Plans for Thomas Stephens Reserve

Items of concern

1. **"Temporary" ferry wharf**

The current location of the ferry pontoon was a "temporary" fix about 20 years ago while a long-term plan was developed. In the gazetted 2009 Church Point masterplan, the ferry wharf is permanently located to the west of the Waterfront Store. The wide boardwalk, ramp and pontoon have already been installed as part of this plan. We have been advised by Transport NSW that 'the moorings identified have been relocated/removed as per previous commitments with the Church Point Ferry Operators in April 2022' (Letter from the Minister for Transport, Jo Haylen MP to Rory Amon MP, 5 May 2024).

In spite of this, the current plans for Thomas Stephens Reserve include a timber boardwalk to the temporary wharf. We urge Council to instead move the ferry wharf to its permanent location, as consistently promised since the temporary wharf was first installed. This would restore the beach and open vista to Pittwater giving a very significant improvement to the amenity of the reserve.

2. **Timber decking and trees**

We understand that Church Point Aesthetics Advisory Group (CPAAG) only suggested timber decking on the waterfront to enable the retention of trees. Otherwise, they were advocating the whole area be paved. However, the current plan has a large area of timber decking but retains no trees except for the small Melaleuca beside the Pasadena. Removal of all the other trees will mean the reserve is much hotter and barer for many years. Why is the timber decking preferred if it does not enable the retention of trees? The Spotted Gums and casuarinas are local native trees which currently provide filtered shade and beautify the reserve. There is considerable angst at them being removed.

3. **Bike rail**

A major change from the original exhibited plan is the installation of a long rail for the bikes of visiting cyclists. The area allocated for the rail and surrounding access is currently constantly used for seating and informal socialising. Thomas Stephens Reserve is small in area but used by a very large number of people. Large groups of cyclists visit only briefly, yet the rails would remove a large area from general use. SIRA asks that bike rails be located on the road edge so that the reserve remains pedestrian-only. There is also a suitable space in the bus lay-by on opposite side of the road.

4. **Old stone wall and garden bed**

Currently, a curved stone wall encircles the garden bed near the phone box, facing the road, the Post Office boxes and the water. It is to be removed and two new garden beds installed with a new stone wall facing the water. The existing wall is highly valued by residents for its functionality and aesthetic charm. All parts of the current wall are constantly used for seating and placing goods. The curved section facing the road is used to drop and pick up people and goods, place items while parking, getting mail or having a chat.

The new plans provide only a very short section facing the road and no seating wall opposite the Post Office boxes. The proposed garden beds and walls do not seem as useful in their location, nor offer as much seating or complement the historic character.

Local resident and heritage consultant Craig Burton recalls discussing the design of this wall with the architect in the late 1970s. It aligns with the old wharf and interprets the original stone retaining wall built in the 1890s to support the wharf and ferry shed. It is an attractive feature, in keeping with the heritage-listed Church Point Post Office and Store and old wharf. Is a Heritage Impact Statement required for adjacent works? Why is the existing wall being removed?

5. Keeping central space open

It is important that the central area be kept uncluttered and clear to facilitate larger gatherings such as the recent Anzac Day service.

6. Bins by post boxes

Three bins are to be placed along the access path to post boxes and store. This thoroughfare is heavily used and needs to be kept clear and attractive. We do not support bins in this location.