



Summary of submissions

Middle Head and Georges
Head Master Plan
Sydney Harbour National Park

© 2018 State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage

With the exception of photographs, the State of NSW and Office of Environment and Heritage are pleased to allow this material to be reproduced in whole or in part for educational and non-commercial use, provided the meaning is unchanged and its source, publisher and authorship are acknowledged. Specific permission is required for the reproduction of photographs.

The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) has compiled this report in good faith, exercising all due care and attention. No representation is made about the accuracy, completeness or suitability of the information in this publication for any particular purpose. OEH shall not be liable for any damage which may occur to any person or organisation taking action or not on the basis of this publication. Readers should seek appropriate advice when applying the information to their specific needs.

All content in this publication is owned by OEH and is protected by Crown Copyright, unless credited otherwise. It is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0), subject to the exemptions contained in the licence. The legal code for the licence is available at Creative Commons.

OEH asserts the right to be attributed as author of the original material in the following manner: © State of New South Wales and Office of Environment and Heritage 2018.

Published by:

Office of Environment and Heritage
59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232
Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)
Phone: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)
Phone: 1300 361 967 (national parks, general environmental enquiries, and publications requests)
Fax: +61 2 9995 5999
TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 131 555
Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 131 555
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Report pollution and environmental incidents
Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or info@environment.nsw.gov.au
See also www.environment.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 978-1-76039-952-8
OEH 2017/ 0628
February 2018

Find out more about your environment at:
www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Contents

Introduction	1
Planning and consultation road map	1
Feedback received	1
Theme one – Exploring the stories	2
Theme two – Arrival	3
Theme three – Walking the harbour	3
Theme four – Panorama	5
Theme five – Healthy environment	5
Theme six – Facilities and uses	7
Theme seven – Events	8
What's next	10

The Draft Middle Head Master Plan was exhibited for public comment from 3 November to 16 December 2016. This report presents the planning and consultation phases and a summary of the comments received.

Introduction

In April 2015, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) commenced preparation of a master plan for the Middle Head and Georges Head precinct of Sydney Harbour National Park.

In mid-2015 the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust (Harbour Trust) reviewed its proposal to amend the Middle Head Management Plan for the adjacent Harbour Trust lands at Middle Head, Georges Heights and Chowder Bay.

Subsequently, NPWS and Harbour Trust have collaborated in the planning process to ensure whole-of-headland outcomes such as bushland management and a connected network of paths, to create a unified parkland. Draft planning documents were exhibited alongside each other for public comment.

This report summarises the 76 submissions received by National Parks and Wildlife Service for the draft Middle Head and Georges Head Master plan, Sydney Harbour National Park.

Planning and consultation road map



Feedback received

A total of 76 submissions were received, including seven from community groups or non-government organisations.

This report presents the range of feedback received in a summarised format by master plan themes.

Theme one – Exploring the stories

The master plan states on page 23:

‘The natural and cultural heritage of Middle Head and Georges Head offers an important opportunity to enrich the experience of the place through a greater understanding and appreciation of a range of diverse stories. This plan recognises that the stories are intrinsically linked across a series of ‘nodes’ or key areas in which the narratives of the site are most effectively revealed and explained.’

Table 1 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme one – exploring the stories.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Provide coordinated interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Landscape, natural features and bushland, the Aboriginal heritage and the particularly rich defence heritage make Middle Head a place of national significance. Good planning for its conservation and interpretation is essential for the creation of a lasting legacy for future generations. I am in favour of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The restoration of the Outer and Inner Forts, including re-build the gun carriages, re-build the flagstaff located between the under-ground DRF [Depression Range Finder] stations Modern high standard signage is probably the single most important and Productive investment that can be made to improve the experience of Cubba Cubba for visitors. The proposition for ‘interpretative sculptures’ and plaques etc. is opposed as it would detract from the natural beauty of this environment.
Managed temporary ‘street art programme’ providing interpretive artwork to selected concrete faces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Street Art: leave this for art galleries, etc. Please display art/items/history more in keeping with national park values.
Displays and small event venues in appropriate fortifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it would be much more interesting to have a re-enactment of the tunnels and buildings of the time and give Sydneysiders (and tourists) a taste of what Sydney life really was like 100 years ago, or so. By this, I mean a static exhibition or a ‘son et lumiere’ maybe with an interactive element showcasing to children and others the history of the place. Please don’t line the bunkers and gun emplacements with signs and descriptions of what they are, we can all see what they are, if we need an in-depth explanation, we could have a pamphlet explaining all these details.

Comments received demonstrated strong support for improving interpretation across the site including one response suggesting multi-lingual interpretation.

Submissions that did not support interpretation mostly identified the source of concern is the use of signage (number, size, location) as the primary method of interpretation.

Theme two – Arrival

The master plan stated on page 27:

‘Consultation for the master plan identified that arrival Middle Head can be significantly improved to assist visitors looking to orient themselves to the national park and to Harbour Trust facilities.’

Table 2 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme two – arrival.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Reinstate the defensive ditch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the excavation of the Outer Defensive Ditch (MH89) from where excavation has already begun down to its northern end. Use the ditch as a ramp leading down to the access point to the walking track along the northern side of Inner Middle Head. • The proposed arrival feature at the reinstated defensive ditch is fantastic.
Use of Guard House for arrival and orientation point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am in favour of the restoration of the historic Guard House, to be used as a café. • The Guardhouse is well positioned for an entry/orientation centre. • I’m against a café restaurant being built at the entrance when it surely should be by the Soldiers Institute. • Please don’t encourage more cars or overdo the trendy venue or restaurant construction. • We agree that a café would be a pleasant facility for visitors to the orientation centre, but we are against increasing the built environment in the park. • It is imperative that NPWS and Harbour Trust work together to have one visitors centre. • A seamless experience with neighbouring parklands (Harbour Trust) will only happen if proper collaboration takes place. An arrival venue is better suited at the entrance to the park, there do not need to be two such venues.

Comments generally supported the proposal to reinstate the ditch. There were mixed views on the proposed use for the Guard House with suggestions that there should be one visitor centre for NPWS and Harbour Trust and proposing alternative locations for a café.

Theme three – Walking the harbour

The master plan stated on page 30:

‘The importance of the site to access the harbour is highlighted in the Sydney Harbour National Park POM [plan of management] 2012 and supported by the strategic positioning identified in the Sydney Harbour National Landscape Experience Development Strategy 2013. This masterplan provides high-level recommendations for the main Harbour Scenic Walk, circuit walks and link walks.’

Table 3 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme three – walking the harbour.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Integrate Middle Head with the Sydney Harbour Scenic Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I commend NPWS on proposing to extend the Sydney Harbour Scenic Walk from Chowder Bay to beyond Middle Head... Its extension as proposed in the Master plan will allow more people to enjoy the specific beauty of Georges Head and Middle Head without walking along Chowder Bay Road. • Paths throughout should have seats/rest spots at appropriate intervals. • These new walks will necessitate more infrastructure and this should be undertaken with utmost care to retain the Aboriginal and military history. • The Harbour Scenic Walk ... maximises community interest in the site, improves and develops key linkages with neighbouring attractions, walking tracks and activities and enhances pedestrian access and circulation. It also helps to blur the mixed tenure of the lands of Middle Head and Georges Head, a key objective of both NPWS and the Harbour Trust. Applaud NPWS's vision of seeking increase visitation and usage that enables a broad cross-section of users and visitors from across Sydney and beyond to enjoy and benefit from the headland parklands. • I can understand that roads need to be upgraded and maintained and tracks cleared. But we don't want tarred roadways through the bush. We want to take bush walks through virgin bush, not this citified parkland which you are intent on creating. • The new walk from Georges Heights to the harbour, making this new track would require cutting down more natural bushland which is outrageous.
Encourage broad range of use of Cobblers Beach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A change in the route of the Cobblers Beach link track could allow for a wheelchair access path. • The proposed rationalisation of paths and construction of the Scenic Walk close to Cobblers and Obelisk beaches is also supported. • The proposed path to Cobblers beach should be changed to avoid the beach. During a warm summer weekend, there would be 300 nudists on the beach. If there is a high tide in the middle of the day, the nudists are forced to use the surrounding grass area. • Please don't allow the interests of some to develop this area with walkways etc., which will subject both nude and walkers to each other, which is not fair for either. We would see this proposal as a stepping stone to bring people to this beach that object to nude bathing, then slowly change the beach to clothes only, as was the case with Reef Beach. • The idea of directing a small number of elderly bushwalkers onto a clothing optional beach would be a failure to both parties concerned, not to mention the extra costs involved in maintaining these bushwalking tracks down to the shoreline. • I see no explicit reference to the status of these beaches as naturist venues being changed as part of this plan, however it is hard to view the proposed walking track terminations as anything other than attempts to place pressure on Cobblers and Obelisk Beaches' status as naturist venues at the behest of a noisy minority who are opposed to naturism and it being supported by the broader community.

Comments supported the Sydney Harbour Scenic Walk with some identifying the need to consider alignment near Cobblers and Obelisk beach, accessibility, preference for walking through bush rather than formed tracks and minimal impact on the environment. Those that opposed the walking tracks identified concerns around the increased use of the park.

Theme four – Panorama

The master plan stated on page 32:

‘Viewing points can celebrate the iconic and unrivalled views of Sydney Harbour by providing a diversity of spectacular and safe vantage points.’

Table 4 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme four – panorama.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Provide diversity of spectacular and safe vantage points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outer Middle Head – Excavate the unfinished 1853 battery (MH2). This would help provide a barrier to the public accessing the edge of the cliff. • A new pathway is definitely warranted and it makes sense to build it through the bush above the water. Hopefully, trees don't block all the views of the harbour from the new walkway. • Increase the drainage for Cobblers Road, put in a viewing area at the start of Cobblers Road near the old barracks, but forget the second access track. • The location is primal to the history of course but the view and exploiting that is discordant with the ongoing significance as a historical site. If people want Luna Park well they can go there and that's also got a great view. • Please do not build horrible fenced off viewing platforms around them. The whole reason why this national park is so attractive is its natural beauty and total simplicity. You are simply overdeveloping this natural site. Please do not build other cliffhanging viewing platforms, we can all see quite well without building these ugly edifices. • The platforms will detract from the serenity of the beach and become an ongoing liability on the NPWS especially by way of cost. • The proposed terraced picnic area above Cobbler's Beach and the managed camping area will increase the density of usage of an area which is currently relatively natural bushland, which would apparently be cleared. • I am generally not in favour of new structures. Providing safety railing for the public is an exception. I believe the multi-purpose timber decks are not in keeping with a national park or a historic national monument. • Middle Head also holds a strong part of Australian history and should not be altered with, instead, it should be kept intact.

This theme attracted few comments, which are covered above.

Theme five – Healthy environment

The master plan stated on page 33:

‘Ongoing management of the natural environment at Middle and Georges Heads remain an important long-term area of activity. The masterplan has identified priority strategies in complement to the general recurrent requirements of the Sydney Harbour National Park Plan of Management.’

Table 5 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme five – healthy environment.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Reinstate and interpret the defensive ditch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals for the defensive ditch and the wooden pedestrian bridge are excellent examples of on-site interpretation.
Improvements to Cobblers Beach Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am in favour of the restoration of the cobbled roads to the Inner Fort and leading to Cobblers Beach.
Continue community engagement and involvement in environmental management activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Soldiers Institute provides a base for community and volunteer activity which creates a sense of ownership, belonging and pride in the park. We are pleased that its current function is to be retained. Possible steps on how to achieve the vision in the Draft Management Plan for interpreting the heritage of Middle Head and how the story might be told are: Recruit veteran volunteers to run guided tours and generally assist the rangers. The Sydney Skinny is a wonderful example of what volunteering can achieve. We believe volunteering can be used as a model for more events and activities. Middle Harbour NPWS staff still operate a corporate volunteer program that brings hundreds of staff from a growing number of corporates, government agencies, schools and not-for-profit groups to undertake work projects nominated and supervised by NPWS staff. It is not insignificant amount of labour invested in the care and maintenance of Sydney Harbour National Park. One wonders what will happen to this mature, established volunteer labour resource once the NSW Government appoints a commercial organisation to operate facilities within the Sydney Harbour National Park on Middle Head. Various sites within the Master plan areas are currently used for a range of community and cultural activities and purposes, such as community gardens, meeting areas and artist residency programs. Council will continue to work with NPWS and the Harbour Trust to ensure current community and cultural activities are continued. We support the Soldiers Institute facilities being upgraded to modern standards to allow for continued community use so long as there is no alteration to the historic fabric of the building or its external appearance. It should remain as the 'home' for volunteers and community gardeners, and for small-scale community use of the facility.
Fire risk, weed management and water runoff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council will continue to work with NPWS for traffic management of Middle Head and Georges Head, fire risk be considered, more detail on minimising conflicting use of Chowder Bay Road. Eradication of weeds and erosion stabilisation is to be commended. The management plan should clarify if areas or previous dieback have been rehabilitated. Wherever possible the bush areas should be returned to a more natural state by the removal of all non-native trees.

This theme attracted few comments, which are covered above.

Theme six – Facilities and uses

The master plan states on page 34:

‘The masterplan seeks to optimise the use of existing and new facilities. This includes maintaining flexibility in the short-term and potential for adaptability in the longer term to respond to changing needs and opportunities.’

Table 6 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme six – facilities and uses.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Retain NPWS presence on-site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are pleased that the existing buildings will be repaired and upgraded with new facilities but that their exteriors will remain original. The draft Master plan plans for the possible movement of operations off-site and the possible creation of picnic areas on the former tennis court and rain gardens. These would be attractive but there are advantages to having operations on-site and not outsourced. The current NPWS works compound should be fully screened from the surrounding areas with suitable shrubs and trees. There needs to be suitable facilities for NPWS operations, ideally adjacent to the works compound. The planned reduction in size and eventual relocation of the works compound is supported in so far that it does not impact on the ability of park personnel to manage the park. NPWS storage/compound etc. – give serious consideration to using some of the 10 Terminal buildings and adjacent areas for NPWS storage etc.
Adaptively re-use buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst NPWS might be State funded, I see no reason why private profit-making ventures should not be considered in the NPWS area. (Naturally very carefully assessed and monitored). Accommodation whether designated as short or long-term, holiday lettings or otherwise must be better defined, both as to numbers of people, times and places. The suggestion of function rooms and community rooms is admirable...but on-site accommodation for a ranger is also imperative for this valuable remote location. Accommodation for a ranger on-site should be an essential inclusion of any plan to ensure the safety of property and potential campers/occupiers of leased premises, etc., – particularly in view of bushfire risk and increased visitor activity. The public/private events and short-term accommodation have little to do with the traditional values of a national park and would ruin what once was a quiet and peaceful place to visit. In addition, there should be no alterations and upgrades to the Soldiers Institute. Once the overnight stay is introduced, it will ultimately be extended and the peninsula become accessible to an elitist few hindering the enjoyment of the area to the whole community.
Use Barracks Green for events with possible multi-purpose shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision for undercover catering etc. should be acceptable, even new buildings provided they are environmentally sensitive in design and placement. A new building should only be contemplated if it is essential to the purposes of the park and only where there is no alternative. Why does the Soldiers Institute need to be extended – this is unnecessary. Please do not build picnic areas and platforms at Georges Head, everyone can take their own portable picnic items. I also do not wish to see an

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
	<p>outdoor kitchen and shelter facility. It is not necessary and again is over-commercialisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is recommended that the possible multi-purpose shelter proposed in section 2.6 of the Draft Plan be removed from the plans.
<p>Install multi-use platforms to facilitate camping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We agree that camping at Middle Head could be a beneficial visitor experience. We would not like there to be permanent structures associated with the camping, or the development of supporting infrastructure that detracts from the natural values of the park. • I object to the proposed construction of platforms on Cobblers beach because the platforms would detract from the natural beauty of the beach. • The Middle Head area has experienced concerning anti-social behaviour during the night and the encouragement of camping would be a significant risk to an increase in vandalism, damage and anti-social behaviours are against the ethos of the national park. • It was never planned to be a commercial precinct to allow overnight camping on Cobblers Beach, rave parties of up to 600 people in structures to be constructed, all night security patrols to stop any fires or other forms of vandalism to occur. • There is no infrastructure there. Therefore, toilets, showers, barbecues etc. will have to be constructed. Where? The area is already too small for the number of regulars who visit. And what about security? There will have to be security officers at the site 24/7 in case of misbehaviour of the campers. Considered all together, these are huge financial investments for only a small return. • Allowing Camping would be dangerous, especially if rangers are removed. • I believe the plans for Cobblers beach (Pathway, Platforms and Camping) will have a significant detrimental and irreversible effect on the beach environment and the community. • No camping on the site. • The park being small and adjacent to an urban area encourages security risks. The provision of 'furniture' at selected locations may be worth considering, however, camping is strongly opposed.

There were mixed views regarding the adaptive re-use of buildings on-site but a consensus that National Parks and Wildlife Services need to retain the buildings, allow for their interpretation and ensure that they are maintained appropriately.

Theme seven – Events

The master plan stated on page 37:

'The role of events and relevance to the site provides

- potential for new users to experience the site in new and diverse ways without long-term impacts
- engaging with new emerging communities
- potential for events to use a range of spaces and locations.'

Table 7 Feedback received on Middle Head Master Plan proposals relating to theme seven – events.

What the draft plan proposed	What you thought about the proposal
Use of the site to host events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The attraction is the place and history itself and not some pseudo-event-audience related entrepreneurial exercise. Probably ticketed and that means restricting the free flow of people. • It seems that management is exploiting the location to make money from other things unrelated to the significance of the history of the site itself. To what extent will the history be retained, enlarged and used to educate the visitors? • Events must be better defined with parameters in size, location, community and environmental impact, noise, security and purpose. • We support and see a need for uses of the precinct for musical events and community gatherings of various kinds but must express concern as to the nature and scale of events that may be envisaged. • I am strongly opposed to your push to commercialise parts of the park through closure to the public to allow commercial events. There should be no closure of any parts of this public land for the exclusive temporary use of any group. • Safety is a big issue. Given some activities and behaviour, such an area would be very dangerous, especially at night. Strict protocols and planning for any individual event/activity should be implemented. • If large-scale events are to be allowed we consider it essential to restrict the number of such events held over each 12-month period and to restrict attendee numbers to protect the environment. • I certainly don't think the area should be used as an events area (Sydney Skinny is OK just once a year) as I believe constant use in that manner would adversely affect what is already there and it would restrict public access if the area is hired out for private events.
Use of fortifications for events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Middle Head Fortifications are unsuitable or events because the critically endangered bent-wing bat roosts in them. • Adapting historic military structures such as the Casemates and the Middle Head Fortifications with bars and facilities for events and functions will detract from their heritage value. These are listed heritage structures. • We understand that they are not structurally sound and that the cost of stabilising and restoring them will be significant. We assume that the purpose of adapting them for events is to generate sufficient funds to do so. • I do not want to see the Outer Fort areas used for commercial events and functions. Can't these be held in the buildings closer to the Obelisk car park? Attracting hordes of people only entails more infrastructure such as public lavatories. Surely there is sufficient space in the already established buildings for this sort of thing? • I am in favour of the following: The restoration of the Outer and Inner Forts, including re-build the gun carriages, re-build the flagstaff located between the two under-ground DRF stations to create a venue for corporate events, private functions and live musical concerts. • There is a public benefit associated with restoring and opening the casemates up to the public for events. The priority for these structures (Casemates) is restoration so that they are structurally safe and accessible to the public. • Ongoing small-scale public and private events, similar to recent custom and practice, are supported.

Comments supported events such as those that have been held on-site but would like NPWS to consider logistical issues such as:

- size
- location
- access
- impact on other members of the public (exclusive vs public access)
- approval process including appropriate to the site
- security and site management/protection.

There was largely consensus that it is important to conserve and interpret the Beehives and Casemates with mixed views on the use of them for events.

What's next

The Middle Head Master Plan will be implemented in stages by NPWS as funding becomes available. Any major works will be subject to rigorous environmental planning procedures in accordance with the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.