

Advice from the Middle Head Open Day

Summary

This report compiles the suggestions and ideas provided by the community at the Middle Head Open Day held by the HarbourTrust on Saturday 8th December 2001.

The Trust's planning directions were widely endorsed. The general tenor of the cards was for the Georges Heights – Middle Head site being used for recreational and cultural purposes within a bushland setting. The common priorities were:

- the preservation and interpretation of heritage places,
- the extension and restoration of natural environments,
- the development of a networks of walking tracks linking places with scenic vistas.

The most suggested activities for the buildings were cultural (museums, studios, exhibition area, training rooms etc) and educational (school facilities, camps etc). A number of people suggested accommodation-based uses to take advantage of current facilities. *Mosman has a strong history of association with the arts, the artillery (military) and aquatic (whaling etc) so these types of uses are appropriate.*

Background

The Middle Head Open Day was designed as a process by which the Trust could explore with the community the values and significance of its Middle Head – Georges Heights – Chowder Bay site. The aims of the day were

- To enrich participants and planners' knowledge of the site and its potential.
- To collect comments from the public on the significance of and ideas for the sites.
- To encourage participants to exchange views with planners and each other.
- To build a positive relationship with the public and the Harbour Trust.

The process was designed after discussions with the Middle Head Consultative Committee and using experience from earlier workshops at North Head, Woolwich Dock and Cockatoo Island. Because of the focus on identifying significance, it was important that participants had an opportunity to view and learn about the site before giving their views.

Due to the size of the site, with visitors being able to walk over most places (except the active Defence bases at Training Command and the Commandos), four stations were set up – at Chowder Bay, at ASOPA, 30 Terminal and on Georges Heights oval. Each had a planner and information on the surrounding Trust lands so that visitors could ask questions and discuss concerns. The station at ASOPA was the main station, with three publicised presentations by the planning team, at 10 am, noon and 2 pm. Two mini-buses were hired to shuffle people from Chowder Bay to Mosman shops. A heritage boat provided short tours of the Georges Heights – Middle Head coastline from Chowder Bay.

The tours and workshop were promoted through advertisements in local papers in Mosman and by posted invitation to the people who had registered interest in the site with the Trust. Leaflets were distributed across Mosman. Publicity was focussed on the surrounding communities since that was expected to yield as many participants as logistics would allow.

As it transpired, the weather defeated ambitions for a large attendance. It was a wet and bleak day, unattractive to outside walking. However, some 80 people visited the site. Since nearly all went initially to one of the presentations at ASOPA., the schedule for the day was altered. After each presentation, people were taken in a guided group to Chowder Bay, onto

the boat, then along the new walking path to 10 Terminal, then by mini-bus back to ASOPA. Back at ASOPA, they were encouraged to give their ideas and comments on cards.

There were three presentations on the day, to 28, 18 and 30 participants. The overwhelming response of people was supportive of the Trust. Some 35 comment cards were collected. The section below summarise the comments from these cards.

This report does not represent a “community opinion” but a collection of thoughtful comments from people who inspected the site and discussed the Trust’s ideas. The absence of negative responses indicates that the Trust is moving in the right direction with its planning.

Comments from the participants

1. About the Trust

Quite a number of cards commented that the Trust was doing a great job.

- The opportunity to visit and learn about the site was greatly appreciated.
- Congratulations to the Harbour Trust on your organisation even though it was a wet day.
- The Trust is doing an excellent job!!! Thanks for today!

2. Significance

The combination of heritage in the bushland / harbour setting was seen as particularly important.

- The harbour and its bushland surrounds are a key feature of Sydney.
- It is part of our social history ... it is important to use these sites to show and explain who the people were who used these sites, the different uses that the sites were subjected to
- This area is primarily an open headland – keep it that way.
- Create wildlife corridors wherever possible and return the land to the flora and fauna

3. Public access

The Harbour is our greatest treasure and should be freely accessible.

Where possible, access around the site should be by walking tracks to avoid any problems with mass tourism and avoid infestations of tourist buses.

Transport suggestions included:

- Ferries to Chowder Bay
- Mini-buses running Mosman – Chowder Bay
- Bike tracks that allow safe cycling and walking (as at Huskinson, South Coast).

4. Walking Tracks

There was general support for a network walking tracks both within the land and as part of a wider network. The newly opened track was praised as a prototype.

- The proposed extension of the Chowder Bay – Middle Head Road track to Balmoral was seen as a high priority, particularly because it contributed to a foreshore walk from Taronga Zoo to Manly. A comparison was made with Pretoria Avenue, which abuts a walkway with *never any problems although none of the neighbouring houses have any fences at all*. Another commented on the importance of including a fire break.
- Some people wanted a coastal route through HMAS Penguin, with a couple commenting that this was preferred to the proposed track past Penguin’s neighbours.
- Several people mentioned the importance of linking tracks on Trust land with surrounding public lands. Improvements were sought to the Obelisk Bay tracks – *cleared and supervised to make them safe for the general public*.

Several people sought clearing some scrub to reveal views at places. Having lookout points was commonly supported. An area for dog walking was wanted by one person.

5. Heritage

The Trust must protect buildings from vandals and environmental damage.

Have some underground rooms (at Georges Heights tunnels) as interpretive centres instead of too many signs around site. Have entry away from views so the visitor will get the feel of enclosure, learn about the site, then exit on Georges Heights to experience the full impact of the views.

There was a demand for information on the heritage significance of the site particularly the fortifications. One commented: reinstate some guns

6. Buildings

There were a variety of suggestions for cultural facilities (eg rehearsal rooms, studios, exhibition areas, art classes), with proposed locations including Training Command, 10 Terminal, ASOPA. One observed that the Blackwattle Bay studios were recently closed.

Several ideas mentioned for generating income to help with heritage restoration, including entry fees, restaurants, offices, spaces for clubs etc

Several saw the potential to re-use some buildings to provide accommodation and classrooms for children's groups such as school camps.

Schools, both metro and country, regularly seek accommodation in Sydney as a base for studies. With possible ferry access to the city, the venue would provide an excellent base. My school currently uses an inner city hotel to house Year 10 students for a weeklong camp. The surrounding walks, playing fields, vistas, dorms and mess hall facilities would greatly enhance school and other organisational conference / convention activities.

Some felt there were too many unimportant buildings, detracting from the significant buildings. One called for *retaining WWI and WWII buildings only if they can be converted economically and used appropriately*. One added, *wherever demolitions occur, land should be restored to its natural state*.

A couple said no to new buildings, "not even at proposed lookouts".

7. Georges Heights

Several people supported the linking of ovals and use of the Commando building as a gateway.

A number of people wrote "no sports centre", but no one proposed one. One said sporting facilities should be for amateurs only and be multi-purpose.

Officers Mess – *Open to all the public – not an exclusive boutique restaurant for the worthy.*

Training Command - the courtyard was seen as a great meeting / performance space. Children's camps, art studios were suggested uses.

30 Terminal – an information / visitors' centre with a lookout was proposed.

Old fuel tanks – the idea for gardens in the oil tanks was supported. *Flora/fauna ecological unit – wonderful idea; a must*. Another suggestion was for their use as the visitors' centre, with tracks to other "villages". Use for water / waste treatment was suggested.

Cross Street – netball courts were proposed.

8. Chowder Bay

Suggested uses include a maritime school, art studios / school / exhibition area, a Museum of Submarine Miners.

Some advocated removal of the light-brick buildings, as they were eyesores, but others suggested hiding them through landscaping. Several people proposed continued use as part of residential programs.

There was a call to make the wharf public.

9. Middle Head

Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) – suggested uses included a school holiday camp or arts camp; backpacker-type accommodation for schools and visitors; community use; arts centre or mini-conservatory with rehearsal facilities, music library, open air amphitheatre; theatre for school / local productions; art display area.

10 Terminal was seen as *an excellent facility for outward bound / multi-cultural / Christian camping organisations / music & art groups / camp site.*

There was a suggestion that some unsightly buildings be demolished.

10. Surrounding areas

There were some comments against the nude beaches at Obelisk and Cobblers, wanting family access to at least one.

Someone suggested that something like the Cavill's Baths once at Balmoral be reconstructed.