



15 December 2017

## **Foundation and Friends of the Botanic Gardens strongly object to the State Significant Development Application 6471**

### **1. Loss of Green Space**

**We object to any loss of green space and the proposed Sydney Modern development involves substantial loss of 18,742 sqm of green space, most of which is owned by RBGDT.**

#### **a) The Gardens has already lost substantial amount of green space.**

The Development will be yet another loss of green space for the Sydney Botanic Garden and Domain ("the Gardens"). This will be to the detriment of the 5.2 million visitors, our 5,200 members and 340 volunteers, the wider Sydney community, and the natural ecosystem.

The Development area is 18,742 sqm, most of which is in the Gardens and owned by the Royal Botanic Garden and Domain Trust (RBGDT).

The Development is not the first to encroach on RBGDT land. Since 1912 over 75,000 sqm (10%) of the 69.1ha of RBGDT land has been lost to other projects including the Cahill Expressway, the Eastern suburbs tunnel, and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

The loss of green space due to the Development would be significant.

#### **b) The NSW Government values green space – The Development goes against NSW Policy and Plans Sydney Green Grid Strategy**

In July 2016, (former) Planning Minister Rob Stokes launched the NSW Government's plan to prioritise funding for the development of the city's Green Grid. The strategy was developed by Government Architects NSW to create a network of high quality green areas that connect town centres, public transport networks and major residential areas in Sydney – and is a key part of planning and building Sydney for the future.

Minister Stokes said "Creating and improving open greenspace areas is a vital part of ensuring that, as our city gets bigger, it gets better as well".

The Development is contradictory to this priority as it is taking away green space in the middle of Sydney's CBD, sacrificing the Sydney's bigger and better future.

#### **Greener Places Policy**

In November 2017, NSW Planning Minister Anthony Roberts launched the draft Greener Places policy which builds on the Sydney Green Grid strategy mentioned above.

"Our commitment to enhancing green, open space will complement the new homes and infrastructure being delivered to address NSW's increased population, which is expected to grow by 2.2 million people by 2036", said Minister Roberts.

“Well planned green infrastructure is fundamental to ensuring our communities retain a high quality of life and helping our cities remain sustainable, both now and into the future. Green infrastructure is essential infrastructure and should be integrated into all community planning.”

The draft policy was part of a push to make the consideration of green infrastructure an integral part of the planning process for NSW.

The Development is contradictory to this policy.

### **Greater Sydney Region Plan**

In October 2017, the draft Greater Sydney Region Plan was released. It forecasted a growth in population in Greater Sydney from 4.7 million people to 8 million people by 2056. It stated there would be a need for 725,000 more homes over the next 20 years.

The plan also highlighted the need to value green spaces and landscapes, this was to be achieved by protecting scenic and cultural landscapes, increasing urban tree canopy cover, and making public open space accessible protected and enhanced.

Increasing green space is stated in the plan to be crucial in building a more sustainable and resilient Sydney.

The plan also outlines a bold vision to divide the city into 3 unique but connected cities. The area in which the RBGDT and the proposed Development sits in that plan is the Eastern Harbour City. In that area, it is projected the population will increase from 2.5 million people to 3.5 million people in the next 20 years and of the 725,000 new dwellings 43.4% will occur in this area. That will result in a further increase in the concentration of people in this area.

We consider that the benefit to the community would be greater by protecting the green space that is outlined to be part of the Development.

### **c) The community values The Gardens**

The Gardens are valued as The Lungs of Sydney. The community uses the green space for health, relaxation, exercise and learning. They appreciate the unique ecosystem and its irreplaceable cultural, historical and environmental values.

Our 5,200 members, 340 volunteers and our staff are a representative sample of community members who use the Gardens. Their feedback is, that green space is invaluable to them.

In December 2017, the Gardens were the winner of the Major Attraction Award at the NSW Tourism Awards, beating many other key Sydney attractions including the AGNSW, Bridge Climb and the Opera House. The community clearly appreciates green space.

As the population grows, there will be further increase of visitors expected to the Gardens and it will become an ever increasingly valuable community asset. This is yet another reason why the green space must be protected for the future of Sydney.

## **2. Proposed Development**

### **a) Location**

We object to the choice of location for the Development because there is a lack of disclosure in the SSDA of over why the AGNSW have chosen this iconic location, with water views, on valuable green space, in the heart of the CBD, for a project with objectives that are internally focused. We also oppose the location because the information provided the EIS about the proposed land allocation does not provide a proper analysis of alternative sites within the Domain and elsewhere.

The Development EIS states that “The proposed building is to be integrated within the existing land form through a series of pavilions focused on existing disused former naval fuel bunker and land bridge to minimise landscape impacts”.

We believe this statement to be misleading as the proposed land allocation requested for the Development is greater than the immediate requirements – and covers an area much greater than the navel fuel bunker and Land Bridge.

### **b) Bulk, scale and positioning of the buildings**

We object to the bulk and large scale of the buildings, particularly those located on the Land Bridge as they will overwhelm the area, and we question whether they are firstly required, and secondly if they needed at all to achieve the Development’s objectives.

We also consider the positioning of the Entry Plaza on the Land Bridge and the Entry Pavilion immediately north of the Land Bridge, too close to the footpath and road which encroaches on the Gardens.

The Entry Plaza has a set-back of 5.75m from Art Gallery Road and the Entry Pavilion a setback of 9.95m. The Plaza height is 8.12m and it appears that the Entry Pavilion will have a height of between 7 and 8 meters.

Of concern is the Entry Pavilion will be opposite the historic Woolloomooloo Gates, an important entry and exit point for the Gardens, as well as opposite The National Herbarium of NSW. Visitors exiting the Gardens currently have views to Woolloomooloo in the distance and green space, and trees in the foreground. The new building will block this and have a detrimental effect on our visitor’s experience. The buildings will also impact visually on views to the east and north along Mrs Macquaries Road and from the Domain.

The SSDA makes it difficult to fully assess the actual size of the buildings and we believe this should be made clear before any decision is taken.

### **c) Additional land**

We object to any loss of green space, and further object to the proposed land allocation requested for the Development as it is larger than the proposed building footprints and considerably greater than what is required for the actual gallery space. Much of it is proposed for undercover walking and relaxation areas which ultimately takes away the Garden’s space without any benefits. This land should remain under the control of RBGDT.

### **d) Trees**

There are 220 trees in the vicinity and 140 will be removed, 72 retained and 8 relocated. 265 new trees will be planted.

DA 0054 shows the removal of many trees on the bank on the eastern side of Mrs Macquaries Road opposite Woolloomooloo Gates and the National Herbarium of NSW.

We object to the loss of the established tree canopy on the eastern side of Mrs Macquaries Road north of the Land Bridge as it is a defining characteristic of the Gardens, it supports a living ecosystem in the heart of Sydney is a major environmental asset and important for the vista it provides north along Mrs Macquaries Road.

The number of trees to be removed to accommodate the proposed Sydney Modern will reduce the extent of the tree canopy over the wider Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain.

It appears that the tree the replacement trees, and their positioning do little to maintain the vista along Mrs Macquaries Road north of the Land Bridge.

#### **e) Control of Art Gallery Road and Mrs Macquaries Road**

We object to the AGNSW managing Art Gallery Road/Mrs Macquaries Road, and the loss of parking space in front of the current AGNSW.

The Development should not include Art Gallery Road/Mrs Macquaries Road, or loss of parking space in front of the current AGNSW because:

- Those roads are the only vehicle access road into the Gardens, and are used for deliveries, major events, emergency access and maintenance of the Gardens.
- Woolloomooloo Gate is one of the main access points and entrances into the Gardens by visitors, suppliers, staff, members and volunteers.
- All surrounding public space through the Domain is managed by RBGDT – providing consistency of management.
- Parking is important for the Gardens visitors, members and volunteers (who contribute over 30,000 hours of time per annum and without whom provide funding for the Gardens would be significantly reduced).
- Parking revenue would be lost, which would put financial pressures on other areas of RBGDT.

To further this objection, we believe that visitation alone should dictate control and management. The Gardens saw over 5.2 million visitors in the 2016/17 financial year compared to AGNSW which saw 1.4 million. Therefore the Gardens has almost 4 times as many visitors than the AGNSW. Even with the projected increase of 1 million more visitors after project completion, the Gardens will still attract more visitors.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that Art Gallery Road / Mrs Macquaries Road continues to be owned and managed by RBGDT for visitor and stakeholder access.

Of additional grave concern is that any road closures during the construction phase of the Development are likely to have detrimental impacts on RBGDT as they depend on unrestricted use of Art Gallery Road / Mrs Macquaries Road. Our day to day activities cannot withstand lack to access.

#### **f) Relocation of the bus drop bay**

We object to the relocation of the existing 'coach drop off' from the forecourt of the existing Art Gallery building to the Land Bridge on the western side of Art Gallery Road. This will impact on the Phillip Precinct and push development impacts well beyond the boundary of the proposed Development. It will result in people (including elderly people and school children) alighting in a heavily congested pedestrian area. It will also result in detrimental impacts on iconic and key view corridors.

Bus parking on the Land Bridge will also impact on the views towards the iconic Sydney City skyline and detract from the overall visitor experience to the Gardens. Also, the Woolloomooloo gate is a major entry into the Gardens and should be maintained with open and inviting views into the Gardens.

Placing buses in this area will also create a visual obstacle to RBGDT operational vehicles turning out of Access Road and will create safety risks for the public, members, volunteers, staff, contractors and delivery drivers as they move in and out of this area. There would be significant safety risks to pedestrians in this high-volume locality.

**g) New vehicle turnaround at convergence of the two parts of Mrs Macquaries Road**

We object to the proposed turnaround as it will impede the traffic flow on the road, and will potentially be unsafe as the space is insufficient for it be used effectively as a turnaround.

**h) Loss of parking, revenue and additional costs**

We object to the proposal to remove 24 car parking and 4 motorcycle spaces from the front of the existing AGNSW building to accommodate a new plaza forecourt. Car parking in the area is at a premium so removing spaces for an unrequired plaza forecourt is a poor decision, and will impact visitors and the community. The removal will also have a significant financial impact upon RBGDT revenue, estimated to be \$400K per annum.

We also have concerns for the additional costs that will arise from the Development including funding for additional resources and precinct management. It is likely that, because of the Development, there will be increased costs associated with flow on effects of the Development of the facility. It is important that costs associated with modification to existing infrastructure and facilities directly associated with the development are not borne by RBGDT.

It is also highlighted that the land above the old fuel bunkers was granted to RBGDT and offered RBGDT the potential to lease the land for a period of 50 years. With the Development now proposed to be located in this area, the revenue generating opportunity would no longer be available.

With now less than 50% of recurrent funding to RBGDT being provided by the NSW Government, RBGDT cannot afford to lose existing and potential revenue sources or have imposed on it additional costs from the Development.

**i) Transport**

Section 6.5 of the EIS sets out a commentary on potential traffic, transport, access, parking impacts that are projected to result from the Sydney Modern project.

Art Gallery Road/Mrs Macquaries Road serve as the primary access road for vehicles to both AGNSW and the Gardens.

We see the Art Gallery Road and Mrs Macquaries Road as being currently congested and overcrowded.

With the proposed additional doubling of visitors to the AGNSW and the continuing increase in visitors to the Gardens it is reasonable to assume that there will be an increase in the congestion. This will be further impacted by the proposed entrance to Sydney Modern being on the Land Bridge which is the narrowest part of Art Gallery Road.

The EIS does not adequately address this congestion issue and a further independent transport plan should be provided.

**j) Disruption**

The Sydney Modern project is a major building project on a tight site which is programmed to take 2.5 years. Not much is contained in the EIS about what actions will be taken to mitigate disruption and the impact of the building.

To minimize disruption, a communication and management plan should be put in place to ensure that key stakeholders are mutually understood and the functionality of the precinct is maintained throughout the delivery and ongoing operation of the Sydney Modern. There is a need to work collaboratively to achieve precinct wide objectives in a coordinated manner.

### **3. Our objection and The Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust**

For over 35 years, Foundation and Friends of the Botanic Gardens (“Foundation & Friends”), formally known as Friends of the Botanic Gardens Inc, has supported the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust.

We are a not-for-profit membership based organisation with over 5,200 members of which 340 are volunteers who contribute over 30,000 hours per year in support of RBGDT. This objection, is on behalf of these members and volunteers.

In the case of the proposed Development, we continue to support RBGDT – and are doing this by objecting to the project.

Our main objection is to the loss of green space in *The Lungs of Sydney*. The Development involves substantial loss of 18,742 sqm of green space, most of which is owned by RBGDT. Foundation & Friends considers this unexpected and an unnecessary proposal for our members, the Sydney community and our environment.

## **Appendix 1 – About Foundation & Friends**

### **a) History**

Friends was established in 1982 and their mission was to promote the enjoyment and understanding of the three Gardens and the Domain as outstanding places for horticulture, science, recreation, the arts and education, and to support the RBGDT and lobby to protect the three Gardens and the Domain (“the Gardens”) from developments that could threaten them.

In July 2012, the existing structure of Friends was converted from an incorporated association under the Associations Incorporation Act 2009 (NSW) to a company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) and changed its name to Foundation and Friends of the Botanic Gardens Limited.

### **b) Purpose**

Foundation & Friends hosts a great range of activities and events for our members, connects the community to the Gardens and raises monies to support the many projects and initiatives for RBGDT. Our community of members, donors and bequestors support the important role plants play in human survival.

The objects of Foundation & Friends, as set out in the Constitution at Clause 2, are to advance the horticultural, scientific, educational, historical and cultural purposes of the Gardens including by:

- promoting and supporting the Gardens
- improving community awareness of the horticultural scientific educational historical and cultural functions of the Gardens
- encouraging the use and enjoyment of the Gardens by the community
- acting as Trustee of the Trust Fund
- All such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of these objects.

### **c) Relationship with the Gardens**

Foundation & Friends has been supporting the RBGDT for over 35 years. This close relationship and understanding of the wants and needs of RBGDT has led Foundation & Friends to fund many projects in your Gardens including:

- Donated over \$465K to the revitalisation of the PlantClinic, which included cutting-edge scientific equipment, interpretation panels and a new garden design and landscaping
- Donated \$1million to a new glasshouse in the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney to accompany the new exciting world-class attraction The Calyx
- Researching into the prehistoric Wollemi pine
- Donating \$1m for the teaching and research laboratories at the Australian PlantBank in the Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan
- Providing annual scholarships to RBGDT employees to further their education and broaden their experience
- Restoration of the Palace Rose Garden, displaying roses that will grow in Sydney using environmentally friendly horticultural practices
- Donating for The Jungle, a pristine Blue Mountains rainforest with ferns and towering coachwood and sassafras trees at the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden Mount Tomah
- Renovating of Lion Gate Lodge, a popular venue for functions in the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney
- Interpretive signage to increase visitors understanding of plants, animals and the natural habitats

... and much more.

With over 5,200 members and 340 volunteers Foundation and Friends also support the Gardens by:

- Providing hands-on help in the Gardens
- Sharing the message about horticulture, science, education and the important historical and cultural significance of the Gardens with the community

- Attending and participating in events that bring the community into the Gardens
- Advocating for the protection of the Gardens
- Raising money to support the Gardens

... and much more!