

15 December 2017



Australian Institute of Architects

Director Key Sites Assessments, Planning Services
Department of Planning and Environment
GPO Box 39, Sydney, NSW 2001
By electronic submission

To whom it may concern:

**Re. Art Gallery of NSW Expansion Project – Sydney Modern
State Significant DA SSD 6471**

The Australian Institute of Architects welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the DA Submission for this important project.

The Opportunity

This is a State Significant Development, which means that this a hundred-year opportunity. It is important that this fact not be forgotten in the face of the variety of challenges that any project of this scale and public importance will inevitably experience.

The Institute is fully supportive of design excellence in all its forms, and urges that all stakeholders remain committed to this objective in order to deliver a project that achieves on these expectations for the people of NSW. We therefore wish to reaffirm our support for the process of appointment of the architects for the project. SANAA were selected by an expert jury as the winning architects from a highly competitive field of local and international architects through the Institute-endorsed international architectural design competition. They, along with their team of consultants, are highly qualified to deliver an exceptional design.

As is the case with a project of this scale however there is a process of continued improvement. So it is at this stage where we recognise that the design is not yet fully resolved – just as we would expect at planning approval stage. We therefore encourage the parties charged with delivering this project to continue to support the architects in developing their vision. If appropriate, as is often the case elsewhere on projects of this significance, a design review panel of eminent design professionals may assist as the design proceeds through key milestones.

This same support needs to be extended throughout the construction phase. As a building type, galleries frequently call for unique approaches to construction. In order to fully realise the opportunity of a hundred-year building, the vagaries of a commercial approach to construction cannot be contemplated, and the design intent of the architects needs to be fully supported by the construction team and procurement process.

Comments

We provide the following specific comments at this interim point in the project's development.

1. Relationship to context

Consistent with our previous comments, we continue to believe that the project would benefit from strengthening the symbiotic relationship between the Gallery and its neighbour, the Royal Botanic Gardens.

At the time of our previous correspondence on this project, we suggested that this relationship might be strengthened by placing the Sydney Modern entrance closer to the ceremonial entrance to the Royal Botanic Gardens. Whilst the entry has moved, it appears now in an uncertain disposition somewhere between the two. We trust that this will be resolved with greater clarity as the design progresses. In addition, in the current plan, the western edge of the landscape link stops at, and sits off to the east of, Art Gallery Road.

Whilst we are not fully informed as to the nature of the boundaries of this project, urban development projects in Sydney seem frequently to unwittingly celebrate their administrative development boundaries. It would be a shame to re-create these otherwise invisible silos between the Royal Botanic Gardens, the road and the Sydney Modern and even between the existing and new galleries. As such we wish to express our support for the design team in their efforts to fully integrate the design within its setting.

2. Urban Design

In our previous correspondence with the project we recommended that "serious consideration needs to be given to enhancing Art Gallery Road's traditional role as the ceremonial roadway leading to Mrs Macquarie's Chair. In particular, we recommend that the pavilions facing the road should be pulled back to be in a closer alignment with the Gallery's ceremonial steps; in the current design they will intrude into the visual curtilage of the roadway, which provides a link between the urban form of the city and the parkland environment beyond Sydney modern and the entrance to the Garden".

It appears as though this remains to be addressed.

3. Landscape

From a public-facing point of view, and given the nature of the site, the success of this project lies not with the building – which should, in a way, be the lesser – but in the landscape, which in the Sydney tradition should be the greater. In this project there is an opportunity for the landscape to celebrate and repair a pre-European settlement landscape and for the buildings, both new and old, to connect to this new landscape in a meaningful way.

As with the architectural team, we therefore wish to express our support for the landscape architects (McGregor Coxall) and urge that they be afforded every opportunity to progress the design in accordance with their design intent.

4. Visitor experience

The new gallery is now a distinctly separate building to that of the existing gallery. This presents challenges for a visitor in understanding which gallery they ought to attend, and consequently places

some pressure on the space between the old and the new. How will they move between the galleries across the landscape link, and, how will they populate this link?

The two buildings are 'connected' via an open-to-the-elements landscaped space located on the land bridge. That this is neither weather-protected nor providing any constructed link between separate buildings of the same institution is a curious approach, that seems requiring of further design development.

In addition, the emphasis now placed on the green space between the new and old buildings emphasises its importance as a public place. It follows that its design and delivery must be exceptional.

5. Public interface

We are pleased to see accessible landscaped roof terraces and the external circulation paths in the project. They seem to deliver on one of the site's best potentials, and will provide a completely unique gallery experience for the public. They must be retained.

6. Future proofing

It is important to remember that cultural institutions are never 'finished'. We therefore suggest that future development scenario(s) are mapped to ensure none of the works of this single project preclude the next gallery evolution.

The Institute is strongly committed to ensuring that the design and delivery of this important project realise a substantial new contribution to our cultural fabric and for the people of NSW.

Yours faithfully



Andrew Nimmo
NSW Chapter President
Australian Institute of Architects

ATTACHMENT

Correspondence to Sally Webster, 9 May 2016

9 May 2016

Ms Sally Webster
Manager, Sydney Modern Project
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery Road
Sydney NSW 2000



Australian Institute of Architects

Dear Sally

Sydney Modern

Many thanks for arranging the presentation to myself and members of the NSW Chapter Built Environment Committee last week.

The Institute congratulates the Gallery on the intensive consultative process that has been adopted in undertaking this exciting and necessary extension project. We are confident the completed project will greatly enhance the Gallery's role in Sydney's cultural life, as well as attracting a substantial increase in visitation from within NSW, as well as interstate and international tourists.

I am pleased to offer the following comments within this consultative framework:

1. The project would benefit from strengthening the symbiotic relationship between the Gallery and its neighbour, the Royal Botanic Garden. Between them these venerable NSW institutions hold unrivalled collections at the heart of the state's natural and cultural heritage. The relationship between them could be strengthened by placing the Sydney Modern entrance closer to the ceremonial entrance to the RBG; this would also strengthen the pathway from Woolloomooloo through the Gallery and the Garden as an alternative pedestrian route to Macquarie Street, as well as providing a gateway between public spaces.

[Efforts made to strengthen the relationship will help to counter criticisms that the Gallery is 'colonising' the Garden.]

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2. Serious consideration needs to be given to enhancing Art Gallery Road's traditional role as the ceremonial roadway leading to Mrs Macquarie's Point. In particular, the pavilions facing the road need to be pulled back to be in a closer alignment with the Gallery's ceremonial steps; in the current design they will intrude into the visual curtilage of the roadway, which provides a link between the urban form of the city and the parkland environment beyond Sydney Modern and the entrance to the Garden.
3. The artist's rendering of the ceremonial entrance is very appealing and permeable, but this lightness is not reflected in the plan of the roof for this pavilion.
4. The Institute believes great buildings are made so by the generosity the architecture provides to the public. With this in mind, we wonder if the public should have the opportunity to access at least one of the green rooftops to better understand how the 'building in a landscape' concept actually works. In the large rendered perspective which hangs in the cafe foyer the rooftops of the central-northern and north-eastern pavilions are shown as being populated, which suggests that they are indeed accessible.
5. The possibility of extending the land covering over the Cahill Expressway to the east should be explored more fully. This would give back more landscape to the park whilst reducing the scar left by the expressway. It would be a pity to lose out on creating more exhibition and pedestrian space because of the Gallery's diffidence in challenging the objections of other government agencies to this option.

[Reducing the landscape area the new galleries take from the park by increasing the landscape through urban repair of the roadway scar will help counter arguments against placing the new building on existing parkland.]

6. Pavement quality is an important urban marker informing the public of a place's use, priorities and importance. We wonder if the material type and quality of Mrs Macquarie's Road could be changed to better reflect a pedestrian-friendly public quality in this section of the park. Granite, sandstone or bluestone are high quality pavement surfaces common used in the city. The Gallery and Garden would both benefit from this change.

Thank you again for inviting the Institute to this presentation. We wish you and the design team well in facing the many challenges ahead.

Yours sincerely



Shaun Carter
NSW President