

Millers Point Community Resident Action Group



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Fort Street Public School Submission

by

Millers Point Community Resident Action Group

A INTRODUCTION

Millers Point Community Resident Action Group (MP CRAG) would like to make the following comments and objections to Fort Street Public School's redevelopment proposal.

Fort Street Public School has been the local primary school for the Millers Point, Dawes Point, Walsh Bay and Rocks community since 1842. It's imperative that the school's redevelopment provides a pre-eminent school for both current and future generations of families.

Located on Sydney's historic Observatory Hill, this is a wonderful opportunity to modernise and expand one of Australia's first schools and deliver an exceptional educational asset not just for our community but for the City of Sydney.

It is an opportunity to truly connect with The Rocks and Circular Quay, Walsh Bay and Barangaroo and the surrounding area's world-class arts, cultural, technological and government facilities, some of which have a partnership with the school.

Due to a lack of proper consultation with both the community and the school, the design and planning solution submitted for approval falls short in many respects and lacks the clear vision this project deserves. This could've been avoided should a true collaborative approach had been taken.

The MP CRAG supports the Fort Street Public School's P&C and their findings, particularly the proposed number of students of the proposed school, which would

dramatically reduce the amount of play area for each child. The proposed design solution is a dramatic overdevelopment of the small, historic site.

The Millers Point community (comprising residents in Millers Point, Dawes Point, The Rocks and Walsh Bay) is diverse – from those that enjoy apartment life on the southern end of Kent St and at Walsh Bay on the water to those that took on the challenge of restoring an old terrace to build a new life with their family in a newly developing community. This includes many public housing residents accommodated in various Kent St properties – some of whom were former students at FSPS. Despite the diversity of our community in family structure, age and history in the area we share a number of common objectives in what we seek from our life in the Millers Point community. These objectives were recently articulated and agreed at our Community Planning Day in February 2020. These objectives include:

- To enhance the safety, amenity and character of the Millers Point neighbourhood
- To protect and promote the unique heritage nature of the Millers Point precinct
- To represent the residents of Millers Point to those who have an impact on our community, whether they be Government, Business or Cultural.

B OUR CONCERNS

There are many concerns from the local community regarding traffic – most of which could be alleviated in the following 2 ways:

1. Prepare a Master Plan for the whole Observatory Hill precinct, as shown on our sketch.
2. Complete the cycleway before construction of the new school, as per Alex Greenwich's letter to Minister for Transport, Andrew Constance, attached.

1. Master Planning of Observatory Hill as Sydney's Foremost Education Precinct

The Master Plan is based on transforming Observatory Hill into Sydney's foremost Education Precinct, which would include:

School Education - Fort Street Public School

Science and Technology - MAAS, Observatory precinct

Environment - the Environment centre at the school

Heritage - The National Trust

Arts - The SH Ervin Gallery (to be used by the school, the National Trust and the public)

The key aspects of this plan are:

- This Master Plan is based on relocating the currently underutilised National Trust office area to a new heritage precinct such as the Government-owned Richmond Villa and Glover Cottages on Kent Street
- The current National Trust office building would be converted back to its original use as Fort Street School
- SH Ervin Gallery would continue to operate as a gallery
- This plan improves general pedestrian safety by physically separating the cycle way from the school drop off zone
- Allows two safe drop-off zones; one in the current National Trust parking area; one in Kent Street with access to a proposed new lift to the school
- Provides the correct amount of play area for the proposed increased number of school children, thus not needing to have staggered lunch hours

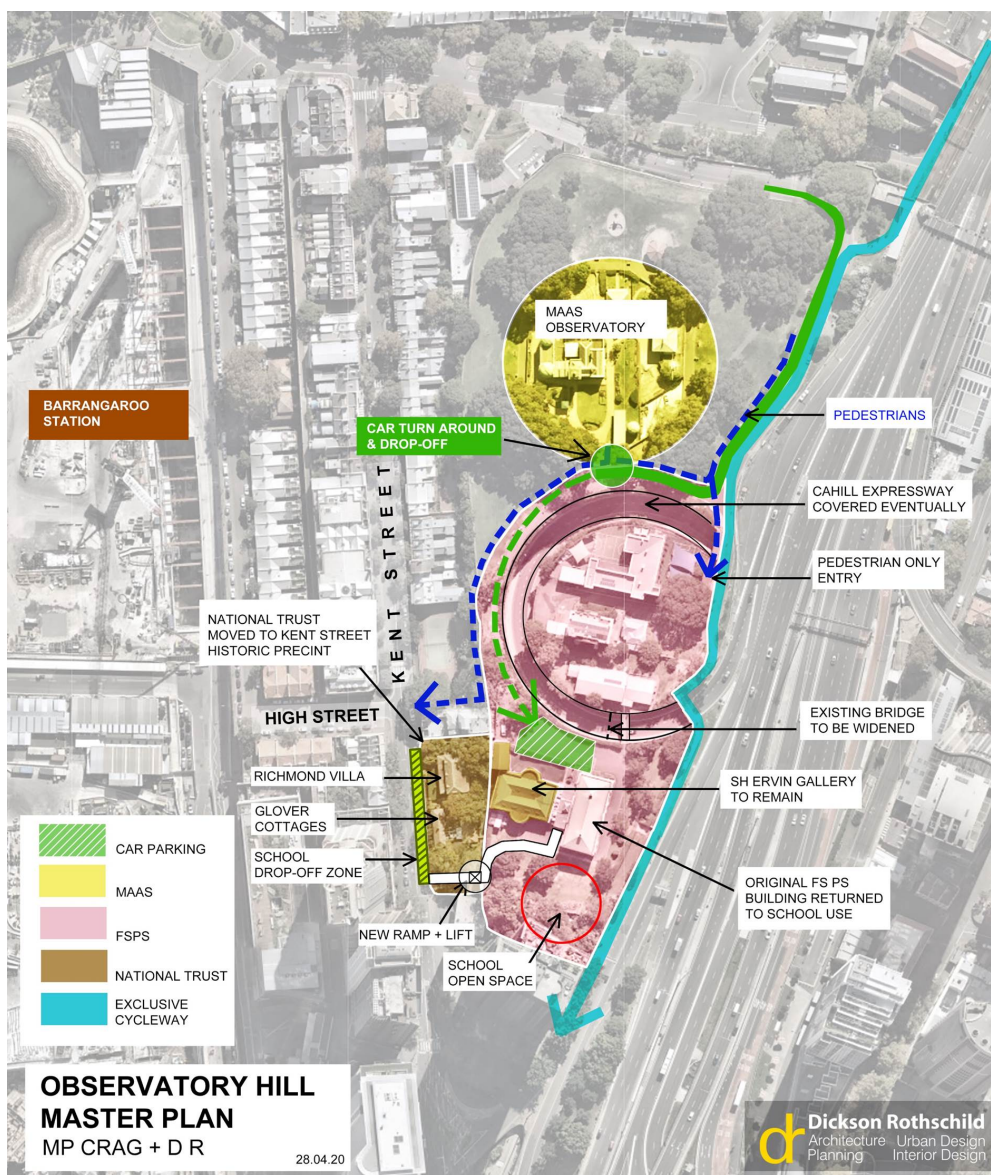


Figure 1.0, Proposed Observatory Hill Masterplan 2020,
prepared by MP CRAG with DR Architecture

2. Cycleway/ Traffic

Given the number of concerns from local residents regarding the proposed cycleway and its many impacts, the preferred outcome is to complete the new cycleway before the commencement of construction work on the school. This is as outlined in Alex Greenwich's letter to the Minister of Transport, Andrew Constance (attached).

These many concerns are outlined below

Traffic

- 1.1 Traffic issues during the two-year construction period for heavy construction vehicles.
- 1.2 Traffic issues during the two-year construction period for the cyclist diversion.
- 1.3 Traffic issues during the newly expanded school operations.
- 1.4 Millers Point Precinct traffic planning under current conditions versus what will be experienced from 2021 onwards.

1.1 Traffic during Construction – Heavy Vehicles

There are two key areas underlying our concerns with increased traffic into our small neighbourhood:

- Construction vehicles, mainly trucks, their entry/egress points and driver behaviour.
- Cyclist diversion due to the closure of the Upper Fort St cycleway.

As an opening observation on the Arup Traffic Study, we must say we are seriously underwhelmed by its contents. The options it has recommended represent a horrendous outcome for Millers Point residents, particularly those on Kent St who will bear the brunt of two-plus years of chaos. The Arup Report does not reflect the professionalism one would expect from such an organisation.

The combination of the recommendations of using Kent St as the new temporary cycleway for two years plus the access/egress point for construction vehicles is a shocking conclusion. Kent St, as is easily observed, is one of the most narrow "main" city streets in Sydney. The combination of parked vehicles on both sides of the street (and usually fully occupied, even on weekends), multiple pedestrian crossings and increased heavy vehicle and cycling traffic is a recipe for disaster. Not only will it increase the likelihood of a major incident(s) between cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles, the increased level of noise, dust and vehicle activity for a residential street such as Kent St will be onerous to say the least.

The volume of heavy construction related vehicles is said to be in the vicinity of 25-50 vehicles per day, Monday to Saturday according to the EIS (page 101). Vehicles will include fully laden concrete agitator trucks, excavated material waste trucks, heavy construction materials trucks transporting steel, timber, masonry, etc. Suffice to say, with the increased volume of such vehicles in such a tight, narrow residential street, comes an increased chance of accident and therefore serious injury and death. Nowhere in the Arup report was there any consideration of an alternate route nor any suggestions for ameliorating the impact of such a large volume of heavy vehicles through measures such as reduced speed zones.

Alternate routes are easily identifiable from a cursory glance at the map of our Harbour village. There is a road to the west of us currently accommodating heavy

vehicle construction traffic for a reasonably prominent construction project – Barangaroo and Hickson Rd. For vehicles entering the city from the west (which will be the vast majority), the obvious route to take is to turn left off the Western Distributor at Sussex St, continue along toward Barangaroo via Hickson Rd, turning up Dalgety Rd at the roundabout and proceeding east down Argyle St towards Watson Rd, where the vehicle will turn right. (As a side note, we will require the Principal Contractor to have a full-time traffic control presence at the bottom of Watson Rd, the reasons for which are obvious).

The route to leave the site can be the same, or to spread the traffic load around the area, an alternate departure route could be to turn right at the bottom of Watson Rd into Argyle St, head east towards the Argyle Cut and then proceed south down Harrington St.

In summary, Kent St is a poor choice and unnecessary option when other predominantly non-residential options are available. It should be rejected. The Principal Contractor's contract should be written to ensure Kent St is not used as a transport route and that penalties (to be determined) for the contractor will ensue if the condition is breached.

Heavy vehicle temporary parking has been an issue for Millers Point for some years. Drivers using our streets as layovers whilst they are waiting to be called to their construction site (Barangaroo, Circular Quay, Sydney Metro, Light Rail, Arts Precinct, etc) seriously erodes the amenity of our neighbourhood. We require the Principal Contractor to instruct all drivers to drive directly to site and to not layover in any part of Millers Point. There should be consequences for the driver and the principal contractor if this rule is not observed.

It is a matter of urgency that we address this issue now. Traffic safety around Millers Point is compromised at the best of times with some intersections being dangerous with normal traffic volumes. It is essential that a Precinct Traffic Plan be documented with full consultation with the MPC RAG and subsequently accepted by the Community. This needs to be done in consultation with City of Sydney, RMS and Lendlease (the project advisor) and MPC RAG. More of this will be written about in a later section of our submission.

1.2 Traffic during Construction – Cyclist Diversion

It was with disbelief that Kent St residents and the MPC RAG alike read of the proposal to divert cyclists down Watson Rd, into Argyle St and south down Kent St during morning peaks and in reverse in the afternoon peak ie most of the day. To say the risks to resident amenity and safety are intolerable is an understatement. Let alone the risks to cyclists accessing and using a congested Kent St during peak hours. Our concerns are multiple:

- Cyclists coming down Watson Rd at high speed and ignoring the 10kph shared zone at the bottom.
- Taxi and Uber drivers (mostly) seeking to access the public toilets at the Harry Jensen Community Centre complex, parking on Watson Rd, which involves the drivers doing a u-turn mid-way up the hill. The parking of course narrows the road.

- Cyclists striving to ride (slowly) up a steep Watson Rd with a concrete truck driver behind them running late for his delivery. With taxis making u-turns in front of them.
- Service vehicles servicing Sydney Observatory and SH Ervin Gallery (food service trucks, utility companies, cash transport armoured vehicles, etc.).
- Bootcamp trainers driving up Watson Rd in the morning peak to set up their training operations.
- Wedding groups including photographers using Watson Rd to access Observatory Hill Park during the week and the weekend at all times of the day.
- Heavy construction vehicles coming up Watson Rd in the morning peak, for example, “competing” with cyclists coming down the hill, and cab drivers doing u-turns so they can park to go to the loo.
- Cyclists exiting Watson Rd onto Argyle St (never stopping in our observed history), likely at speed. Multiply that by scores. Argyle St during the week is a busy thoroughfare. Accidents will happen.
- Pedestrians seeking to use the crossings at Kent/Argyle outside the former Post Office – cyclists not always observing the road rules to stop.
- Cyclists proceeding down a narrow Kent St, peak hour drivers seeking to go around them (safely or otherwise), some cyclists coming to the conclusion that this is too dangerous and using the footpath instead, into the oncoming stream of office workers (post-Covid19). Our residents in this area walk out their front doors onto the footpath directly where a cyclist maybe riding on the footpath.
- Some cyclists exiting Watson Rd but choosing to avoid Kent St carnage and go east down Argyle St towards Argyle Cut and therefore having to cross (safely) the west flowing lane of traffic, sometimes with vision impeded because the bus zone (capable of accommodating four buses) is full.
- Pedestrians accessing Observatory Hill Park via Watson Rd, sometimes with their dog(s), and wishing to do so safely on narrow footpaths with whizzing cyclists, lumbering concrete trucks and taxis doing u-turns.

There are multiple scenarios for which the ending is not good.

We have an alternate plan. This involves the construction of a new cycle way using the current route and a possible temporary diversion through the tunnel at the top of Watson Rd through to Cumberland St.

Firstly, there are a number of local traffic management matters that need to be put in place. These would form part of an urgent Millers Point Traffic Plan that needs to be developed prior to construction commencing. We elaborate further below in this document.

- Parking on Watson Rd is banned.
- Parking on Upper Fort St is banned. Bootcamp trainers’ vehicles will need to be accommodated (perhaps near the roundabout at the Sydney Observatory entrance). Other traffic would not be permitted to enter the precinct.
- Those wishing to access the public toilets at the Harry Jensen Community Centre will need to park on Argyle St.

- To accommodate this demand, the bus zone situated on the southern side of Argyle St adjacent to Watson Rd would be converted to a 15 minute parking zone. The 311 Bus would sit at its bus stop on Argyle St, adjacent to the bus shelter. Excess 311 buses will need to furlough elsewhere and only approach the bus shelter just prior to their departure time, as quite simply there is no room for them. This is part of a broader discussion the Community would like to have with Sydney Buses as to how best to meet our bus needs.
- Service vehicles to be prohibited from parking on the cobbled road pedestrian shared space in front of the Harry Jensen Community Centre at the bottom of Watson Rd.
- Private coaches will have to park (legally) elsewhere. There is a car park tailor-made for coaches at King St Wharf.
- Upper Fort St and Watson Rd speed zones to be 20kph.

Attached is a detailed proposal (The Highgate proposal) to construct the new cycleway before the construction of the school project commences. This is of course the most sensible long-term option, particularly as cycling is increasingly popular and encouraged as a mode of commuting.

In the interim, cyclists will need to be diverted from dangerous traffic conditions. We propose a diversion to Cumberland St via the tunnel at the top of Watson Rd.

- In the morning peak, cyclists dismount at the Sydney Harbour Bridge exit on the grassed area adjacent.
- Cyclists wheel their bikes through the tunnel.
- Cyclists continue their mounted journey to the CBD via Cumberland St, with exits at Essex St into the northern CBD or onto Bridge St towards Wynyard.
- The Principal Contractor to be responsible for implementing and manning a traffic control solution at the SHB cycle exit.

1.3 Traffic during School Operations from 2023

Two particularly perplexing suggestions were made by Arup in their report for parents to use as they are waiting to pick their children up (or drop off).

- Page 18: Kent St 4.6.1: *“Cars may wait in the taxi zone or 5 minute parking zone in front of the Langham Hotel opposite.”*
- Page 45: 9.5 Potential Overflow Queuing Arrangement: *“If vehicles approaching on Argyle Street find that Watson Street queuing area is full, then drivers from both directions can circulate via Argyle Place (yellow loop) or Windmill Street (orange loop).”*

Both of these suggestions are rejected outright. Nonsensical, possibly illegal, completely ignorant of the fact that people live here and that Argyle Place Park (one of the most historically significant landmarks in Sydney) should not become a convenience for out-of-precinct drivers who are hurrying to pick up their kids because they are late for ballet practice or soccer training.

The best way to address traffic issues for when the school re-opens is for the school catchment to be fully observed.

Allowing out-of-catchment families to attend the school because it is convenient as they work in the city needs to be knocked on the head. And now is a good time. With the impending temporary relocation of the school, now is the time for the Department to speak with out of catchment parents and work with them to secure a new school where they live so they don't have to relocate their children more than once. The opportunity to find a local school which has both primary and secondary related campuses must be attractive these parents. It is incumbent upon the Department to make this happen so the proposed catchment doesn't fall into the "fiction" category.

That said, during periods of inclement weather or when children are attending OOSC, parents will likely opt for the car. Similar traffic suggestions we stated earlier should apply:

- No parking on Upper Fort St and Watson Rd to allow free flowing two-way traffic.
- Upper Fort St and Watson Rd speed zones to be 20kph.
- Improved sign posting of the 10kph shared pedestrian zone at the bottom of Watson Rd.
- Parents needing to access short-term "wait" parking can use the former bus zone on Argyle St for 15 minute parking needs.

Parents should be strongly advised to avoid "cruising" around Millers Point streets. Park and stay put, move only when you are required and avoid congesting local streets where people live. We seek a commitment from the Department and the School to this effect.

1.4 Millers Point Precinct Traffic Planning

The proposed construction of the new school has brought to a head the need to urgently address the broader traffic issues in Millers Point. These have been well documented with City of Sydney Council in recent years, but for the sake of clarity, let us restate them:

- The Millers Point Precinct is seeking to move to an increasingly "low vehicle" future with a range of policies to discourage excessive and unnecessary traffic.
- Speed zones be reduced on most streets to reflect the fact that Millers Point is a high pedestrian count area with residents, office workers, visitors and tourists. In particular, Argyle St, Argyle Place, Lower Fort St, Windmill St, Dalgety Place, High St and Kent St.
- That speed reduction/traffic calming initiatives be developed and funded.
- Heavy vehicle parking be not allowed in timed parking spots.
- Critical intersections (Kent St/Argyle St opposite the Lord Nelson Hotel) and Windmill St/Lower Fort St (opposite the Hero of Waterloo Hotel) be

addressed as part of this process. This includes improving pedestrian safety to a satisfactory level.

We require an immediate consultation process with the key decision makers and funders (City of Sydney, RMS/TfNSW, Department of Education, NSW Police). If it helps, we believe these smaller style of projects are perfect examples of “shovel ready” projects to be immediately undertaken to assist the broader economy to rebuild post-COVID. Undertaking these works in the current low traffic environment is also a great opportunity.

Other Issues related to Observatory Hill

- The dismissing of covering the Cahill Cut (particularly when one of the designs for school does contemplate partial covering on the western side) is a missed opportunity – and now is the best time to consider it from its’ over sixty years of existence
- The re-vegetation of the Park to reflect a native/indigenous plant Garden of Eden (like Barangaroo Reserve), particularly in a world experiencing climate change and need for sustainability. The big Figs could be the centrepiece of such a project
- Include City of Sydney in this process and review the 2012 Harbour Village North Domain Study and update as required
- As a clear statement as this stage of the process, we would like to reiterate our earlier comment that the School commit to not use the Park as spill-over playground and that the School’s use of the Park be no different or frequent than any other visiting school.

C CONCLUSIONS

MP CRAG believes the following key aspects should take place:

1. Prepare a Master Plan for Observatory Hill as Sydney’s foremost Education Precinct
2. To ensure the Fort Street Public School community receives the optimum outcome, we endorse the recommendations of the School’s P&C submission
3. Complete construction of the cycleway before commencing construction on Fort Street Public School’s redevelopment

Yours faithfully,



Anne Warr, FRAIA, PhD

Chair

Millers Point Community Resident Action Group

Attachment: Letter from Alex Greenwich MP to Minister for Transport and Roads, 28 April 2020.

28 April 2020

The Hon Andrew Constance MP
Minister for Transport and Roads
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Minister

Sydney Harbour Bridge Cycleway

I write on behalf of constituents who have contacted me about the cycleway diversion proposed during construction of the Fort Street Public School redevelopment (SSD-10340) which is currently on exhibition.

A number of adjacent residents are concerned about conflict between school students, motor vehicles and bike riders at the school entrance and I have requested changes to prevent conflict a number of times. Residents have identified that the proposed diversion of the cycleway required during school construction may cause additional conflicts between road users and greater risk.

The government has proposed changes to the Sydney Harbour Bridge Cycleway that aim to prevent conflict between road users and improve road safety, however the proposal has not yet proceeded to approval and construction. Constituents have requested the planned realignment of the cycleway to be done now in place of a temporary diversion that has safety concerns that will also require construction of the final route to be carried out later. I share community concern that safer routes be considered sooner in order to prevent additional disruption.

Could you please investigate bringing forward construction of the southern leg of the Sydney Harbour Bridge Cycleway and inform me what action you will take?

Yours sincerely



Alex Greenwich
Member for Sydney
CC: Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning

