



MONTEFIORE ST IVES

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY REPORT

CLIENT : MONTEFIORE

CODE : S25-1063

ARCADIA

SYDNEY
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live and work. We acknowledge their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past, present and emerging whose knowledge and wisdom has and will ensure the continuation of cultures and traditional practices.

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01 PROJECT FRAMEWORK

DESIGNING WITH COUNTRY

“We don’t see Country as a resource; it’s a living entity intertwined into our identity and informing our worldview.”

— Luciano Svagelli

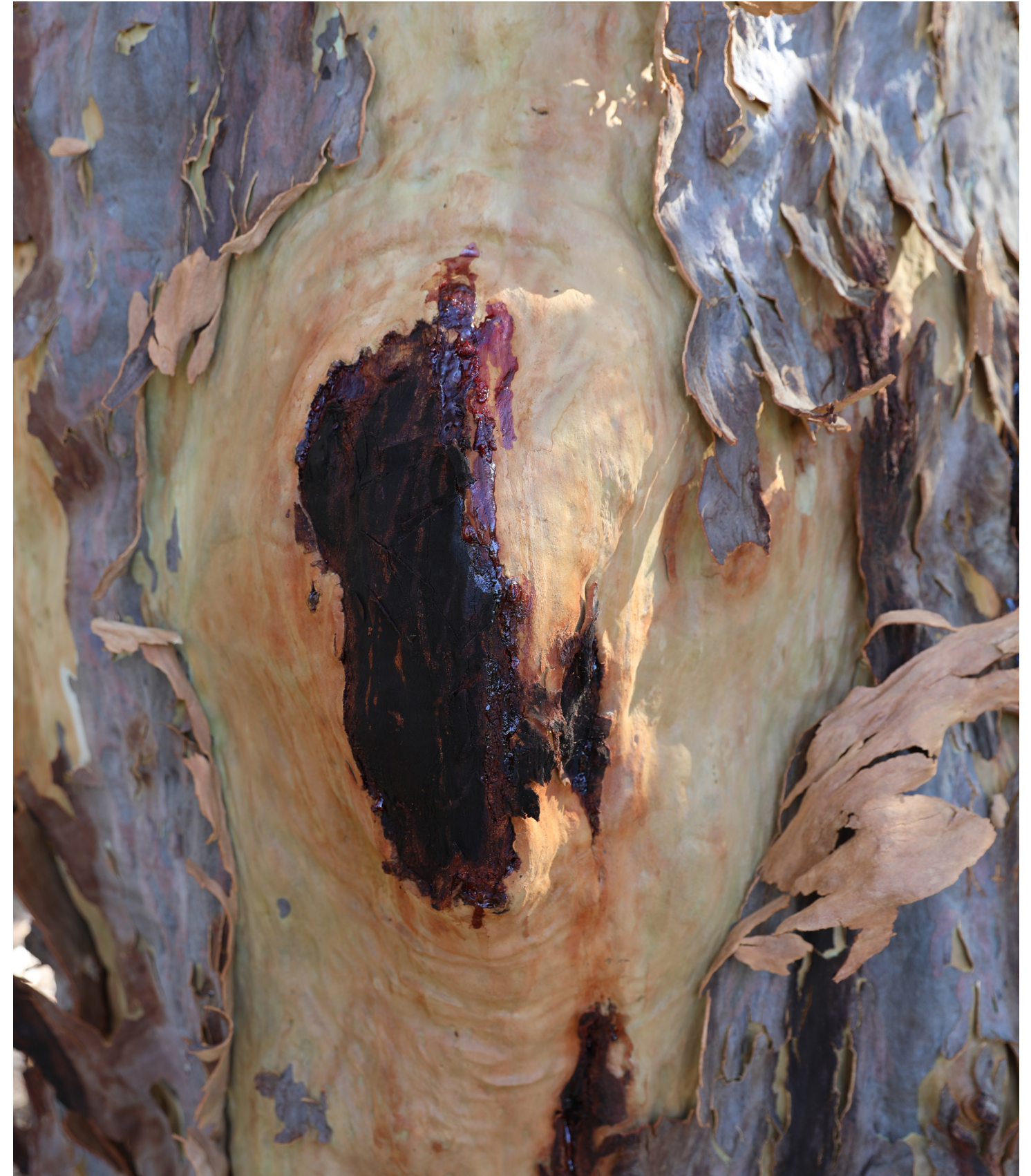
COLLABORATING WITH FIRST PEOPLES

Arcadia is a leading landscape architecture and urban design practice working at the intersection of the built form and nature. Our focus is to enrich community and Country, shaping meaningful places for all Australians in regional and urban settings. We design for people first, taking a considered approach to place through collaboration with end users, stakeholders and First Nations communities. By placing high importance on the way people interact with the environment, we continuously pursue rigorous, enduring outcomes that use landscape as a powerful tool for connection. Building on existing ties with First Nations organisations and cultural leaders, our approach is to develop an Indigenous design strategy that works to inform the approach to placemaking, art and interpretation, planting, spatial programming and material selection.

FIRST NATIONS TEAM

Arcadia’s commitment to First Nations understanding and cultural competence sets our projects apart. Arcadia’s First Nations Design Consultancy is led by Luciano Svagelli from the Redfern Aboriginal community with connections to the central deserts of the Pitjantjara and Luritja peoples, supported by Noah Orman, from Birri and Guugu Yimithirr peoples. Our landscape architects and urban designers work with the team to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into every project.

As a part of an ongoing process of trust building, knowledge sharing and partnership, we have the ability to collaborate and engage with First Nations communities in the locale of every new project site.



CULTURAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND USE OF FIRST NATIONS CONTENT

ARCADIA ACKNOWLEDGES AND PAYS RESPECT TO THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LANDS THAT WE WORK AND DESIGN ON.

The cultural knowledge embedded in this report has been developed through meaningful collaboration with Uncle Dennis Foley. This information reflects deep cultural significance, intellectual property, and community connection.

Use of any First Nations content in this report, including artwork, stories, design motifs, language, and cultural insights, is not permitted outside the scope of this project without the express written consent of the relevant First Nations collaborators. Ongoing respect for cultural protocols and ownership is essential.

UNCLE DENNIS FOLEY

Uncle Dennis Foley, Elder and Knowledge Holder is one of the leading figures in First Nations education. His matrilineal connection is Gai-mariagal of Northern Sydney, and his patrilineal connection is to the Wiradjuri people of the Turon River region. He is active within the Indigenous community and Indigenous business associations. Dennis teaches the stories of his Grandmother country, Gai-mariagal Country: Matriarchal country which today is known as the Northern Sydney region of Sydney, Australia.

Uncle Dennis was incredibly generous and knowledgeable in teaching us the stories of his Grandmother, matriarchal stories, and the rich cultural narratives of the Gai-mariagal lands.



Pictured: Uncle Dennis Foley

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

Embedding First Nations knowledge into the designs of Montefiore, St Ives will identify narratives to explore, as well as opportunities to facilitate cultural practice and community aspirations; it is Arcadia's position that developing a well-considered First Nations design strategy is integral to best practice urban design in the contemporary Australian context.

The purpose of Connecting with Country during the initial stage of a project is to identify and establish preliminary Indigenous design moves and narratives for development throughout a project, as well as establishing a framework for integration throughout all stages of design and construction to ensure the integrity of the original intent is maintained.

Through a reconciliatory process of collaborative design, it is our position that Indigenous design offers the following:

- Authentic placemaking
- Insight into ecological systems
- Place-appropriate planting design
- Facilitates cultural exchange and education
- Supports community health and biophilic connections
- Reveals opportunities for land management partnerships
- Cares for Country
- Respects First Peoples through reconciliatory processes
- Creates unique neighbourhoods and facilitates civic stewardship.



BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY FRAMEWORK 2023

The design for the proposed development of Montefiore St Ives will be guided by the principles of the NSW Government's Connecting with Country framework, ensuring that Aboriginal perspectives, values, and knowledge systems are meaningfully embedded in the project.

The Connecting with Country framework is designed as a tool to support both non-Indigenous and Indigenous project teams to create places, buildings and infrastructure that respect their connection to Aboriginal land. The goal is to place consideration of Country at the heart of the state's planning system.

The document highlights the need for moving from a human centred approach to a Country centred approach. A Country centred approach is a circular network consisting of integrated relationships, where humans are part of the natural environment.

"The Connecting with Country Framework is critical in [the] re-imagining of how we engage with Country and cultural landscapes. It enables Aboriginal people's values, knowledge systems and mechanisms for connecting to country to influence the design and planning processes for building and architecture," (NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, David Harris)

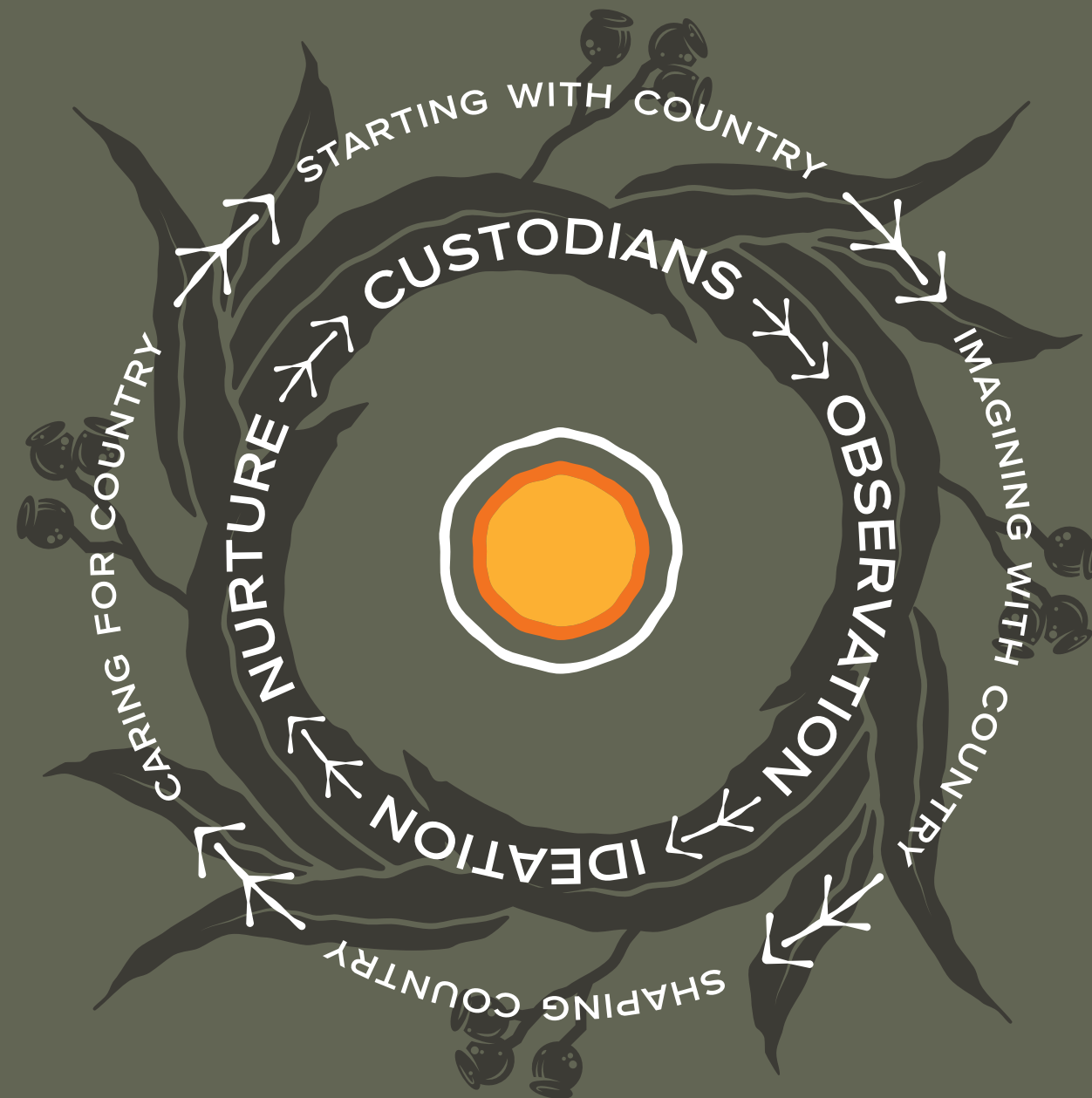
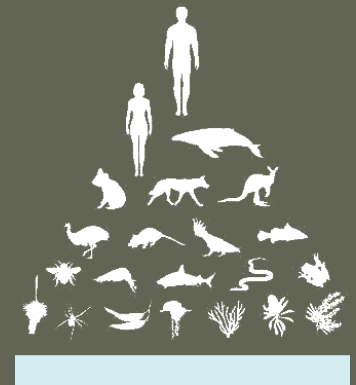


Figure 01:
Project Lifecycle from an
Aboriginal Perspective

Diagram from Arcadia Landscape Architecture
Connecting to Country Framework (2025).

"First Nations peoples around the world have long understood the importance of living in balance with the natural world, developing traditional practices and knowledge to support that way of life."

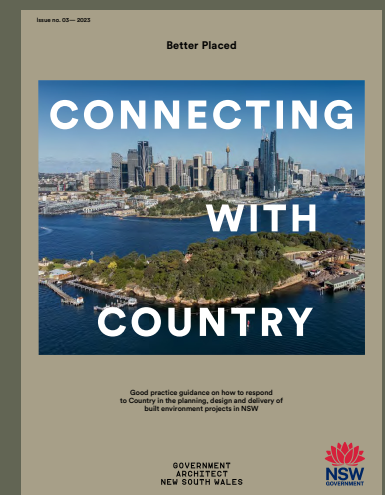
— Abbie Galvin (NSW Government Architect)



Moving from
Human-centred



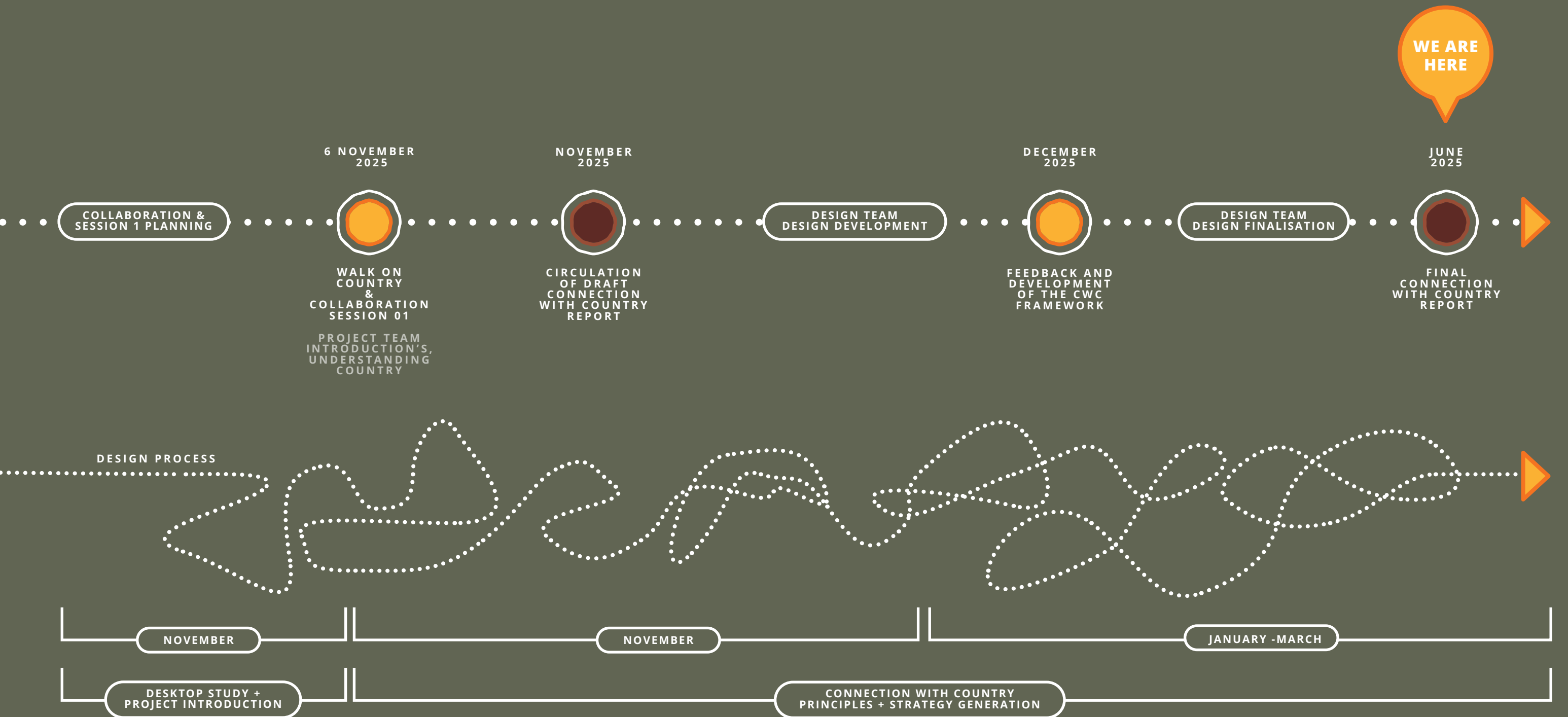
to
Country-centred
approach



CONNECTING TO COUNTRY TIMELINE

As a part of a national move towards reconciliation, it is essential that we work with Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work in, exploring opportunities to share and exchange knowledge and culture.

Ongoing consultation will ensure that the design is grounded in cultural knowledge, respectful of the stories and significance of Country, and enriched by the perspectives of Traditional Custodians. This collaborative approach is essential to creating a place that is meaningful, responsive, and deeply connected to the land on which we are working.



02 UNDERSTANDING PLACE

"Anyone can build
a building but not
everyone can give
it spirit."

— Uncle Dennis



SITE UNDERSTANDING: COUNTRY

GAI-MARIAGAL COUNTRY

St Ives sits on Gai-mariagal Country, the traditional lands along Sydney's north-eastern shores. For thousands of years, the Gai-mariagal clans lived in close relationship with the land and sea, shaping a way of life deeply connected to their environment. Their fishing practices, ceremonies, and sandstone engravings tell stories of a rich cultural heritage woven into Country. While colonisation brought immense disruption and displacement, the Gai-mariagal people's enduring connection to Country continues today. The area surrounding the Montefiore site remains culturally significant, reminding us to honour Country as a living relationship, one that calls for truth-telling, respect and the continuation of culture through the way we live and design.



UNDERSTANDING PLACE: SITE CONTEXT

The site is located in St Ives on the Upper North Shore of Sydney, approximately 18Km from the CBD and in the local government area (LGA) of Ku-Ring-Gai Council.

St Ives, has a higher-than-average proportion of older residents with nearly 20% of the population aged 65 and over. The site is located on the eastern edge of the local centre surrounded a mix of high, medium and low residential land zoning as well as educational infrastructure. Located within a well-established community of seniors living, the site is surrounded by a range of accessible community amenities.

It is within 800m of St Ives Shopping Centre with over 100 retail spaces with supermarkets, cafes and specialty shops as well as comprehensive allied health services, a medical centre a public library and a neighbourhood centre. St Ives Club, a well-established bowling and recreation club, is also within close proximity to the site.

Bedes Forest is in close proximity to the site and is to be redeveloped into a community park.

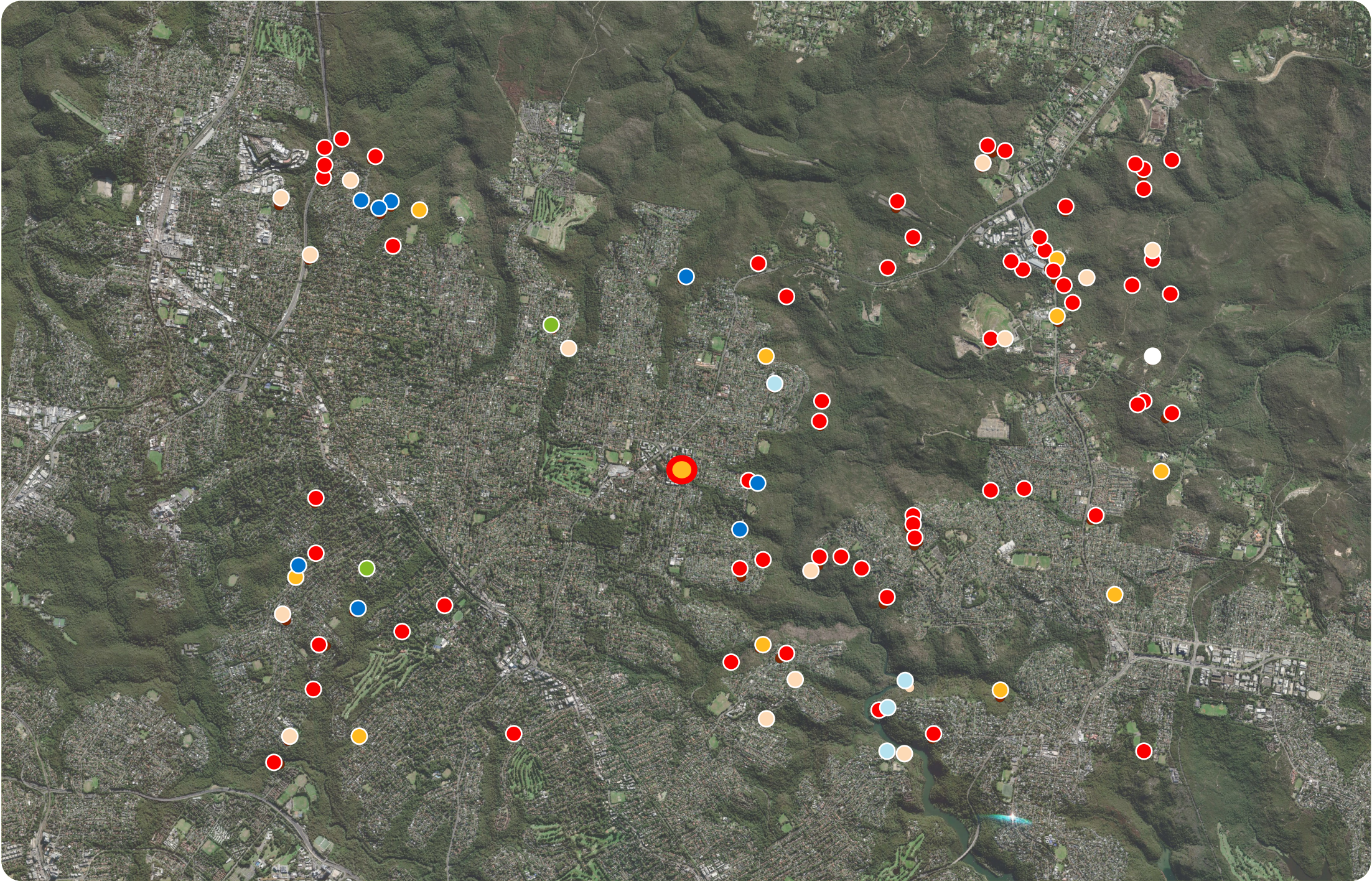
A network of parks and green spaces, including close proximity to Garigal National Park, which provides recreation opportunities.



UNDERSTANDING PLACE: AHIMS REPORT

Based on the AHIMS mapping, the broader St Ives area demonstrates a high concentration and diversity of recorded Aboriginal sites, highlighting its longstanding cultural significance to the Gai-Mariagal people and neighbouring Aboriginal groups. The mapped sites include extensive rock art (pigment and engraved), grinding grooves, artefact scatters, shell deposits, modified trees, potential archaeological deposits (PADs) and burial sites. The density of these recorded places, particularly along sandstone ridgelines, sheltered rock overhangs, waterways and valley systems, indicates that the area was an important cultural landscape supporting a range of activities including habitation, ceremony, resource gathering, tool manufacture, travel and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

The distribution of sites across the landscape reflects the strong relationship between people and Country, with elevated ridges providing outlooks across the surrounding valleys and waterways, and sandstone environments offering suitable locations for art, shelter and resource use. The presence of both tangible archaeological evidence and culturally significant places suggests that the area formed part of a connected cultural network rather than isolated occupation sites. Collectively, the AHIMS records demonstrate that the St Ives locality retains a rich Aboriginal cultural heritage, with the landscape continuing to express stories of occupation, movement, connection and custodianship that have endured over thousands of years.



(K)	(D)	(K)	(D)	(K)	(D)	
■	Art (Pigment or Engraved)	■	Grinding Groove	■	Shell Artefact	■ Burial
■	Artefact	■	Potential Archaeological Deposit	■	Modified Tree (Scared or Engraved)	● Site



UNDERSTANDING PLACE: HYDROLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Hydrology:

The Site is close to waterways which run through Garigal National Park, including Rocky creek to the southwest and Middle Harbour Creek to the southeast of the site

Topography:

St Ives is located on the relatively flatter top of a ridgeline

The Site has an elevation change of 5m, the highest point at an elevation of 161m on the west side, down to the lowest point of 156m in the southeast side of the site



KEY

- SITE
- DIRECTION OF SLOPE
- HIGHEST POINT



UNDERSTANDING PLACE: DEEP TIME GEOLOGY

The site sits within an area of Ashfield Shale, leading down into Hawkesbury River Sandstone.

The site sits on a higher ridge of the Sydney Basin, leading into Garigal National Park, where the erosion of sandstone has created deep gullies and valleys.

KEY

- TUTH - HAWKESBURY RIVER SANDSTONE
- TWAI - ASHFIELD SHALE
- SITE
- WALKING CIRCUMFERENCE

01 : Hawksbury River Sandstone
02 : Ashfield Shale
03 : Enriched Sandstone Moist Forest





UNDERSTANDING PLACE: PRE-COLONIAL VEGETATION

The site has two vegetation groups of most significance, Sydney Turpentine Iron Bark Forest which is the dominant community due to it having the largest remaining population on the site followed by the Blue Gum High Forest.

The Enriched Sandstone Moist Forest, Coastal Sandstone Gully Forest, Scribbly Gum Woodland, Coastal Sandstone Bloodwood Shrub and Heath-Mallee are all found on the surrounding Country.

KEY

- PCT 3136: BLUE GUM HIGH FOREST
- PCT 3162: SYDNEY TURPENTINE IRON BARK FOREST
- PCT 3176: SYDNEY ENRICHED SANDSTONE MOIST FOREST
- PCT 3595: SYDNEY COASTAL SANDSTONE GULLY FOREST
- PCT 3586: NORTHERN SYDNEY SCRIBBLY GUM WOODLAND
- PCT 3593: SYDNEY COASTAL SANDSTONE BLOODWOOD SHRUB
- PCT 3814: WORONORA PLATEAU HEATH-MALLEE
- WALKING CIRCUMFERENCE
- SITE

01 : Sydney Turpentine Iron bark Forest
02 : Blue Gum High Forest
03 : Enriched Sandstone Moist Forest



03 PROJECT COLLABORATION

“To be present with
Country is to practice
deep listening, no past or
future just tuning in with
your own spirit and all
that are around’.”

— Luciano Svagelli

WALKSHOP: LEARNING FROM COUNTRY

The project team met on Douglas Street, St Ives and walked to the City View Lookout in the Garigal National Park, Uncle Dennis Foley welcomed us and introduced Gai-mariagal Country, passing on knowledge about its creation and its cultural significance. Participants included Arcadia's First Nations Design Consultants and wider team, Montefiore and Jackson Teece Architects.

This was followed by walking the site, collectively discussing different aspects of planning and design, understanding the topography and considering how to connect the site with the nearby National Park. We then met at Gordon Library to conduct the workshop.



01



02



03



04

01 : The group with Uncle Dennis look out over Gai-Mariagal Country

02 : Uncle Dennis shares stories of the Angophora tree

03 : Uncle Dennis welcomes the group and asks permission for us to be on Country

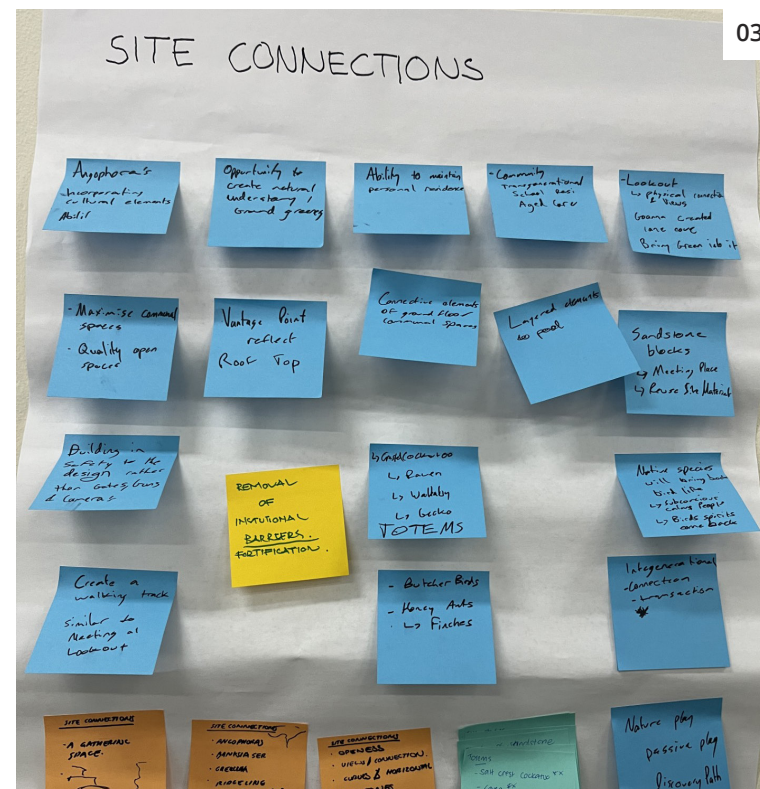
04: Uncle Dennis shares Ga-Mariagal culture and practice with the group

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY: COLLABORATION SESSION

In collaboration with Uncle Dennis, the group explored three ideas of Site Connections, Human Connections and Legacy. Some of the significant themes that emerged from these discussions are;

Some significant elements emerged;

- Using Gai-mariagal language for place.
- Designing spaces for residents to connect with family and community.
- Drawing inspiration from Gai-mariagal Country, mirroring its ecotones.



01 : The architectural team share details about the development
 02 : Uncle Dennis shares thoughts on integrating Country into the design
 03 : Site Connections notes from discussions
 04 : Workshop discussions



SITE CONNECTIONS: SHARING AND DISCUSSION 1

The views over the Sydney CBD and Chatswood from the City View Lookout in Garigal National Park were an impressive way to start the Connecting with Country Walkshop with Uncle Dennis. The group were surrounded by tall tree canopy and natural bushland, with the sound of kookaburras and birds enveloping the group. A bleeding Angophora provided the perfect accompaniment for Uncle Dennis to share stories of its significance to First Nations community.





HUMAN CONNECTIONS: SHARING AND DISCUSSION 2

The tranquility of the bush offered a stark contrast to the high level of security at the school located adjacent to the site. This reinforced the importance of bringing life into the development and connecting people Country through meaningful design. Replacing institutional barriers with green spaces and pockets for connection that foster connection and calmness. The group noted the importance of creating dedicated spaces for kids and areas for people of all ages to discover and enjoy.





LEGACY: SHARING AND DISCUSSION 3

The group discussion focused on how we can foster community belonging and active participation in the place through sharing stories of Country, language and ongoing education. Uncle Dennis noted that anyone can design a building but creating a space that is full of life and has spirit is something special that will be valued by future generations.



04 CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY OPPORTUNITIES

“Ca-bra-munga means
resting the mind.”
— Uncle Dennis

DESIGNING WITH COUNTRY: PRINCIPLES AND VALUES



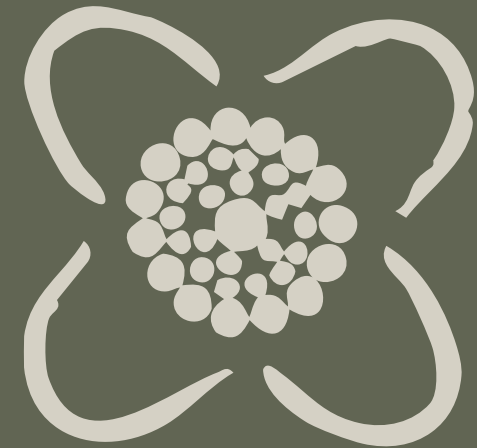
GAI-MARIAGAL COUNTRY

To continue Country, we can draw inspiration from local textures, colours, and ecotones of Country to create spaces that reflect and respect the local landscape. Embracing the spirit of the Gai-mariagal people by incorporating traditional trees, and native plants that speak to Country and the viewpoints from the ridge line, St Ives is situated. The Angophora tree plays a significant role in the spirit's journey from conception to the afterlife and back.



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Designing open spaces inspired by Country fosters connection and wellbeing, yarning circles for sharing stories, quiet spaces for reflection, and natural passive play areas that invite people to gather, connect with nature, and create lasting memories through meaningful interactions.



EDUCATION OF GAI-MARIAGAL

We can educate residents and the local community by implementing Gai-mariagal language through signage and place naming of buildings and streets. An example given by Uncle Dennis shared 'Cab-ra-nunga', meaning 'a resting mind'. Inspired by the land and sky, the design can also include First Nations constellations like the Emu and Brush Turkey, along with local engravings, to share Gai-mariagal stories and cultural identity throughout the space.

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY OPPORTUNITIES: THEMES

The key themes listed have been developed in conversation with Uncle Dennis. These are presented as potential opportunities which can be revealed throughout the design.

CONTINUING COUNTRY

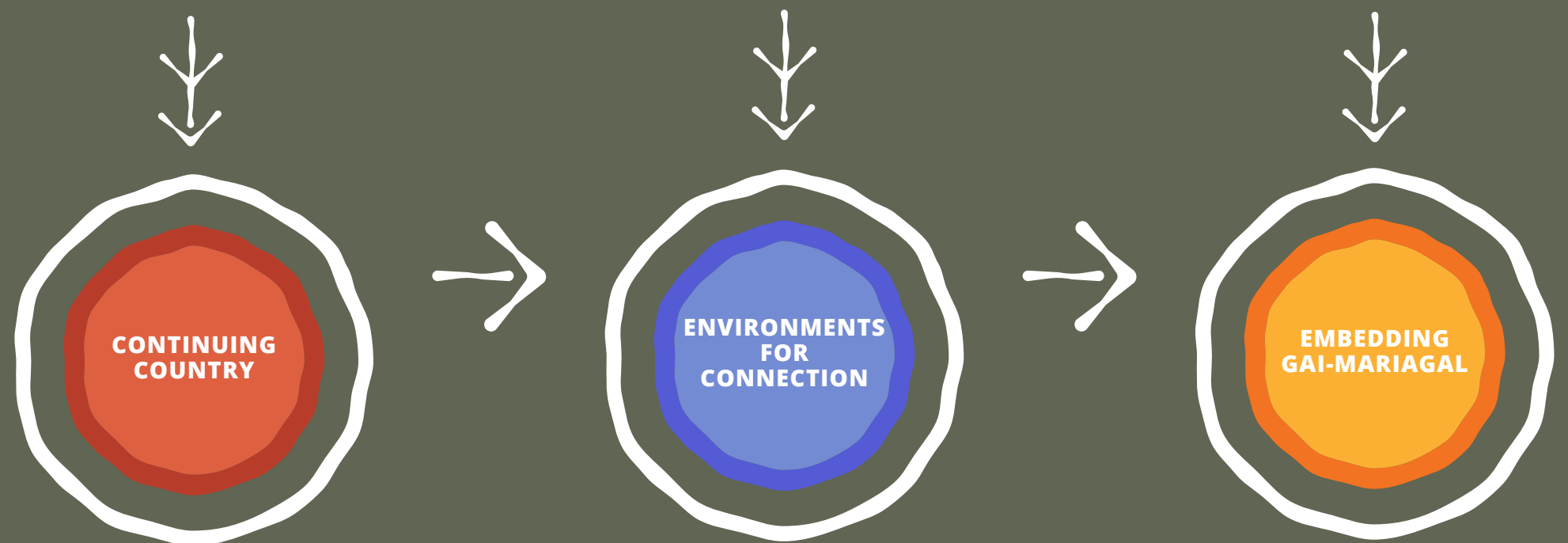
Multiple spaces can incorporate elements that soften and humanise the development. Curating traditional flora in activated street fronts and on the podium level can be utilised to foster community and continue the beauty of Country.

ENVIRONMENTS FOR CONNECTION

Designing spaces that provide opportunity for residents to connect and gain a sense of belonging whilst surrounded by the beauty of Gai-mariagal .

EMBEDDING GAI-MARIAGAL

Embedding Gai-mariagal identity through placemaking elements that celebrate culture and history. Imprints in paving, distinctive roofing patterns, and interpretive signage create meaningful wayfinding. Plaques and markers share stories, transforming common areas into living narratives that honour and bring 'spirit' into the physical space of the project.



CWC OPPORTUNITIES: CONTINUING COUNTRY

To continue Country we can draw inspiration from the local plants, textures, colours, and ecotones to expand with the local landscape. The Angophora tree plays a significant role in the spirit's journey from conception to the afterlife. Embracing the spirit of the Gai-Mariagal people by incorporating traditional trees, and native plants that speak to Country and the viewpoints from the ridge line St Ives is situated, can help create a landscape that is deeply connected to place, culture and community.

- / Reflect the local ecotones of Country through the architectural expression and landscape character. Draw inspiration from the transitions between ridgeline, woodland, heath and creekline environments through colours, textures, materials, and forms that express the diversity of the local landscape.
- / Take inspiration from the story and cultural significance of the Angophora tree, exploring opportunities to embed its cultural narratives within detailing, materiality, landscape structure, gathering spaces, wayfinding and interpretive elements.
- / Incorporate plant species that are endemic to the local area. Focus on traditional flora that holds cultural, ecological and seasonal significance to the Gai-Mariagal people, while allowing these planting communities to inform colour palettes, patterns and design.
- / Create habitat-rich landscapes and built environments that support local fauna, strengthening ecological connections and celebrating the relationship between plants, animals and Country.
- / Draw on traditional knowledge of flora and fauna to inform both landscape and architectural outcomes, including material selection, planting design and educational opportunities that foster a deeper understanding of local ecological systems and cultural practices.



01 : The project group looking over Country
 02 : Angophora tree
 03 : Garigal National Park bushland
 04 : Angophora tree flowers
 05 : Plants in the Garigal National Park
 06 : Flowering plants

CONTINUING COUNTRY

Opportunities

KEY PLAN



KEY

- LOCAL ECOTONES REFLECTED IN ARCHITECTURAL COLOURS AND MATERIALS
- ANGOPHORA CANOPY
- ANGOPHORA COSTA FEATURE CANOPY TREES

All further developments of these opportunities must be approved and workshopped with Uncle Dennis Foley



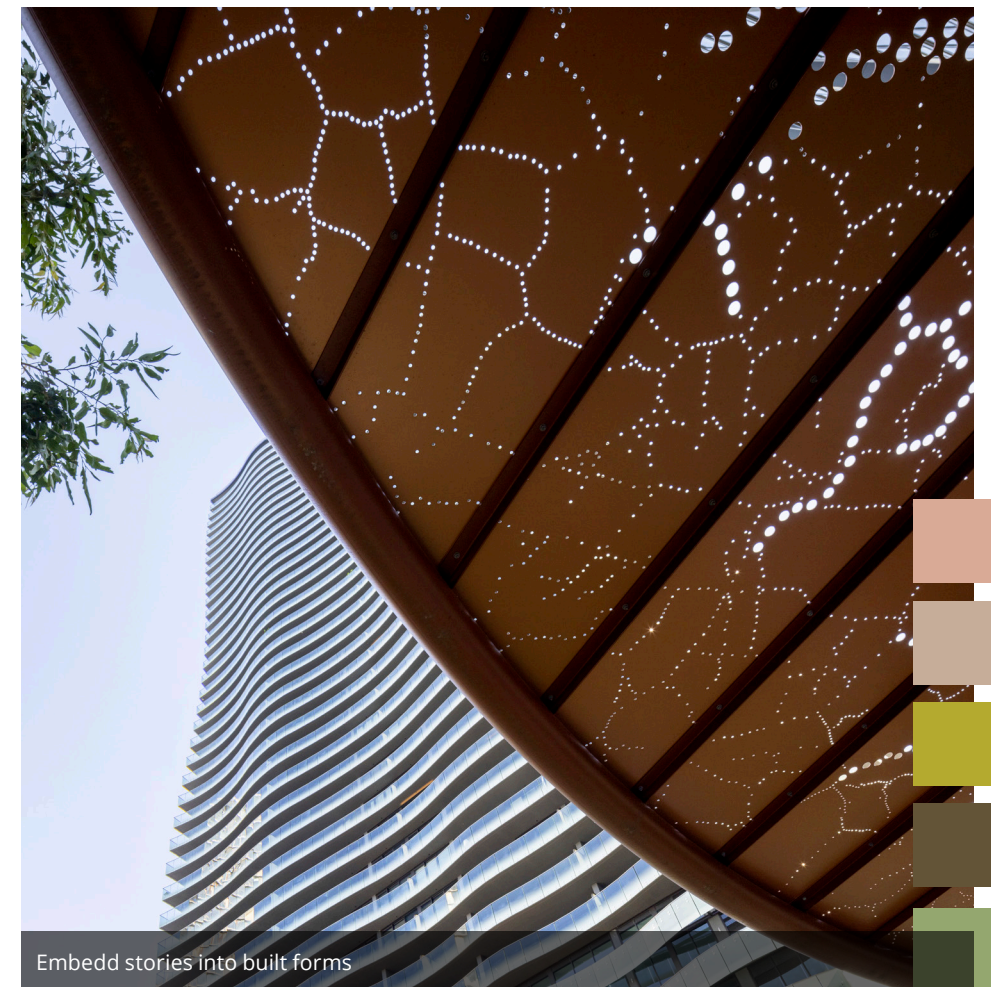
Native Plants which reflect the local ecologies



Reflect the significance of the Angophora Tree



Ecotones of the local ecologies

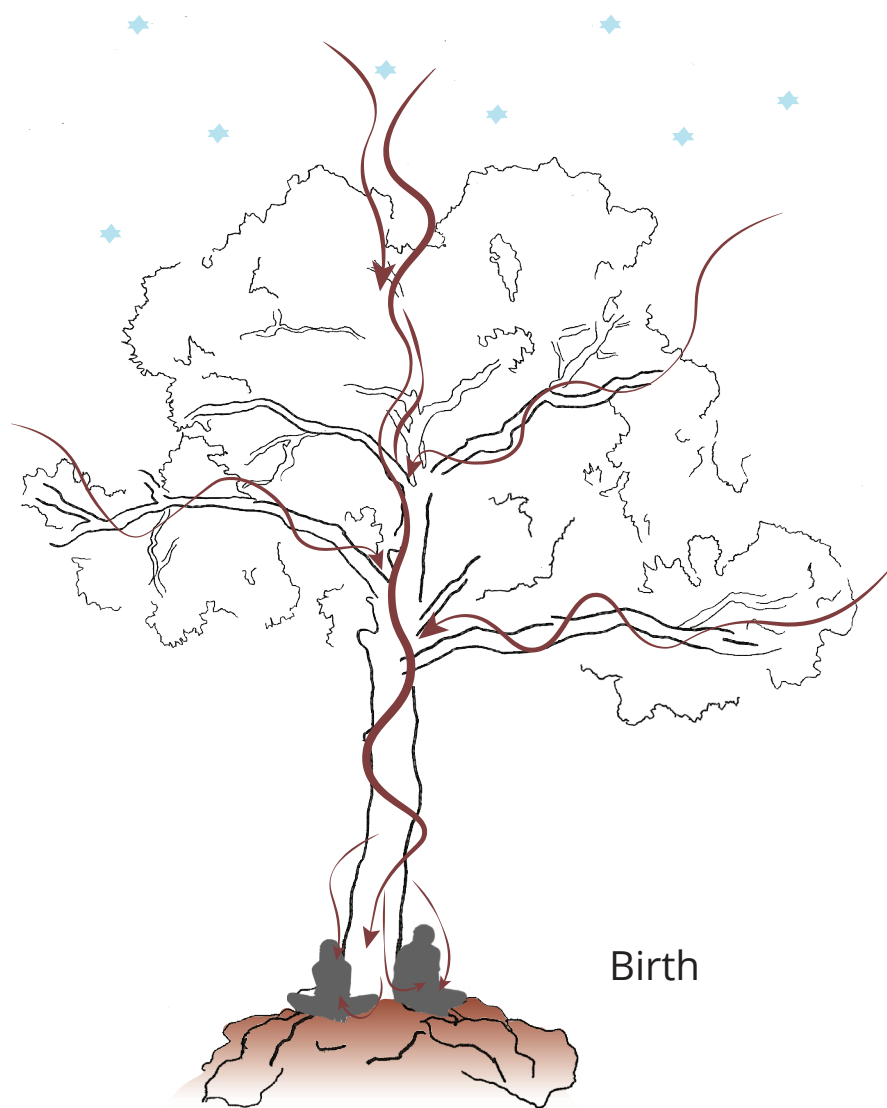


Embed stories into built forms

CONTINUING COUNTRY

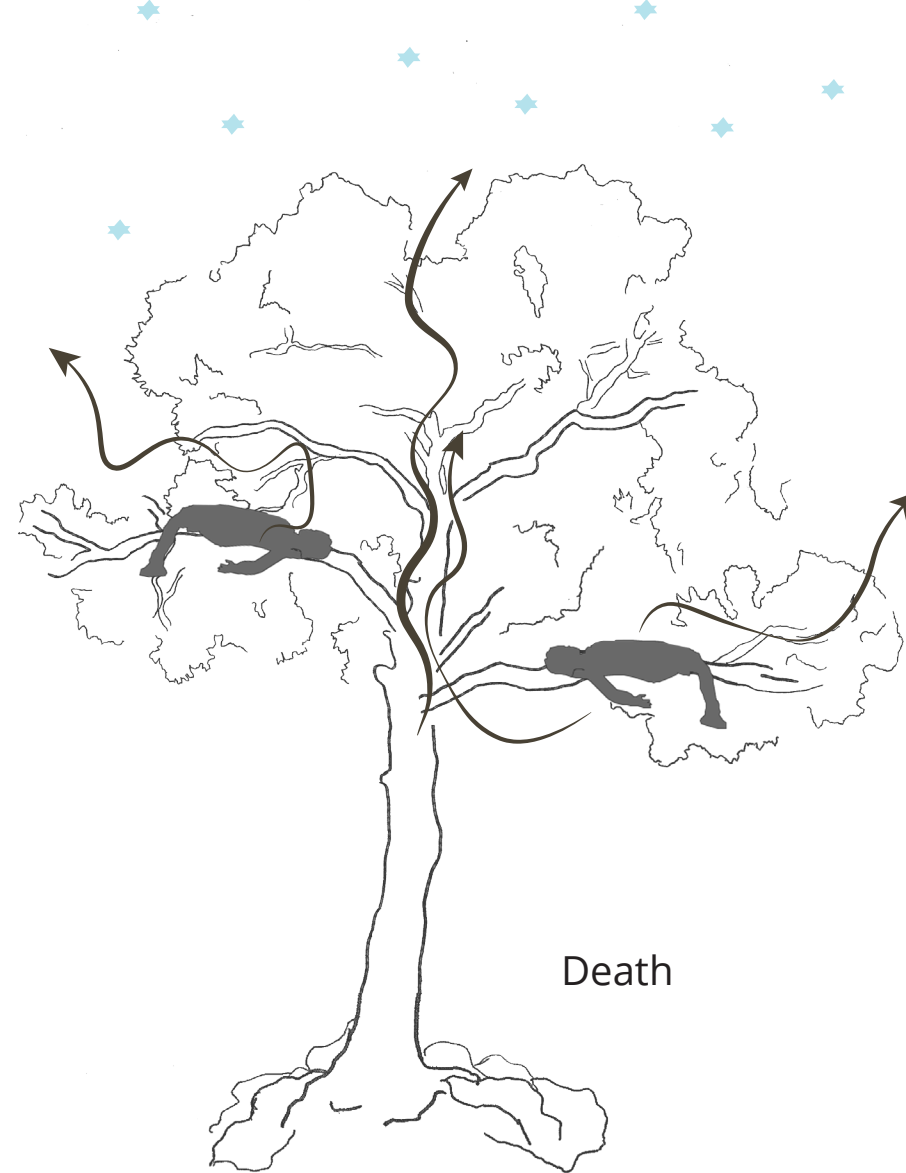
Understanding the significance of the Angophora

CONTINUING
COUNTRY



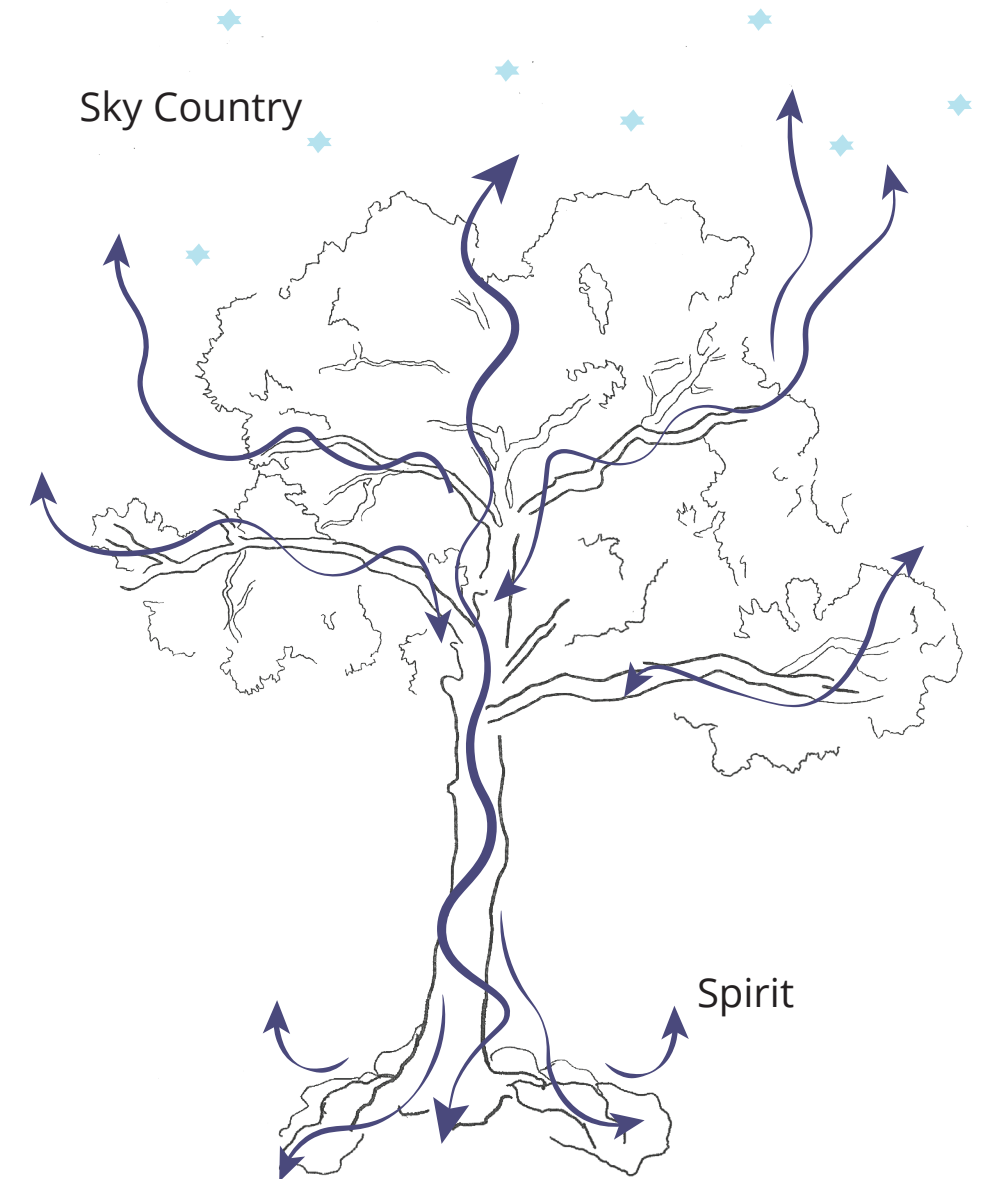
Birth

Women would come to the Angophora while menstruating. The tree brings spirits down into the womb, fertilising the women.



Death

Bodies would be wrapped in bark and placed over the strong vertical branches of the Angophora, allowing their life source to return to sky Country



Spirit

The Angophora acts as a sacred place connecting life, death and spirit

CWC OPPORTUNITIES: ENVIRONMENTS FOR CONNECTION

Designing open spaces inspired by Country fosters connection and wellbeing, yarning circles for sharing stories, quiet spaces for reflection, and natural passive play areas that invite people to gather, connect with nature, and create lasting memories through meaningful interactions.

- / Design open spaces inspired by Country that encourage people to pause, gather and connect with the landscape.
- / Provide spaces within both the landscape and building for quiet reflection, contemplation and the sharing of stories, offering opportunities for individuals and groups to connect with Country.
- / Incorporate yarning circles, gathering spaces and informal meeting areas that support storytelling, learning, cultural exchange and connection.
- / Create natural play spaces that encourage exploration, discovery and interaction with the local environment, fostering an appreciation of Country through play.
- / Integrate moments of pause throughout the development, including outlooks, shaded resting places and spaces that frame views to significant landscape features, allowing people to slow down and engage with their surroundings.
- / Provide comfortable and accessible seating opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, supporting social interaction, observation, rest and connection.



01 : Uncle Dennis shares history of Country
02 : Uncle Dennis shares Angophora stories
03 : The tranquil surrounds of Garigal National Park
04 : The flowering Angophora tree

ENVIRONMENTS FOR CONNECTION

Opportunities

KEY PLAN



KEY

- ARCHITECTURAL COMMUNITY SPACES: LOBBY, POOL, GYM AND CLUB LOUNGE
- RESTING NODES THAT ENCOURAGE CONNECTION AND WELLBEING

- OUTDOOR COMMUNAL SEATING
- NATURE PLAY

All further developments of these opportunities must be approved and workshopped with Uncle Dennis Foley



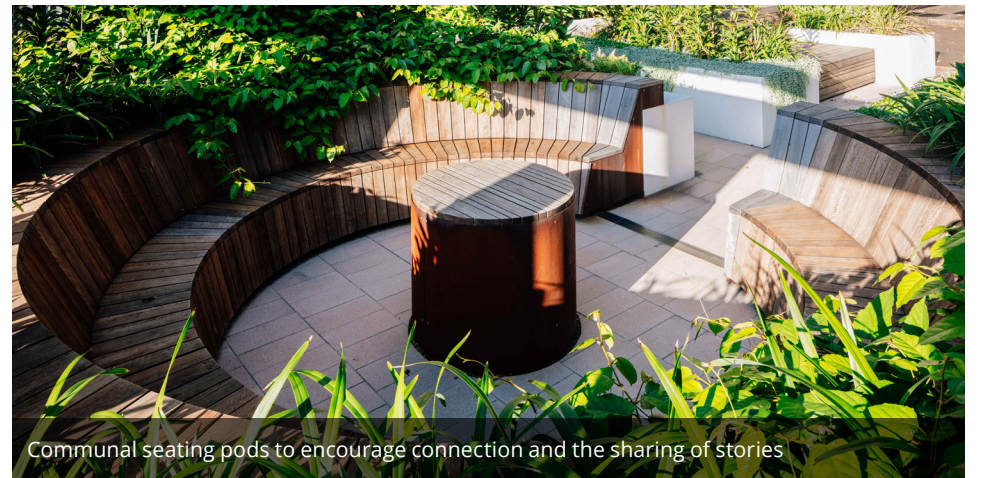
Nature play elements



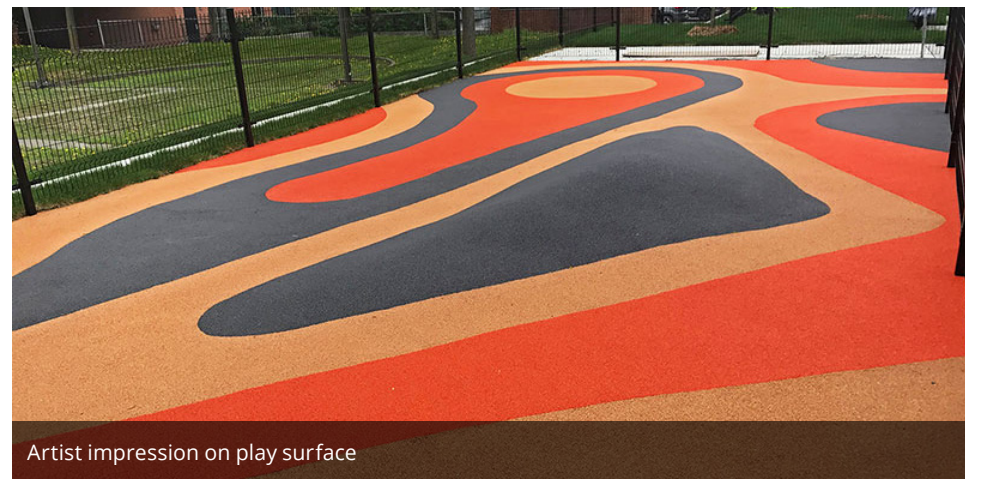
Subtle seating edges



Comfortable spaces for reflection and gathering



Communal seating pods to encourage connection and the sharing of stories



Artist impression on play surface

CWC OPPORTUNITIES: EMBEDDING GAI-MARIAGAL

We can educate residents and the local community by implementing Gai-mariagal language through signage and naming of buildings. An example given by Uncle Dennis was 'Cab-ra-nunga', which means 'a resting mind'. Inspired by the land and sky, the design can also include First Nations constellations like the Emu and Brush Turkey, along with local engravings, to share Gai-mariagal stories and cultural identity throughout the space.

- / Implementing Gai-mariagal language (To be approved by Uncle Dennis)
- / Embedded Gai-mariagal stories such as the constellations like the Emu and the Brush Turkey
- / Wayfinding signage and plant signage to encourage residents and visitors to learn about Gai-Mariagal Country



01 : Land and sky connections

02 : Ferns

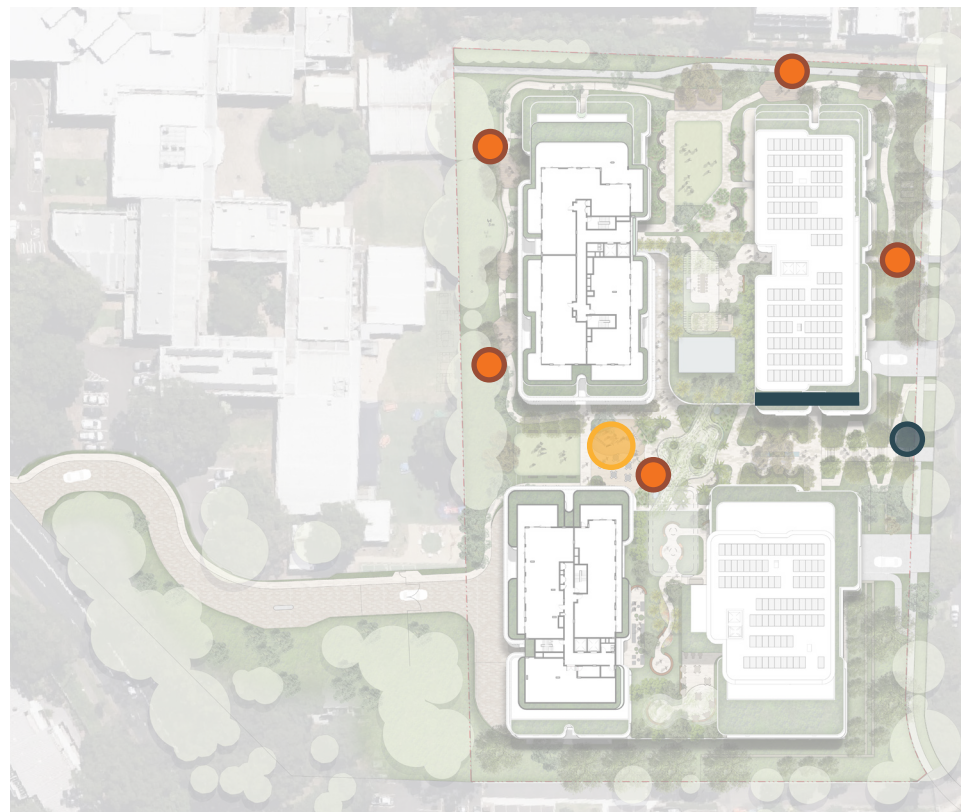
03 : Angophora flowers

04 : The Angophora tree plays important role in First Nations culture

05 : The project team listening to stories of First Nations culture

EMBEDDING GAI-MARIAGAL Opportunities

KEY PLAN

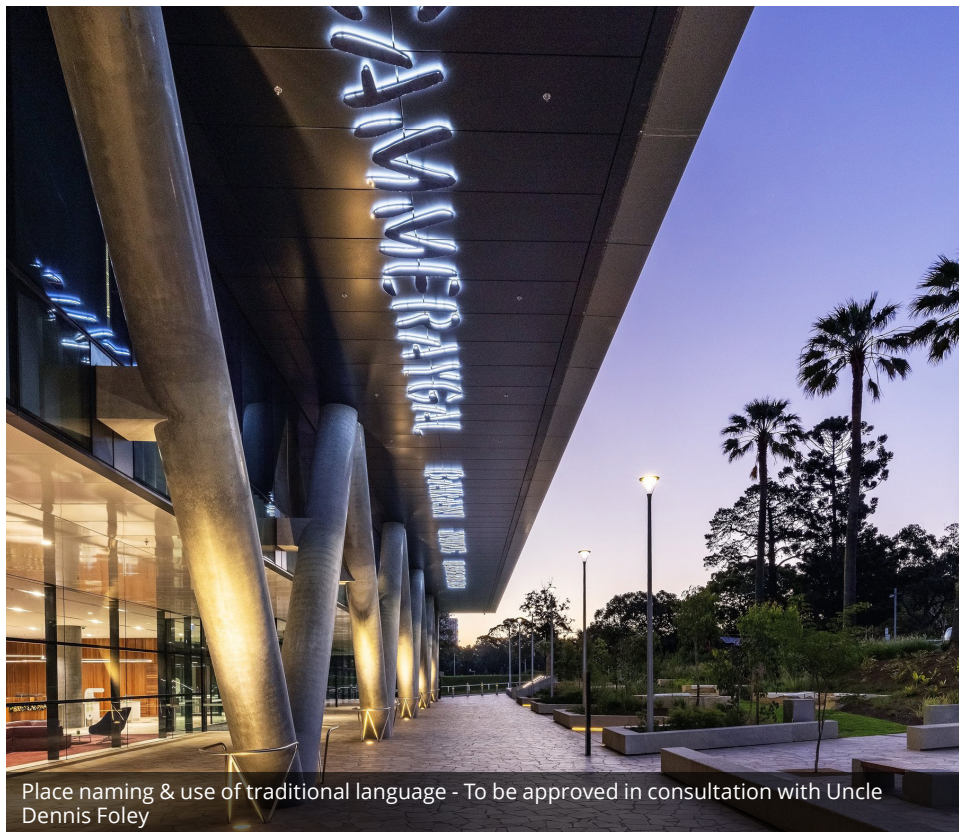


- KEY**
-  SITE PLACE MAKING SIGNAGE
 -  EMBEDDED GAI-MARIAGAL STORIES WITHIN THE PLAY SPACE
 -  LANDSCAPE WAYFINDING AND EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE

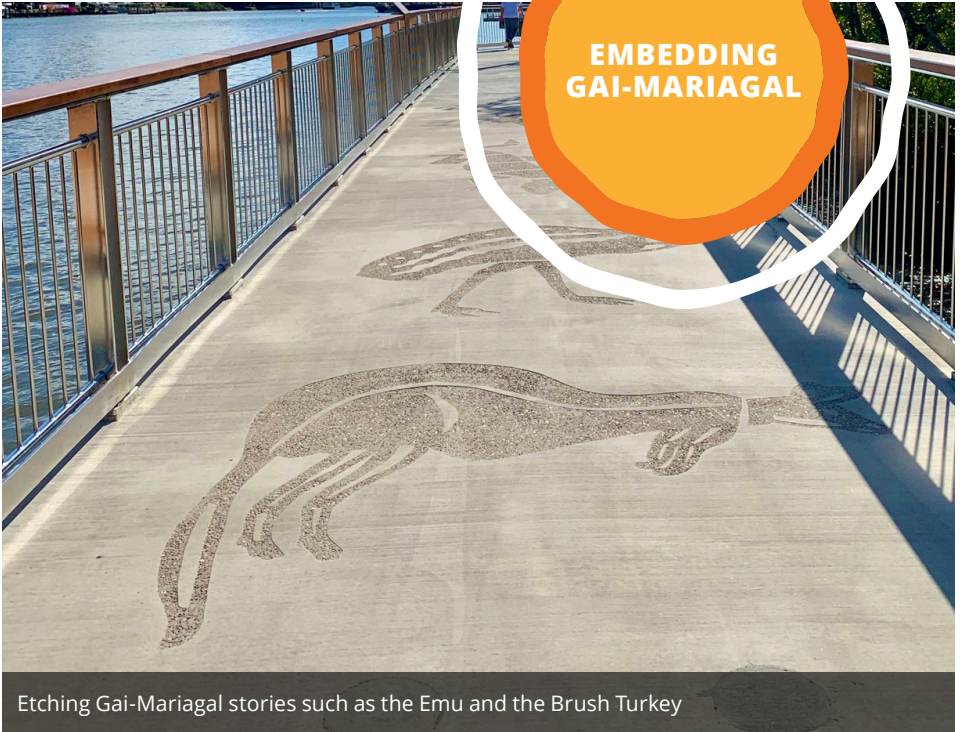
All further developments of these opportunities must be approved and workshopped with Uncle Dennis Foley



QR codes for plant education and story telling



Place naming & use of traditional language - To be approved in consultation with Uncle Dennis Foley



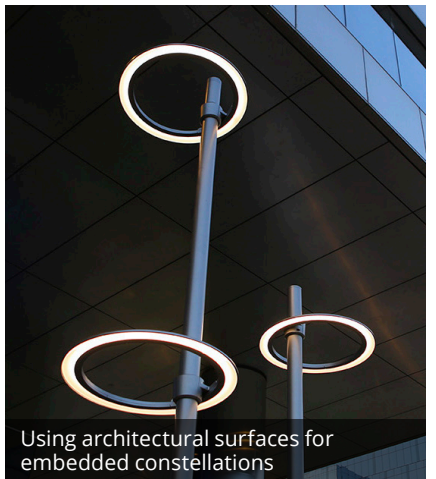
Etching Gai-Mariagal stories such as the Emu and the Brush Turkey



Integrating Language into furniture



Etching of Gai-Mariagal endemic plants



Using architectural surfaces for embedded constellations

ARCADIA