

What is Council planning for Catherine Park?

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What does Catherine Park and its beachfront mean to you?

What is special? What could be improved? How?

For those who live nearby, Catherine Park is the landscape of our daily lives. We revel in the beauty which surrounds us. For all of us, it's the place where the community comes together.

We are locals who love the park, have studied Council's draft Landscape Improvements Plan in detail and are concerned about its overall impact. Our views and suggestions are explained in this article to put them forward for community discussion.

We encourage you to look at the plans and submit your own comments to Council.

<https://yoursay.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au/catherine-park-scotland-island>

The plan contains proposed works which are welcome and needed, such as improvements to drainage, the grassed area, paths, steps and playground. However, there are many other proposals which need careful consideration as to whether we really want them.

Our concerns fall into two groups.

- **Too much stuff: concrete, hard surfaces, extra infrastructure**
Wide paths of 2.0m and 2.5m surfaced with crushed gravel and concrete, sandstone block wall on beach, three kayak racks, kayak ramp, extra paving and concrete, exercise equipment, altered playground area.
- **Formalised foreshore access for small vehicles along path and onto beach**
Access for any small vehicles (buggies, mobility scooters, motor or quad bikes) leads to a more formal, constructed foreshore with larger concrete landing at wharf junction, 2.5m path/road and 7.5m turning circle extending over the beach.
Pedestrians, playing children and vehicles will all be using the same small prime area.

What makes the park so charming is its stunning location, sandy beaches and informal, tucked away, natural character. Together, these works would significantly change the look and feel of Catherine Park, especially along the foreshore. It would be a more standard suburban park. But unlike other local beaches or paths, small private vehicles would be allowed to drive along part of these recreational places. We instead suggest that an extended parking area above the phone box in Pitt View St would be a much better option for all of us, including buggy drivers. The foreshore could then be a beautiful and safe place to walk, chat and relax.

What is proposed in the plan?

Key works in the plan which we'd probably all agree upon:

- improvements to drainage
- improving the quality of the grassed area
- repair and improvement of paths and steps

- pedestrian bridge over drainage outlet and potential mini-wetland
- safer connected access between the two halls
- maintaining the former kindy playground
- removing weeds from the surrounding slopes and grass

These are important basic measures, with priority needed for drainage and grassed area.

Our Concerns: Too much stuff?

Very wide, hard-surfaced paths

- Path 2.5m wide with compacted gravel proposed from the wharf to the creek along the foreshore.
- Path 2.0m wide coloured concrete proposed from creek to steps to Robertson Rd and continuing along the ridge to halls. Unnecessarily wide for pedestrian use only.

Our suggestion: 1.2m width maximum with crushed stone surface where sufficient.

Damaging and reducing beach

- Beach is reduced to form the wider, 2.5m surfaced path.
- 7.5m diameter crushed gravel turning circle extends half-way across grassed area of beach although not shown clearly in plans.
- Larger stone wall on beach at High Water Mark – reduces beach and causes erosion.

Our suggestion: Alternative parking proposal outlined below removes foreshore vehicle access and the need for wide path or turning circle. Restore informal low sandstone wall along current position.

Three kayak racks

- Large, obtrusive structures – look at examples at Carols.
- Difficult to use if you're not strong.
- Annual fee for usage. Presumably, any kayak not in rack becomes illegal.

Our suggestion: We take community responsibility, as we have done before. All small craft to be stickered annually and those not claimed, removed.

Other stuff we may not need

- Timber ramp by stone groin for kayak access
- Separate fitness equipment and "senior play area"
- Paved area and bench in front of central playground
- Extent of compacted gravel circles around picnic tables and sandstone paving around BBQ
- Two sandstone terraces on the slope below septic tanks and basketball court
- Extent of proposed wetland at creek outlet

Importance of keeping maximum open grassed area for flexible use

Each item of built stuff makes the park feel a bit less natural, a bit more urban, a bit more cluttered. For everything we add, we lose open grassed area which is flexible space for multiple uses. Most of our blocks are steep, making Catherine Park the only level grass we can access on the island.

Less could be more! If we require less of the proposed works, the money saved should enable best quality outcomes eg sandstone pavers rather than concrete.

Our concerns: Foreshore access for small vehicles (buggies, scooters, motor bikes)

Foreshore access for small vehicles is to the detriment of the safety, amenity, character and environmental values of the beachfront area.

Background

Before buggies started driving onto the foreshore in more recent years, the path was narrow, with grass either side. The community built the stone walls and planted the new garden beds to make this a welcoming, pleasant place. Vehicle access has led to major erosion of the path and surrounding park, widening the path, damage to stone walls and some social tension.

It is also illegal, as stated by the *Road Rules 2014*, reg 288(1):

http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_reg/rr2014104/s288.html.

Nearly all island buggies are unregistered and therefore uninsured. Furthermore, Transport NSW will currently not allow any new buggy registrations for use on the island. Despite prolonged negotiations over many years, this problem remains in limbo with no solution in sight.

What's proposed?

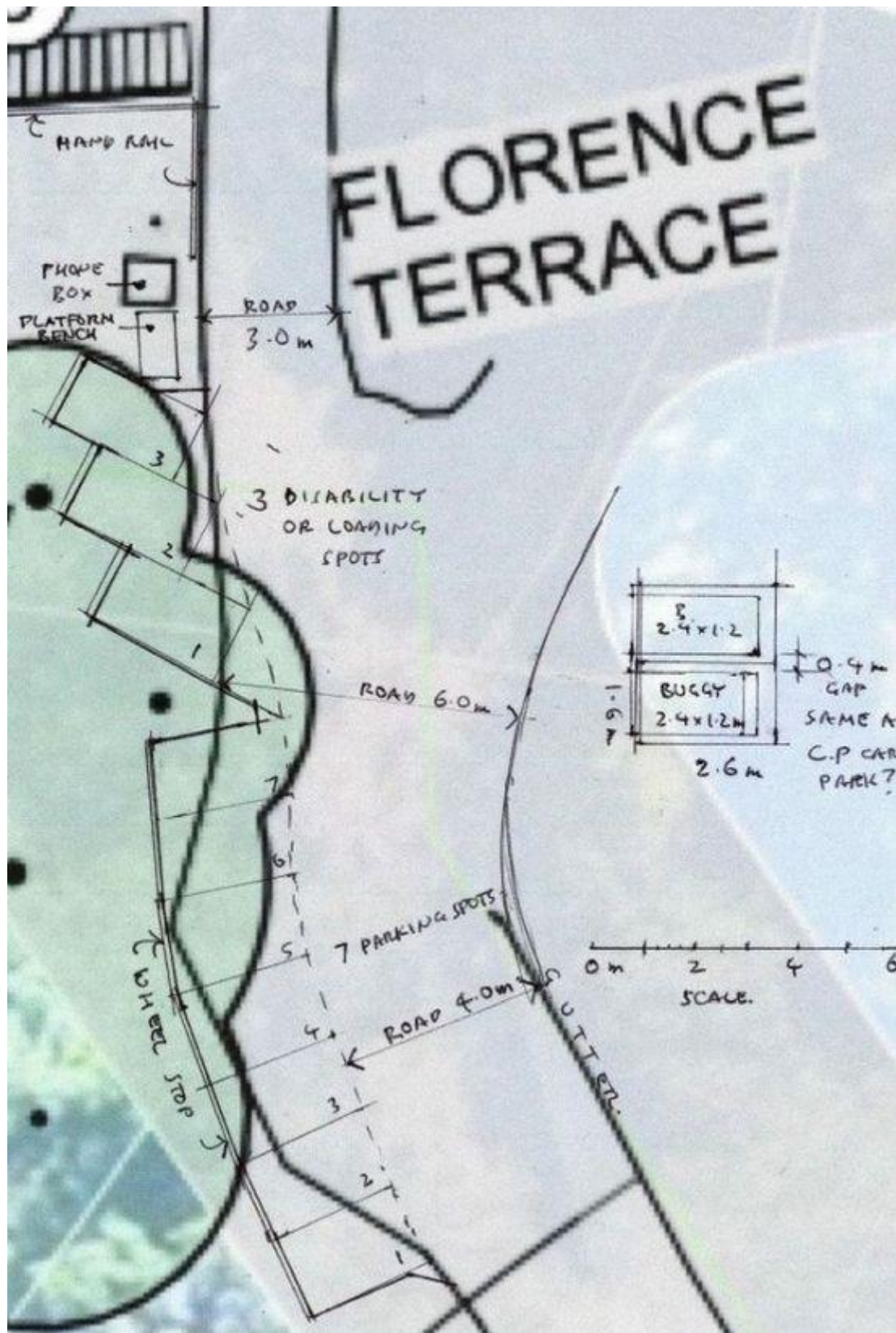
Enabling buggies to drive along the foreshore dominates the proposed design for this beautiful, intensively used small area. This requires:

- enlarged concrete landing at junction with wharf and around the tree
- 2.5m wide surfaced path
- 7.5m surfaced turning circle extending across the beach.
- Four parking spaces are provided, intended for Mobility Permit use only though this is not specified. All others are to park elsewhere.
- Bollards installed across path prevent driving further than the parking spaces.

Problems with proposed plan

- Combining buggies with people walking and relaxing in the same small foreshore space is dangerous and stressful.
- Most Tennis Wharf buggy drivers will have to park opposite Fire Shed.
- It is unclear whether the parking spaces are to be reserved for disabled access only, and if so, how it will be enforced.
- Why should buggies be allowed to go further than other vehicles to pick up and drop off?
- The foreshore is dominated by infrastructure for buggy access before Transport NSW has agreed to any Island buggy registration.

WIN-WIN-WIN alternative proposal for parking in extended lay-by in Pitt View St



Our proposed alternative plan balances the varied access needs with foreshore recreational amenity and safety.

- No access for small vehicles to the foreshore so it returns to a safe pedestrian and recreation area.
- 10 buggy parking spaces in Pitt View St by extending the existing layby above the phone box at the junction with Florence Terrace.
- Designates 4 of the 10 new buggy parking spaces for Mobility Permit holders.
- Provides 6 more buggy parking spaces than the 4 waterfront spaces in Council's plan and would therefore work better for both Mobility Permit and ordinary buggy drivers.
- The junction with Florence Terrace offers space for buggies to turn.
- Vehicles could still reverse down to the bollards to pick up if they prefer.
- New handrails along the road and steps from Pitt View to the park would assist with walking from the parking area to the wharf. This enables access to the wharf in a considerably shorter distance than from the Disabled parking beyond toilets at Church Point.
- All other vehicles to park opposite Fire Shed – as agreed by community meeting many years ago. Council and the community need to ensure it's kept clear for short-term parking.

Catherine Park is indeed a much-loved park with deep connections and many uses across the community. It's worth careful planning!