

CSIRO site redevelopment – 2017 AGM notes



Large site – 12.85ha (Block 7 Section 4). Possibly more land area available for redevelopment than the Brickworks site.

- Designated land under the National Capital Authority as part of the Lake Burley Griffin and Foreshores Precinct and listed as “community facility”.
- Listed as RZ1 Suburban under Territory Plan land use.
- Note that the oval is not included in the site – it is now ACT government land
- Also does not include Westridge House.

Significant heritage items on the site – Commonwealth Heritage Register has two listings: former Australian Forestry School; and CSIRO Forestry Precinct (see Point 2 on next page)

Currently protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act as it is leased by a Commonwealth institution (CSIRO) that retains responsibility for managing and maintaining the property under a 20 year lease that expires in 2022 (with two 10-year options).

- Possibility that CSIRO may leave the site earlier if both CSIRO and Gunyar Pty Ltd (which bought the site in 2002) agree.
- When CSIRO leaves the site, all heritage and conservation issues lose protection under the EPBC Act.

Need to ensure enough protections built into other heritage and conservation listings

- ***as well as ensuring the redevelopment is suitable for the suburb.***

YRA provided a submission on the draft new Heritage Management Plan in May 2017. CSIRO has indicated that it is awaiting an input from the Heritage Council and they will then respond to the submission (submission available on YRA website). The submission indicated the YRA would welcome the opportunity to discuss the implications of the “highly likely” transfer of the CSIRO lease to Gunyar Pty Ltd.

Key points in the submission were as follows:

1. Simply moving a number of the specific site assets onto the ACT Heritage Register would not provide the same level of protections as currently provided. The risks of such a transfer need much stronger explanation to engender trust in the community.
2. The current draft plan takes a piecemeal rather than a holistic view of the site. This is particularly the case as one of the two Commonwealth listings (105595) is for “The CSIRO Forestry Precinct”. The current description of the 2004 listing is “It is a complex of buildings, arboretum, nursery, and tennis courts forming an important national scientific institution, established as a response to Federation to provide a national forestry school and national forest research centre. It demonstrates both the Commonwealth's interest in scientific endeavour and a vision for Canberra as the location for science as well as general government administration.” P134. The heritage listing goes on to state “The precinct is important for its array of features from different phases of development linked to the scientific and educational purpose of the site. These features include the former Australian Forestry School, the former Offices of the Forestry and Timber Bureau, the former Seed Storage Building, Forestry House and Caretakers Cottage, the CSIRO Divisional Headquarters, Controlled Environment Laboratory, tennis courts, arboretum plantings and moveable objects of furniture, collections and historic timber hauling vehicles.” The important element here is the fact that it is a precinct – there is an array of features where the value of the whole precinct is greater than just the sum of its parts. There is no clear path forward for maintaining the heritage and conservation elements of the precinct as whole.
3. The current draft plan does not do enough to update changes since the 2008 heritage and conservation plans. For example, there is no discussion of the Pyrotron facility that has been used to test models of bushfire behaviour.
4. There is a need for at least a discussion how any developments on the CSIRO lease will impact on the oval area, and vice versa.
5. The plan also appears to fail to cover adequately elements of the site other than buildings.
 - i. For example, there is a small part with three original remnants of forestry activity – a logging whim, a log tram running on wooden rails, and a log buggy. These would appear to be significant remnants dating from the late 1800s to early 1900s. The heritage value would be useful to consider, especially as they appear to be suffering badly from their current exposure to the elements.
 - ii. Additionally, the value of trees in the area receive no specific mention in the assessment of site values. It is likely that some of them were planted by Charles Weston or other notable foresters from the area.
 - iii. Even though there are references to tree protection in the management plan including replacement of like with like, there clearly are parts of the site where some significant trees have been removed and there is no clear action to replace them.
6. The draft plan is also clear that it has not sought to obtain further information on the possible indigenous values on the site.
7. The 2008 studies covered both a Heritage Plan as well as a Conservation Plan. It would be useful to gain specific assurances that the current plan incorporates all relevant conservation elements, including issues around landscapes, flora and fauna.

YRA will give priority to monitoring developments.