planning, design, delivery and long-term stewardship on Gadigal Country.

## **Cultural authority and leadership**

Cultural authority for Waterloo South rests with Gadigal Custodians and recognised Aboriginal knowledge holders with enduring connections to place. Their role is to provide guidance on cultural matters, including Country, story, language, protocol and the appropriate expression of cultural identity within the precinct. This authority is acknowledged as foundational and must inform key decisions rather than be sought retrospectively.

Local Aboriginal community members, organisations and leaders also play a critical role in shaping contemporary cultural outcomes, reflecting Waterloo's long history as a place of Aboriginal movement, activism and community life. Governance arrangements recognise both Custodial authority and contemporary community leadership as essential to maintaining cultural integrity.

## **Cultural governance structure**

The Connecting with Country Framework supports an integrated cultural governance model that aligns with existing project governance while clearly defining how cultural advice is sought, considered and applied. Cultural governance is intended to operate alongside, not separate from, project decision-making, ensuring that cultural considerations are embedded within mainstream planning and delivery processes.

Governance structures may include advisory groups, working groups or panels comprising Custodians, community representatives, Aboriginal organisations and relevant project partners. These structures provide forums for guidance, review and dialogue, and enable cultural matters to be escalated and resolved in a transparent and culturally appropriate way.

## **Decision-making and accountability**

Clear accountability is central to maintaining trust with community. Cultural advice provided through Connecting with Country processes must be documented, attributed where appropriate and responded to transparently. Project teams are expected to demonstrate how guidance has influenced decisions, design outcomes or delivery approaches, and to clearly explain where and why alternative approaches may be required.

Community engagement outcomes consistently emphasised the importance of moving beyond verbal commitments. As such, cultural, social and participation commitments arising from Connecting with Country must be embedded into formal project documentation, including strategies, scopes, contracts and reporting frameworks, to ensure delivery partners are held to account over time.

### **Alignment across project streams**

Cultural governance for Waterloo South must operate across multiple streams, including Connecting with Country, Designing with Country, Aboriginal Participation, employment and procurement. This Framework supports alignment between these streams to avoid duplication, fragmentation or conflicting advice.

An integrated governance approach ensures that cultural themes, design intent, participation pathways and community priorities reinforce one another and remain consistent as the project evolves, new consultants are engaged and delivery phases change.

### **Cultural safety and capability**

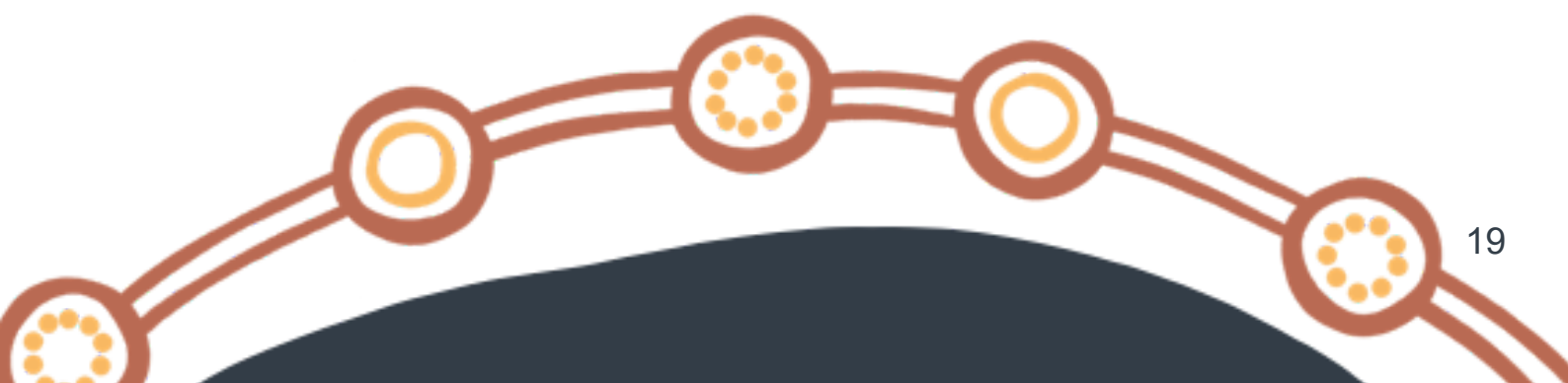
Cultural governance is supported by a commitment to cultural safety and capability across all project teams. This includes ensuring that consultants, contractors and decision-makers understand their responsibilities when working on Gadigal Country, including appropriate protocols, respectful engagement practices and the limits of their authority.

Orientation processes, cultural briefings and on-Country learning opportunities may form part of this approach, supporting informed decision-making and reducing the risk of cultural harm.

### **Ongoing review and adaptation**

Cultural governance arrangements are not static. They are intended to evolve in response to community feedback, project learnings and changing circumstances over the life of the redevelopment. Regular review of governance effectiveness, informed by community input, helps ensure that Connecting with Country remains responsive, credible and grounded in lived experience.

Through this governance approach, Waterloo South commits to shared responsibility, cultural accountability and long-term stewardship — ensuring that decisions made today contribute to enduring cultural, social and environmental outcomes for Country and community.



# 11. Our engagement approach

## Overview

Community engagement for Waterloo South is grounded in the outcomes of extensive previous consultation and is guided by the Aboriginal Engagement Strategy developed for the project. Together, these sources confirm that engagement must move beyond discrete consultation activities and operate as an ongoing, culturally safe relationship that informs decision-making across planning, design, delivery and long-term stewardship.

## Engagement purpose and focus

Engagement at Waterloo South is intended to ensure that Aboriginal voices meaningfully shape outcomes that affect Country, housing, community life and cultural continuity. Consultation outcomes consistently highlighted that engagement must have real influence, be transparent about decision-making, and deliver tangible benefits for Aboriginal people — particularly Gadigal Custodians, Aboriginal tenants and local Aboriginal organisations. Accordingly, engagement focuses on:

- embedding cultural authority and lived experience into decisions,
- supporting housing security and cultural safety for Aboriginal tenants,
- strengthening Aboriginal participation in employment, procurement and service delivery, and
- ensuring cultural identity and truth-telling are visibly embedded in the precinct.


## Who will be engaged

Engagement is undertaken with multiple Aboriginal stakeholder groups, recognising that cultural authority, community leadership and lived experience sit across different parts of the community.

This includes:

- Gadigal Custodians, Elders and Knowledge Holders, as holders of cultural authority for Country;
- Aboriginal tenants and families living in Waterloo South and the surrounding area, many with intergenerational connections to the estate;
- Local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) providing health, housing, legal, family, youth and aged-care services;
- Aboriginal community leaders, artists and advocates with long-standing connections to Redfern-Waterloo; and
- Aboriginal employment, training and business representatives, supporting economic participation pathways.

Engagement recognises that these groups hold different roles and perspectives, and that effective engagement requires tailored approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all model.



### **When and where engagement occurs**

Engagement is undertaken across the full lifecycle of the project, beginning in early planning and continuing through design, approvals, construction, transition and post-occupancy. Consultation outcomes highlighted the importance of engaging early — before key decisions are locked in — and maintaining regular touchpoints as the project evolves.

Engagement occurs in culturally appropriate settings, including:

- on-Country walks and site-based discussions,
- community venues and ACCO spaces,
- tenancy forums and small group yarning sessions, and
- project-specific workshops and governance forums aligned to key milestones.

This staged and continuous approach ensures that community guidance informs decisions as they are being shaped, not after they are finalised.

### **How engagement is undertaken**

Engagement is delivered using culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and relational methods, consistent with the Aboriginal Engagement Strategy and community feedback. Approaches prioritise listening, dialogue and shared understanding rather than presentation-led consultation.

Methods include:

- yarning-based discussions and facilitated workshops
- co-design sessions linked to planning and design milestones
- one-on-one engagement with tenants, Elders and organisations
- iterative feedback loops that test and refine ideas over time, and
- clear communication about how input will be used and what decisions have been made.

Engagement processes are designed to be accessible, respectful of time and capacity, and responsive to community feedback, with flexibility to adapt as needs change.

### **Governance-led engagement**

Consultation outcomes identified fragmented engagement as a key risk in previous processes. In response, engagement for Waterloo South is embedded within clear governance structures, including cultural governance, tenancy, community organisation, and employment and procurement working groups.

These forums ensure that engagement:

- is coordinated rather than duplicated,
- is connected directly to decision-making pathways, and
- provides accountability for how community guidance is applied.

Governance-led engagement supports continuity across project phases and changes in project teams, ensuring knowledge, relationships and commitments are carried forward over time.

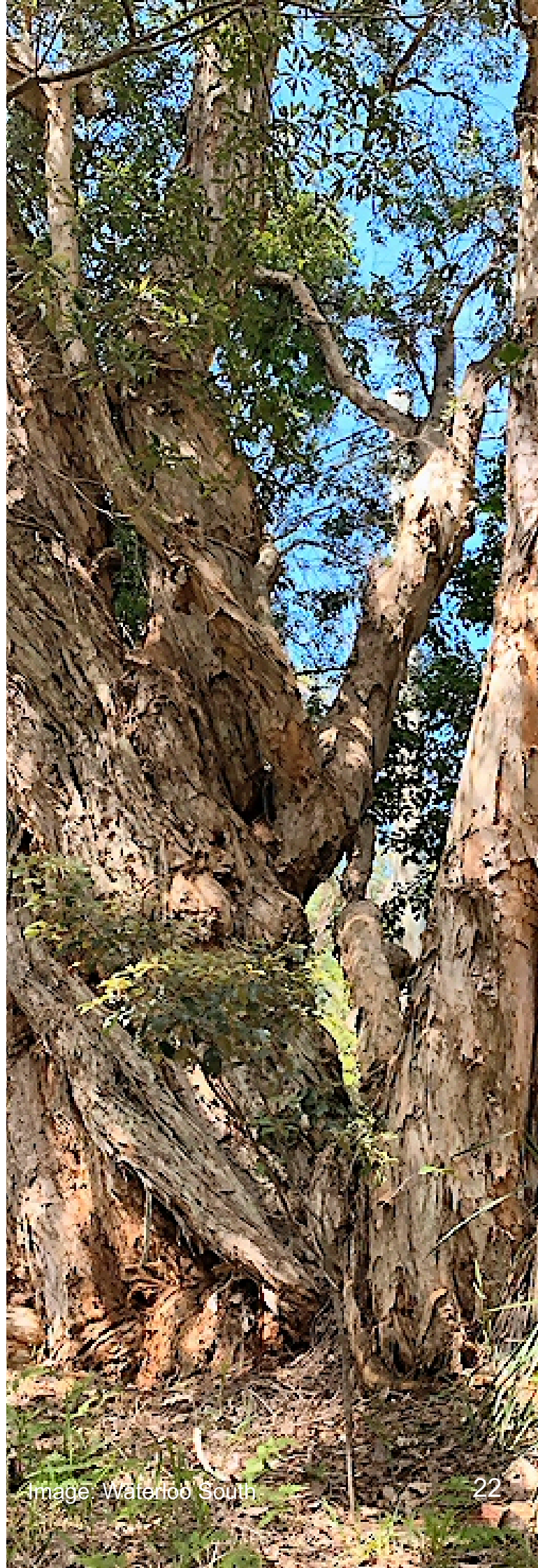
## **Cultural safety, transparency and accountability**

Cultural safety underpins all engagement activities. This includes recognising historical and ongoing impacts of displacement and trauma in Waterloo, providing safe spaces for participation, and working through trusted intermediaries where appropriate.

Transparency is maintained through:

- regular updates to community and governance forums,
- clear articulation of decisions and constraints, and
- documented responses to key issues raised through engagement.

Accountability is reinforced by embedding engagement commitments into project documentation, delivery plans and reporting frameworks, ensuring engagement outcomes translate into real and lasting change.





## Continuity through change

Across all stages, Connecting with Country provides continuity as project phases progress and delivery partners change. The governance and working groups established for Waterloo South ensure that cultural knowledge, community priorities and agreed commitments are carried forward rather than reset.

By embedding engagement across the lifecycle of the project, Waterloo South commits to an approach where Connecting with Country is not a milestone to be completed, but a relationship that endures — guiding decisions, strengthening accountability and supporting shared stewardship of Gadigal Country for generations to come.

Focus Area	Early Planning & Visioning	Design Development	Approvals & Construction	Activation & Stewardship
<b>Cultural Authority &amp; Integrity</b>	Embed cultural authority to guide Country, story, language, protocol and place vision.	Ensure design concepts align with cultural values and place-based narratives.	Uphold respectful management of Country and appropriate cultural protocols during works.	Maintain cultural integrity through interpretation, naming, programming and future adaptation.
<b>Tenant &amp; Community Voice</b>	Capture lived experience, aspirations and safety priorities to inform early planning.	Integrate feedback into housing layouts, shared spaces and public domain outcomes.	Maintain clear communication and responsive issue resolution during delivery.	Support ongoing feedback to ensure spaces remain culturally safe and functional.
<b>Community Partnerships &amp; Services</b>	Identify community priorities, service needs and potential impacts.	Align design responses with access, service delivery and community use.	Coordinate with local organisations to support collaboration and avoid duplication.	Enable activation, programming and long-term community benefit.
<b>Employment &amp; Economic Participation</b>	Identify early employment, training and procurement pathways.	Shape design decisions to create participation opportunities.	Monitor and support delivery of employment and procurement commitments.	Strengthen sustained employment, enterprise growth and economic participation over time.

# 13. Informing Designing with Country



Connecting with Country provides the cultural, relational and governance foundations that inform all Designing with Country outcomes at Waterloo South. While the Designing with Country Strategy sets out the cultural narratives, design principles and spatial directions for the precinct, this Framework ensures that those directions remain grounded in lived community knowledge, cultural authority and ongoing engagement as the project evolves. This section explains how insights gained through Connecting with Country are translated into design intent, tested through design development and carried forward across successive design teams and project phases.

## **From connection to design direction**

Designing with Country at Waterloo South begins with the understanding built through Connecting with Country. Cultural guidance gathered through engagement with Gadigal Custodians, cultural knowledge holders, Aboriginal community members, tenants and organisations informs how design questions are framed, what priorities are set and which values guide decision-making.

Rather than treating cultural knowledge as an input to be extracted, Connecting with Country establishes an ongoing relationship through which understanding deepens over time. This allows design direction to evolve responsively, reflecting both long-standing cultural narratives and contemporary community experience.

## **Translation into design intent and principles**

Insights from Connecting with Country are translated into clear design intent, principles and themes through the Designing with Country Strategy and related design documentation. This includes guidance on:

- place identity and narrative;
- relationships to land, water and movement;
- public domain and landscape responses;
- housing and shared space considerations;
- art, interpretation, naming and storytelling; and
- operational and activation considerations.

Design teams are expected to demonstrate how cultural guidance has informed their work, showing a clear line of sight between engagement outcomes and design decisions.

## **Design review and cultural accountability**

Designing with Country is supported by structured review processes that ensure accountability. Cultural governance forums, including the Gadigal Cultural Governance Group and other relevant working groups, provide opportunities to review emerging designs, test alignment with cultural intent and identify where refinement is required.

These review points are critical to avoiding superficial or symbolic responses. They ensure that cultural expression is embedded early, reinforced through iteration and protected as projects move from concept to delivery.

### **Continuity across design teams and phases**

Given the multi-stage nature of Waterloo South, design teams and consultants will change over time. Connecting with Country provides continuity across these transitions by carrying cultural knowledge, agreed principles and community priorities forward.

Design briefs, scopes and handover documentation are informed by Connecting with Country outcomes, ensuring that new teams understand not only what is to be delivered, but why it matters and how cultural integrity is to be maintained.

### **Informing delivery and operation**

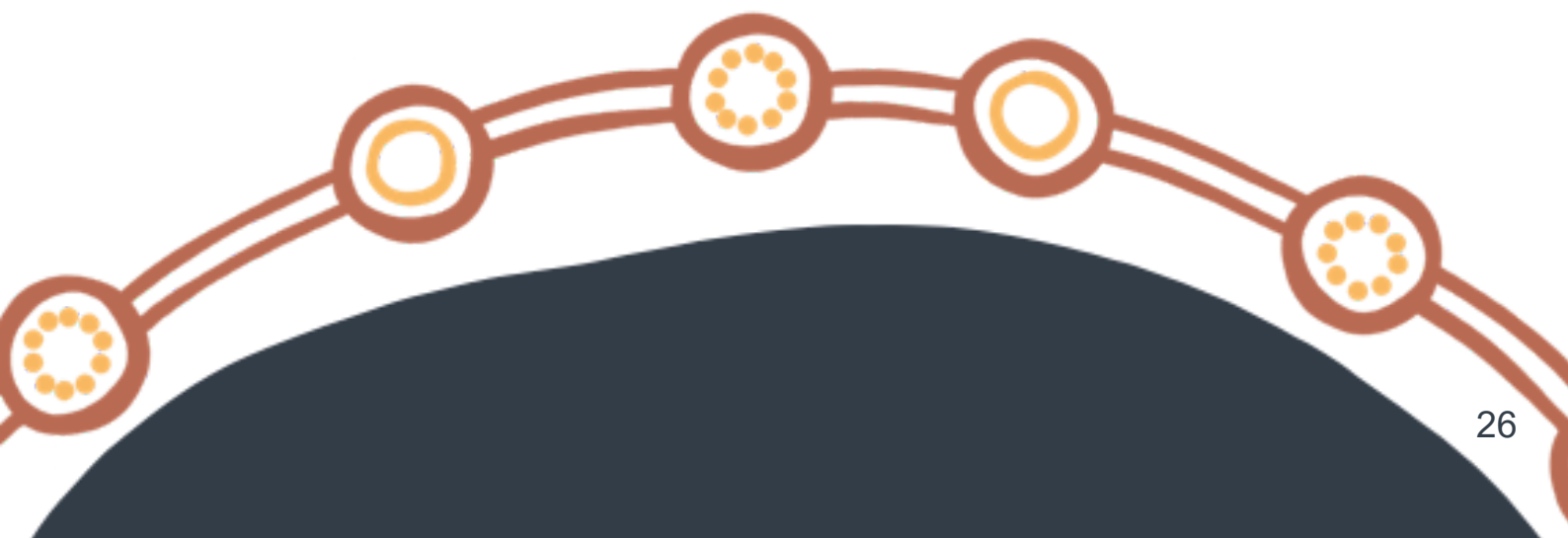
Designing with Country does not end with design documentation. Cultural intent must be realised through delivery, construction and long-term operation. Connecting with Country informs how design outcomes are implemented on site, how interpretation is delivered, how spaces are activated and how future changes are approached.

Ongoing engagement with the community helps test whether design outcomes are functioning as intended and allows for adjustment over time, reinforcing the understanding that Designing with Country is a living practice rather than a fixed outcome.

### **Relationship to other project streams**

Designing with Country is closely linked to other project streams, including Aboriginal participation, employment and procurement, tenancy outcomes and community development. Connecting with Country ensures that these streams are aligned, reinforcing rather than competing with one another.

By grounding design outcomes in connection, governance and community-led insight, Waterloo South ensures that Designing with Country delivers places that are culturally grounded, socially meaningful and resilient over time.



# 14. Aboriginal participation and leadership

Aboriginal participation and leadership are central to achieving meaningful and enduring outcomes at Waterloo South. Consistent with community feedback, participation is understood not as a compliance requirement or a short-term initiative, but as a long-term commitment to building capability, leadership and shared stewardship on Gadigal Country.

This section outlines how Aboriginal participation is embedded across governance, design, employment, procurement and community life, ensuring that Aboriginal people are not only consulted but are active contributors to shaping, delivering and caring for the precinct over time.

## **Leadership and governance roles**

Aboriginal leadership is embedded through formal governance structures that provide clear pathways for cultural authority, lived experience and community priorities to influence decision-making. This includes leadership roles held by Gadigal Custodians, Aboriginal community representatives, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal tenants across governance and working groups.

These roles ensure that Aboriginal people are involved in setting direction, reviewing outcomes and holding delivery partners to account. Leadership is recognised as both cultural and contemporary, valuing Custodial authority alongside the lived experience of those who call Waterloo home today.

## **Participation in design and place-making**

Aboriginal participation in design extends beyond cultural advice to include active involvement in shaping place outcomes. This includes participation in design reviews, co-design processes, artistic contributions, interpretation, naming and place activation.

Community engagement outcomes highlighted the importance of seeing local stories, leaders and creative expression reflected in the built environment. Opportunities for Aboriginal artists, designers, storytellers and cultural practitioners are therefore prioritised to ensure that Waterloo South visibly reflects its Aboriginal identity in authentic and locally grounded ways.

## **Employment, training and economic participation**

Long-term employment, training and mentoring pathways are a core aspiration for the Waterloo South community. Participation is framed around sustained capability building rather than short-term targets or project-by-project engagement. Aboriginal employment and procurement initiatives are designed to:

- support pathways into construction, trades, professional services, creative industries and precinct operations;
- embed mentoring and wraparound support to improve retention and progression;



- create second-chance opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage; and
- strengthen local Aboriginal businesses and organisations through meaningful, repeat opportunities.

These pathways are informed by community priorities and overseen through governance arrangements to ensure accountability and continuity.

### **Strengthening Aboriginal organisations and community capacity**

Local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations play a critical role in supporting community wellbeing, service delivery and cultural continuity. Participation at Waterloo South prioritises partnerships that strengthen these organisations rather than duplicating or displacing existing services.

This includes involving Aboriginal organisations in planning, programming, service delivery and activation, and ensuring they are adequately resourced to participate. Building community capacity is understood as essential to achieving long-term social and cultural outcomes alongside physical redevelopment.

### **Youth and intergenerational participation**

Youth and Elders were consistently identified as priority groups through engagement. Participation frameworks therefore ensure that:

- Elders guide cultural integrity, protocol and continuity; and
- young people shape spaces, programs and opportunities that reflect their needs, aspirations and strengths.

This intergenerational approach supports cultural transmission, leadership development and long-term community resilience, ensuring that participation today contributes to future cultural strength.

### **Measuring meaningful participation**

Meaningful participation is measured not only through quantitative targets, but through qualitative outcomes such as cultural safety, community trust, leadership development and continuity over time. Reporting and review processes focus on whether participation is delivering real benefit, influence and opportunity for Aboriginal people and communities.

By embedding Aboriginal participation and leadership across governance, design, delivery and stewardship, Waterloo South commits to a redevelopment that supports self-determination, builds long-term capability and ensures that Aboriginal people remain central to shaping the future of Country.



# 15. Knowledge sharing and cultural integrity

This Framework recognises that Aboriginal cultural knowledge is not a commodity or a design resource to be extracted, but living knowledge held by people with enduring connections to Country. Respecting cultural integrity is therefore fundamental to maintaining trust, cultural safety and the long-term credibility of the project.

## Respectful knowledge sharing

All knowledge shared by Gadigal Custodians and Aboriginal community members is offered within the context of relationship and consent. Engagement processes prioritise listening, care and reciprocity, recognising that not all knowledge can or should be recorded, reproduced or made public.

Knowledge sharing is guided by clear expectations around:

- why information is being shared,
- how it will be used to inform decision-making and design,
- who will have access to it, and
- what limits apply to its use or dissemination.



Image: 'The Block', Redfern

## Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)

This Framework aligns with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) principles to protect the rights of Aboriginal people to control how their knowledge, stories, names, imagery and cultural expressions are used.

Key ICIP commitments include:

- informed consent before recording or reproducing cultural knowledge;
- appropriate attribution of knowledge holders where consent is given;
- restrictions on reuse, adaptation or commercialisation without agreement; and
- respect for ongoing custodianship, including the right to withdraw or amend consent over time.

These principles apply across design, interpretation, art, naming, storytelling, media and public communications associated with Waterloo South.

## Cultural knowledge in design and delivery

Cultural knowledge informs design intent, principles and outcomes, but does not automatically translate into public display or interpretation. Decisions about what is expressed publicly are guided by community preference, cultural protocol and context.

Design teams and delivery partners are expected to demonstrate how cultural guidance has informed outcomes, without disclosing sensitive knowledge. This ensures cultural integrity is maintained while still achieving meaningful and grounded design responses.

# 16. Monitoring, review and adaption

Monitoring, review and adaptation are essential to ensuring that Connecting with Country remains meaningful, credible and responsive over the life of the Waterloo South project. Given the long-term and multi-stage nature of the redevelopment, this Framework is designed to be actively used, tested and refined rather than treated as a static document.

## **Monitoring effectiveness**

The effectiveness of Connecting with Country is monitored through a combination of qualitative and process-based measures, informed directly by community feedback and cultural governance input. Monitoring focuses on whether engagement is occurring early and consistently, whether cultural guidance is influencing decisions, and whether commitments are being delivered in practice.

Rather than relying solely on numerical indicators, monitoring considers indicators such as:

- the quality and continuity of relationships with Gadigal Custodians and Aboriginal community members;
- the clarity and transparency of decision-making;
- the extent to which cultural guidance is reflected in design, delivery and operational outcomes; and
- community confidence that commitments are being upheld over time.

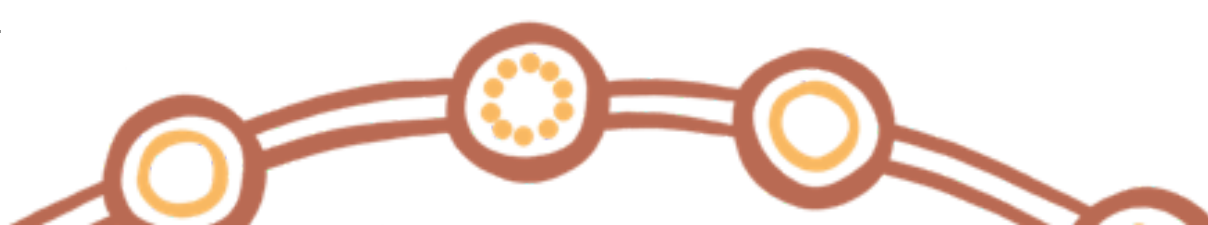
## **Review processes**


Regular review of Connecting with Country processes occurs at key project milestones and transition points, including changes in project stage, design teams or delivery partners. Reviews are informed by cultural governance forums and working groups, ensuring that Aboriginal voices are central to assessing what is working and where improvement is required. Review processes are used to reflect on engagement effectiveness, identify gaps or risks, and confirm whether cultural priorities established earlier in the project remain relevant or require refinement as the precinct evolves.

## **Adaptation over time**

Adaptation is a core principle of this Framework. Connecting with Country is understood as an ongoing process that must respond to change, learning and evolving community needs. Where monitoring or review identifies shortcomings, engagement approaches, governance arrangements or delivery mechanisms are adjusted in consultation with community and cultural governance groups.

Adaptation may include refining engagement methods, strengthening accountability mechanisms, revisiting governance structures or updating guidance to reflect new phases of work. This flexibility ensures that the Framework remains fit for purpose across decades of delivery.





### **Accountability and transparency**

Findings from monitoring and review are shared through established governance and engagement forums, supporting transparency and trust. Clear records of cultural guidance, responses and actions help demonstrate accountability and continuity as project teams change.

By embedding monitoring, review and adaptation into the Framework, Waterloo South commits to continuous improvement, shared responsibility and long-term stewardship—ensuring that Connecting with Country remains responsive, culturally grounded and effective throughout the life of the project.

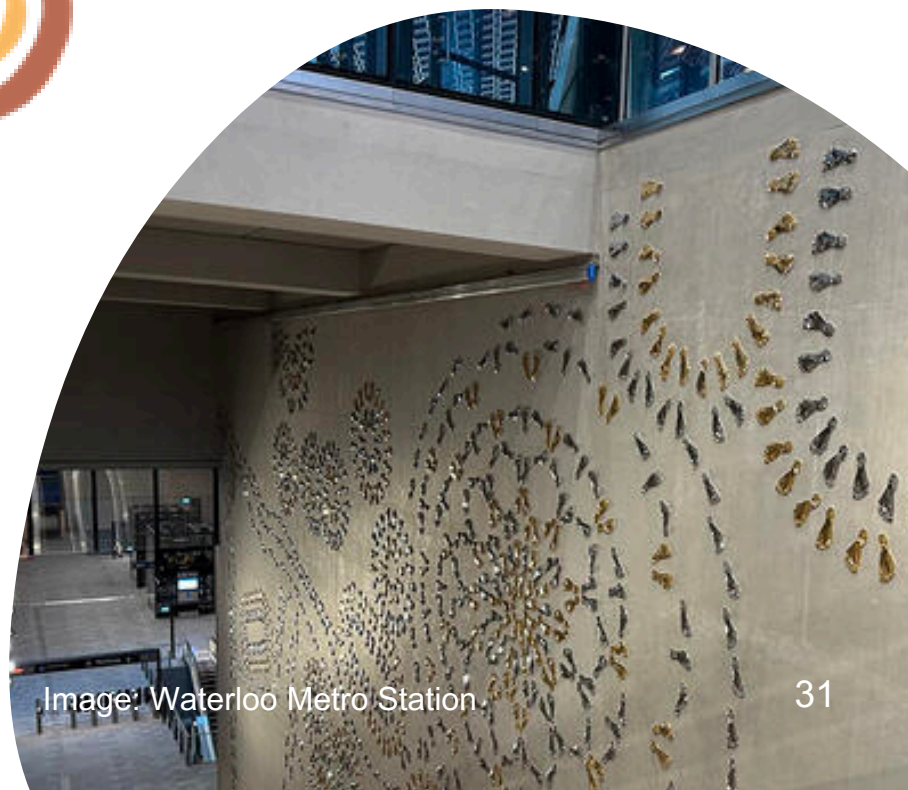


Image: Waterloo Metro Station.

# 17. Commitments and next steps

This Connecting with Country Framework represents a shared commitment to working differently on Gadigal Country. It sets clear expectations for how relationships with Country and with Gadigal and local Aboriginal communities will guide decision-making across the life of the Waterloo South redevelopment. These commitments are intended to endure beyond individual project stages, teams or delivery partners.

## Ongoing commitments

Waterloo South commits to embedding Connecting with Country as a foundational and ongoing practice across planning, design, delivery, occupation and long-term stewardship. This includes a commitment to:

- work in genuine partnership with Gadigal Custodians and local Aboriginal communities;
- uphold cultural authority, cultural integrity and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property principles;
- engage early, transparently and consistently, with clear feedback on how community guidance is used;
- avoid tokenistic approaches and ensure cultural outcomes are meaningful and locally grounded;
- support Aboriginal leadership, participation and long-term capability building; and
- maintain accountability through clear governance, documentation and review.

These commitments apply to all agencies, partners, consultants and contractors engaged on the project.

## Embedding the framework

The Connecting with Country Framework will be embedded into project governance, design and delivery processes to ensure it is actively used rather than treated as a reference document. This includes integrating the Framework into:

- project induction and onboarding for new team members;
- consultant scopes, briefs and procurement documentation;
- governance and working group terms of reference; and
- ongoing reporting, review and assurance processes.

Embedding the Framework in this way supports continuity and consistency as the project evolves over time.

## Immediate next steps

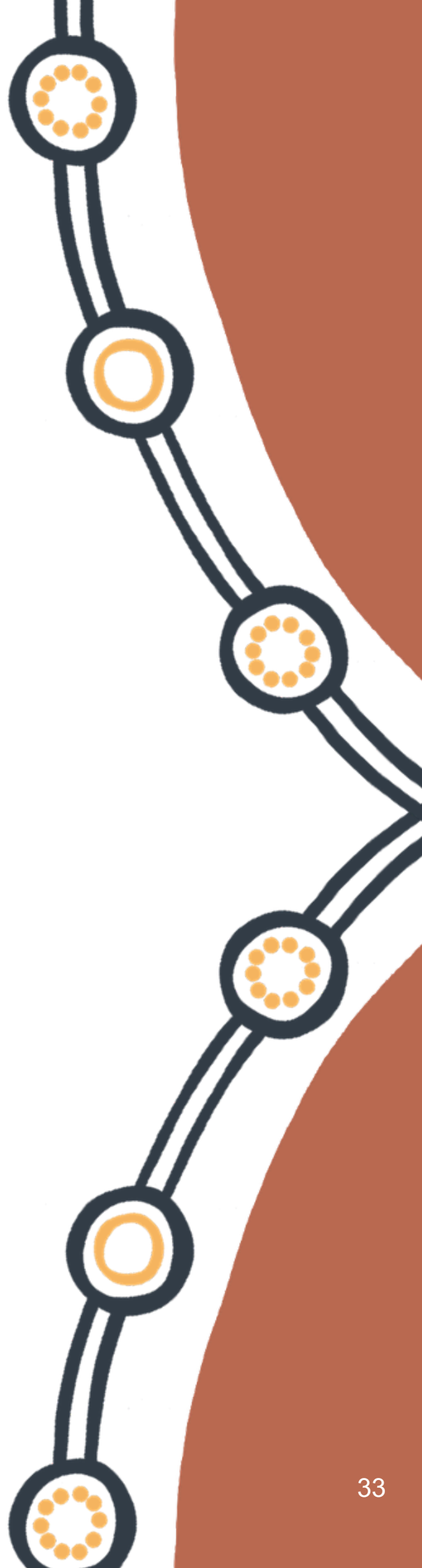
The immediate focus following endorsement of this Framework is to establish or confirm the governance and engagement structures required to give effect to its intent. Key next steps include:

- confirming membership and roles of cultural governance and working groups;
- aligning the Connecting with Country Framework with the Designing with Country Strategy and Aboriginal Engagement Strategy;
- briefing project partners and delivery teams on expectations and responsibilities; and
- identifying early actions and priorities for upcoming project stages.

These steps ensure that Connecting with Country informs work already underway and is positioned to guide future phases.

### **Looking ahead**

As Waterloo South progresses, this Framework provides a foundation for long-term partnership, learning and shared stewardship. Its success will be measured not only by physical outcomes, but by the strength of relationships, the continuity of cultural leadership and the confidence of community that Country is being respected and cared for. By committing to Connecting with Country as an ongoing practice, Waterloo South affirms its responsibility to honour the past, support the present and create a future shaped with care, respect and cultural integrity for generations to come.





## Note of Acknowledgement

This report has been prepared by Ngurra Advisory, with the invaluable contributions and guidance of Gadigal Traditional Custodians who have walked alongside Ngurra Advisory and the broader project team throughout this journey.

The Gadigal Custodians involved in this process have shared their cultural knowledge, stories, and perspectives to ensure that this document reflects a deep respect for Country and culture. They are supportive of the project, the approach undertaken, and the contents of this document, and look forward to seeing these shared aspirations brought to life through the delivery of the project.

### Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) Statement

Ngurra Advisory acknowledges the ongoing ownership and custodianship of all cultural knowledge, stories, language, and perspectives shared throughout this process by the Gadigal Traditional Custodians.

This information remains the intellectual and cultural property of the Gadigal people and is shared within this document with permission for the purpose of this project only. It must not be reproduced, shared, or used for any other purpose without the express consent of the Gadigal Custodians.



## Thank you

Ngurra Advisory extends our sincere gratitude to the Gadigal Traditional Custodians, Elders, and Knowledge Holders who have generously shared their time, knowledge, and lived experience throughout this process.

Your guidance, wisdom, and dedication to Caring for Country have been instrumental in shaping this framework, ensuring that the design, delivery, and long-term stewardship of this place honour Gadigal values, stories, and responsibilities.

We recognise the depth of connection, resilience, and commitment that Gadigal people continue to carry for these lands, waterways, skies, and all living beings that call them home.

This document reflects not only your contributions, but also our shared commitment to ensuring Country remains central, cared for, respected, and celebrated through every stage of the Waterloo South Project.



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