

Annexure N: Heritage Interpretation Strategy

Sydney Olympic Park Master Plan

Heritage Interpretation Strategy
15 February 2024

Acknowledgement of Country

We respect and acknowledge the Darug people, their lands and waterways, their rich cultural heritage and their deep connection to Country, and we acknowledge their Elders past and present. We are committed to truth-telling and to engaging with the Darug people to support the protection of their culture and heritage. We strongly advocate social and cultural justice and support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Cultural warning

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this report may contain images or names of First Nations people who have passed away.

Report Register

The following report register documents the development of this report, in accordance with GML's Quality Management System.

Job No.	Issue No.	Notes/Description	Issue Date
23-0043	1	Draft Heritage Interpretation Strategy	6/6/23
23-0043	2	Heritage Interpretation Strategy	3/7/23
23-0043	3	Heritage Interpretation Strategy	15/2/24

Quality assurance

The report has been reviewed and approved for issue in accordance with the GML quality assurance policy and procedures.

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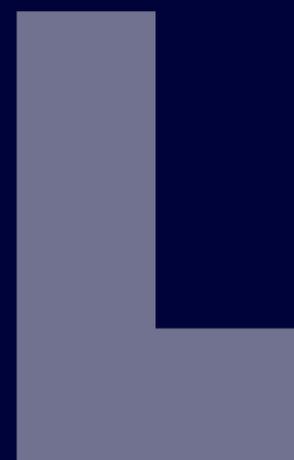
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Introduction

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Introduction

Sydney Olympic Park is transforming into a thriving suburb strategically located in the centre of Greater Sydney. It is a suburb that benefits from a diversity of land uses, proximity to both Sydney and Parramatta central business districts, and is of national significance, all of which have played an important role in its evolution since hosting the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As the 640-hectare site continues to evolve into vibrant neighbourhoods, it will reconnect with its Wangal roots and extensive natural assets to provide a meaningful connection to Country.

The Sydney Olympic Park 2050 Vision & Strategy (the Vision) was released in June 2022 and serves as a roadmap to inform decision-making for the next three decades. Sydney Olympic Park Master Plan 2050 (Master Plan 2050) is the next stage of strategic planning for Sydney Olympic Park. Master Plan 2050 will ensure a coordinated, long term development plan is prepared for the whole precinct.

The most recent iterations of a master plan for Sydney Olympic Park were completed in 2018 and 2021, to support the delivery of Sydney Metro West. Building upon the Vision, Master Plan 2050 considers Sydney Olympic Park holistically, seeking opportunities to integrate thinking about the parklands and urban core together, enhancing its role in Greater Sydney.

The Vision articulates an aspiration to position Sydney Olympic Park as Sydney's Green Beating Heart: a place that is energised with everyday life, is Country-first, nature positive and where Sydney comes to play.

In 2050, Sydney Olympic Park will be a complex, layered suburb offering a rich and varied range of experiences. Many will live and work here, others will visit for events, diverse attractions or for everyday retail and entertainment. Master Plan 2050 aims to balance certainty with flexibility enabling Sydney Olympic Park's future to be resilient, dynamic and able to leverage future opportunities and technologies not yet known.

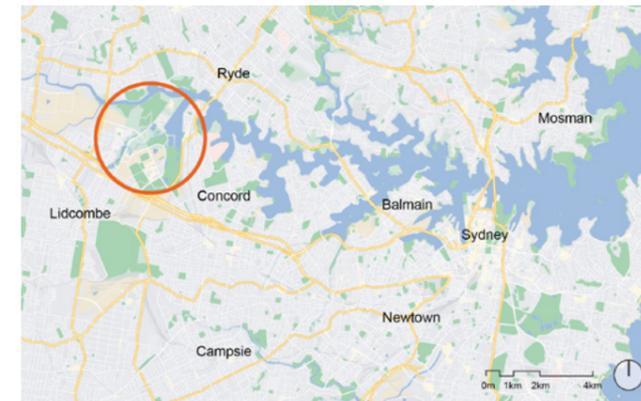


Figure 1 The location of Sydney Olympic Park. (Source: © Google Maps with GML overlay)

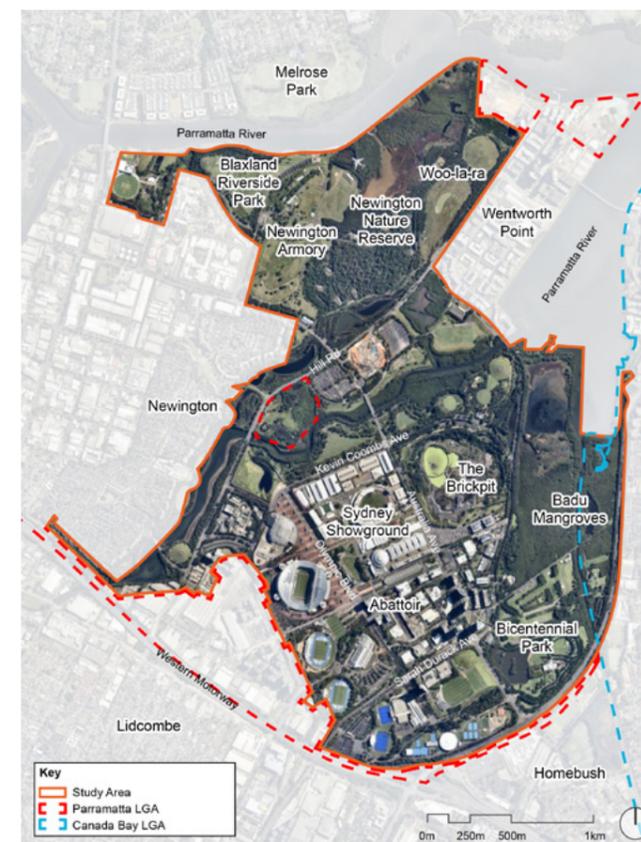


Figure 2 Sydney Olympic Park Master Plan 2050 study area. (Source: Nearmap with GML overlay)

Site identification

Sydney Olympic Park is identified in Figure 1. The site is associated with the Sydney 2000 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Sydney Olympic Park precinct is the study area for the Sydney Olympic Park Master Plan 2050 and is defined as the land under the protection and authority of the Sydney Olympic Park Authority (SOPA), as shown in Figure 1. Several small sections within and bordering the study area are in the Parramatta Local Government Area (LGA). This area is included in this Master Plan and is identified in Figure 2.

Interpretive objective

Heritage interpretation can transform our experience and understanding of a place. Effective interpretation is most engaging when it not only communicates a story but evokes an emotional response and prompts us to appreciate a place's heritage values in a meaningful way. Interpretation initiatives present an opportunity to enhance places through creative design interventions that are visually and intellectually stimulating.

What is SOPA's vision for interpretation?

In 2050, Sydney Olympic Park will be a highly-connected series of diverse neighbourhoods and experiences. Many will live and work in this multi-faceted suburb, others will visit—for events, for its diverse attractions or for everyday retail and neighbourhood needs. Sydney Olympic Park's diverse communities will each experience the Park differently. It's what makes it a complex and thriving place.

Sydney Olympic Park 2050: Vision & Strategy Summary.

SOPA have a 2050 Vision to transform Sydney Olympic Park into a place that is a home, workplace and playground for thousands of Sydneysiders. 'Sydney's beating green heart' is articulated with three guiding principles:

- Country-first and nature-positive
- Energised everyday
- Where Sydney comes to live and play

Aim of this Heritage Interpretation Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to guide the approach to interpreting Sydney Olympic Park. It provides an overview of the existing interpretation and a brief analysis of challenges and opportunities related to this content.

The thematic framework, in turn, forms the foundation for interpretive content curation, development and implementation. It proposes several interpretation opportunities and projects that have the capacity to meaningfully communicate the site's values in a way that is compatible with existing and proposed interpretation projects within the precinct.

Methodology



Report limitations

First Nations consultation and interpretive content

It is acknowledged that First Nations storytelling on this site is one of the key pillars of SOPA's vision for the precinct. Further work is currently being undertaken to consolidate consultation with Traditional Owners and community to understand their vision for future interpretation, programming and events on this site. Current key initiatives include the Murama Dance Ground and Murama Healing Space at the Newington Armory.

Dr Paul Irish's 2005 report 'Aboriginal People at Homebush Bay: From the Wann-gal to the Present Day' provides a detailed summary of research conducted by the SOPA Aboriginal History & Connections Program (AHCP). It comprehensively explored and documented the connections that Aboriginal people have had with the Sydney Olympic Park area prior to 1788 through to 2005.

The research found that there is limited information available regarding the pre-1788 cultural landscape of Sydney Olympic Park. This was due to the lack of archaeological evidence or early historical documentation of cultural practices in the area.

Dr Irish especially emphasised that:

caution should be used in making any claims about the cultural significance of Homebush Bay. In previous research in the Aboriginal History of Homebush Bay it was claimed that the area was a meeting place for Aboriginal people from the Sydney area and even further afield. However tenets of this argument do not bear scrutiny...caution should be used in making any claims about the significance of Homebush Bay.

However, post-1788, Aboriginal history and connections were found to be well documented. Key issues explored by the research include:

- early interactions between European colonists and Aboriginal people;

- Aboriginal reactions, and interactions, with the increasingly urbanised Sydney Olympic Park area through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;
- the arrival and lives of Aboriginal industrial and domestic workers;
- the significance of the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games;
- ongoing efforts to educate and portray Aboriginal history, culture and society at Sydney Olympic Park; and
- contemporary expressions of culture.

The report recommended that the findings of this research could be used to offer opportunities for interpretation and future research and to develop appropriate strategies to portray Aboriginal culture and history at Sydney Olympic Park. The report should be referred to in future consultations with Traditional Owners and community in the interpretation planning process for Sydney Olympic Park.

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Review

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Existing interpretation policies and plans

Existing heritage interpretation strategies and conservation management plans have provided specific interpretation policies across Sydney Olympic Park which should be reviewed against any future interpretation planning on-site.

Sydney Metro Heritage Interpretation Strategy draft (2022)

- The Sydney Metro Heritage Interpretation Strategy presents high-level themes (Freshwater to Saltwater, Country, People and Community, and Working Lives) and design precedents. Further advice from Sydney Metro is required regarding which stories will be designed and implemented.
- The designs included signage, digital media, timelines and toposcopes, selected landscape elements (such as paving, etching and inlays), lighting design and public art.
- Future stages of research and content development should include the cultural significance of Newington Armory and women's places in consultation with Traditional Owners.

Sydney Olympic Park metro station will be located to the south of the existing Olympic Park station. Heritage interpretation is being developed by Sydney Metro in conjunction with a Connecting with Country committee and Connecting with Ngura (Country) framework.

Coordination between SOPA and Sydney Metro for future interpretation planning will be required.

Abattoir Heritage Precinct Sydney Olympic Park Conservation Management Plan—Government Architects Office (September 2013)

This document is an update of 'Abattoir Heritage Precinct, Sydney Olympic Park Conservation Management Plan', prepared by Graham Brooks and Associates Pty Ltd in June 2003. Key recommendations included:

- Prepare an interpretation strategy for the site focusing on themes related to its early history, role as part of the State Abattoir and the subsequent redevelopment of the site.

- Develop a comprehensive Interpretation Strategy and Plan for the Abattoir Heritage Precinct and implement interpretation on-site and digitally.

Newington Armory Interpretation Strategy (2008)

This strategy, prepared by Freeman Ryan Design, proposed an integrated interpretive strategy for Newington Armory over a 10-year period.

Stage 1 involved baseline interpretive strategies, including operational signage. This strategy also provided a summary and recommendations including:

- develop a clear and separate identity for Newington Armory;
- use six major themes to underpin the detailed development of content for the interpretation of key buildings, permanent exhibitions, and public and education programs;
- maximise use of the movable heritage collection to enrich visitor experience and improve the effectiveness of interpretive methods used to develop a vibrant and effective introductory visitor experience at the river front, as well as an interpretive pathway from the main gate to Five-Ways as the spine of the interpretive experience (including a range of landscaping works);
- develop Five-Ways as a focus destination and service point, particularly for groups;
- using a staged approach, develop interpretive panels for each building and a series of interpretive walking and vehicular tours;
- adapt and re-use Buildings 8, 18 and 20 as focal points of the interpretive experience, and also, in particular, Buildings 2, 24, 39 and 139;
- develop an interpretive experience along the river edge to raise the profile of the site and a strategy for wayfinding signage that complements, but is separate from, interpretive building signage; and
- continue peer and community consultation and review.

Newington Conservation Management Plan (2013)

Principle interpretation guidelines

Interpretation of the history and heritage significance of the Newington Armament Depot and Nature Reserve and their many significant elements is an important conservation action. Interpretation of historic places reveals long-term connections and cohesions which underpin our cultural identity.

To interpret a historic place in its geographic and physical setting is to bring its history to life in a way that increases the public's understanding of it and, through its extended understanding, enhance appreciation of the significance of the place.

A considered approach to interpretation will enable the site's full cultural significance to be clearly and attractively explained to visitors and occupants alike.

Policies

Policy 75—Develop interpretation of the place to enhance visitor appreciation and understanding of its diverse levels of heritage significance. The Newington Armory Interpretation Framework (February 2008) should be developed into a five year interpretation plan

Policy 76—The five year interpretation plan should include recommendations for interpretation methods, locations of interpretative information and installations, and ongoing maintenance of the interpretation material.

Policy 77—As part of the program of interpretation, oral histories should be collected from people associated with the Newington Armament Depot.

Existing heritage items

The Sydney Olympic Park precinct is not listed on a heritage register, although there are sites within the precinct that are listed on multiple heritage registers. Figure 3 provides a summary of identified heritage items and conservation areas within the study area. It includes the results of a search of the Heritage NSW Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) database shown in Figure 4.

- Badu Mangroves
- Sydney Olympic Park Environmental Conservation Area
- Olympic Cauldron
- Newington Armament Depot and Nature Reserve
 - Millennium Parklands Heritage Precinct
 - Explosives Store—Building 87
- Abattoir Heritage Precinct (Heritage Conservation Area)
 - Vernon Heritage Buildings
 - Maiden Gardens
 - Railway Garden
 - Historic Abattoir Administration Precinct
 - State Abattoir locality
- 'Hall of Champions' movable heritage collection

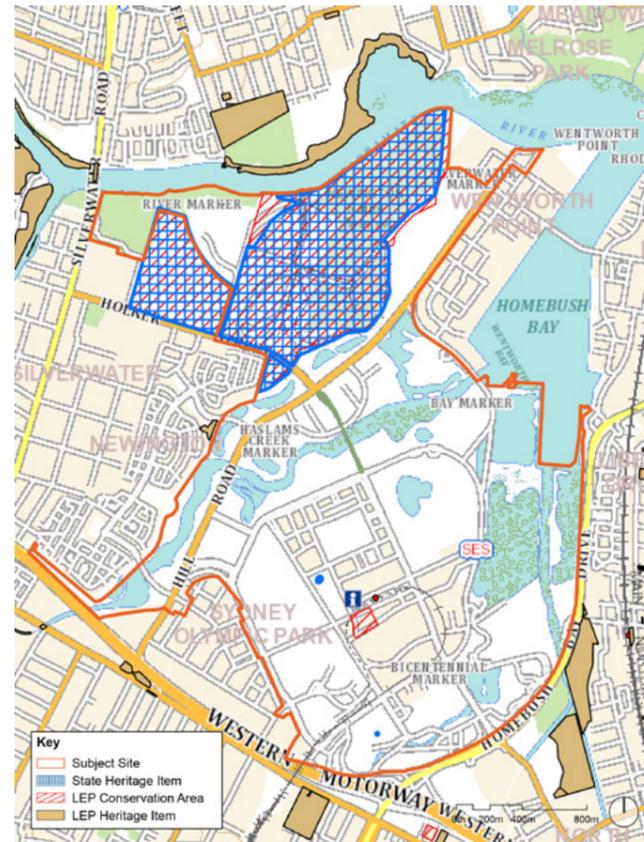


Figure 3 Heritage context map showing the location of heritage items and heritage conservation areas within the study area and in the vicinity. (Source: NSW Planning Portal with GML overlay)



Figure 4 Location of AHIMS sites within the study area. (Source: SIX Maps with GML overlay)

Audience

Existing and new communities that visit the precinct are potential audiences for heritage interpretation. Effective interpretation models consider who the potential audience might be and how they could engage with the place and its heritage values. This includes considering how they might orient within the space, the duration of time they might spend in public areas and how to best capture their interest.

Interpretation will be most successful when it is targeted specifically to audience needs and ensures that information is broadly accessible. Audiences may visit the site and interact with devices installed on-site, but might also seek out information digitally and engage with the history of the site through online sources.

The following audience breakdown is based on *Sydney Olympic Park 2050: Vision & Strategy Summary*.



Customers and general visitors

Visitors are vital to the Sydney Olympic Park ecosystem. The suburb is home to large-scale events, from rugby league grand finals and athletics spectacles to live stadium performances by entertainment juggernauts like U2 and Adele. Each year there are 160 days where major events are held, drawing visitors from Greater Sydney, regional NSW, interstate and—as tourism numbers return to pre-pandemic levels—around the world. Sydney Olympic Park also hosts business conferences, community events and (between 2018 and 2019) over 23,000 school students on parkland excursions.

Relevance to interpretation

Customers, clients etc of the businesses operating at Sydney Olympic Park will likely only visit the space irregularly and spend limited time in public areas. This category might include people that work or live nearby or travel through the space. They may not be expecting to encounter heritage interpretation devices but may be inclined to explore the area and engage with its history and values.



Tourists and special interest groups

Tourists and special interest groups who seek out heritage experiences may visit the precinct as a significant location for local history and heritage.

The type of visitor engagement to be expected can be separated into three segments:

- skimmers—visitors who prefer visually engaging interpretation that is fast and easy to consume;
- delvers—visitors who are connecting with the place for the first time and are seeking multiple and easily accessible avenues for further investigation; and
- divers—visitors who value original sources, seek academic research and provide their own input.



Education groups

Primary and secondary schools in Sydney, as well as from technical tours from overseas, visit Sydney Olympic Park seeking education experiences. Education programs can offer:

- planned activities that align to curriculum outcomes;
- emphasis on interactive interpretation, tactile and physical experiences, particularly for primary school groups; and
- guided educational experiences.

Relevance to interpretation

A range of education programs are on offer with a strong emphasis on educational content about biodiversity and ecology on site. This Master Plan offers opportunities to revitalise education spaces so that they offer expanded heritage and historical content.



Residents

The population of Sydney Olympic Park is young and ethnically diverse, with many renting in the area due to its proximity to the Sydney and Parramatta CBDs. The median age is 31 years old and, while two-thirds of residents are either single income, no kids (SINKs) or double income, no kids (DINKs), there are young families who have the luxury of parklands at their door. All homes in Sydney Olympic Park are apartments; it will become a high-density suburb. In these dwellings, Chinese, Korean and Indian-born millennials are highly represented and over three-quarters of these households primarily use a language other than English. The majority of local residents own a single car, while 17% own two and 12% do not drive a vehicle of any kind.

Relevance to heritage interpretation:

Residents (including neighbouring suburbs Newington and Wentworth Point) will have the most consistent access to the precinct and perhaps the longer dwell-time to revisit and engage with interpretive content. The increasingly diverse community should be considered in the development of future devices. How is their identity and experience reflected in the public domain and civic spaces of their suburb?

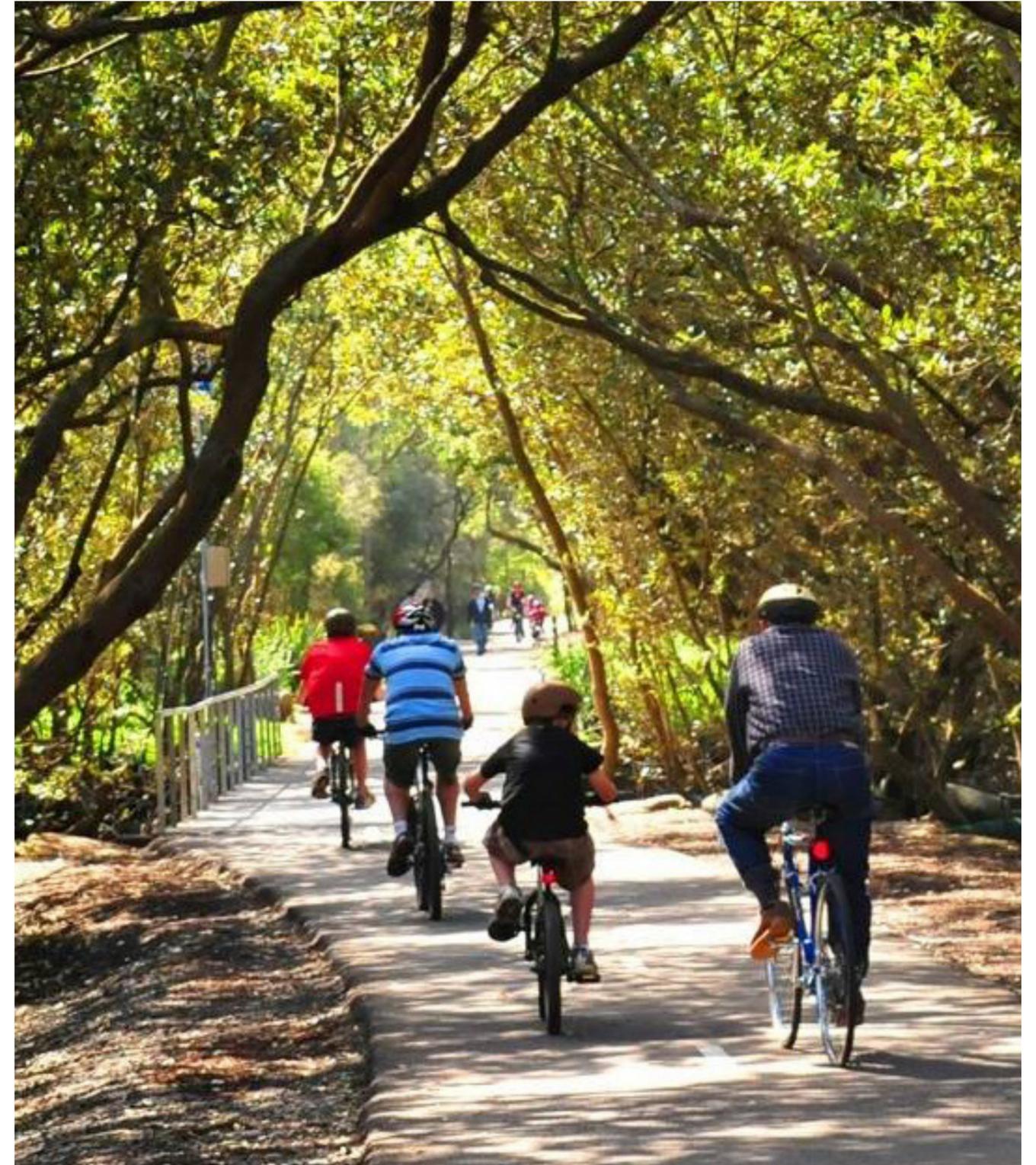


Workers

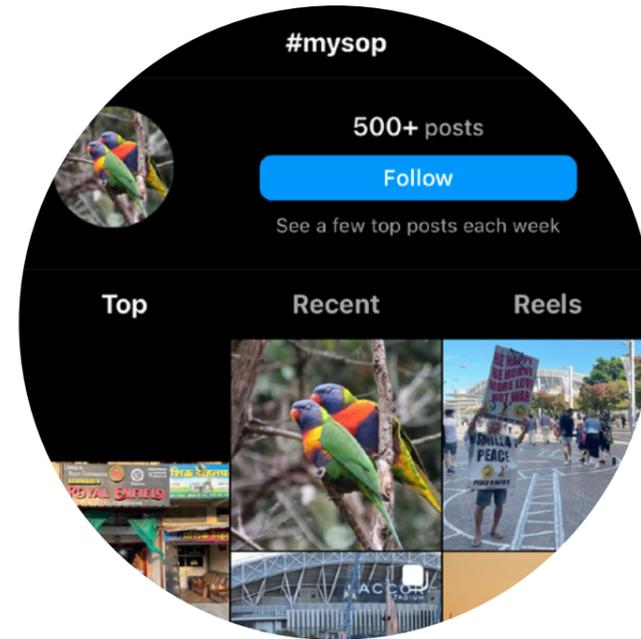
Sydney Olympic Park’s workforce is a mix of white-collar, science and tech, arts and recreation, emergency services and seasonal event workers. The pandemic reshaped office workforces, with many people continuing to work remotely part or full-time. However, the suburb’s 19,500-strong workforce (as of 2021) has a diversity of industries that operate on-site, guaranteeing a healthy working population. The parklands attracts a growing volunteer population who preserve one of Sydney’s most biodiverse green spaces. Between 2020 and 2021, there were 1,298 volunteer hours donated by environmental organisations to monitor and care for Sydney Olympic Park’s local flora and fauna.

Relevance to interpretation:

Most consistent users are workers of commercial tenancies and the associated retail/commercial outlets. It can be anticipated that workers will use or pass through public places on a regular basis and have ample opportunity to engage with heritage devices. Workers might also encourage visitors to learn about the site’s values and history by alerting them to devices.



Existing interpretation



Online presence

Existing online interpretation includes a range of platforms including:

- Instagram;
- public art fact sheets; and
- self-guided tours:
 - Walking Sounds Audio Tour
 - Abattoir Heritage Precinct
 - Sydney Olympic Park’s Games Legacy Experience
 - Bicentennial Park and Surrounds
 - Newington Nature Reserve Circuit
 - Marvel in the Mangroves
 - Urban Art
 - Mangrove Magic Kids Sensory Tour
 - Eco-ramble: Lake Belvedere
 - Eco-ramble: Louise Sauvage Pathway
 - Eco-ramble: Follow the Flow



On-site tours

Guided

- The Wangal Walk, Armory
- Behind the Scenes Series
 - The Green Games and Beyond
 - Brickpit and the Bellfrogs
 - Armory Restricted Tour
- Heritage rail tour



Education

- Water in the World Wetlands
- Water in the World Urban
- Ecosystem Dynamics
- Ecosystems at Risk
- Environmental Adaptions
- Creature Features—Features of Living Things
- Biophysical Interactions -Intertidal Wetlands
- Landscapes and Landforms
- The Circle of Life—Life Cycles of Living Things
- Our Place
- Urban Places—Urban Renewal Case Study
- Place and Liveability—Sydney Olympic Park
- Changing Places—Sydney Olympic Park: A colourful past, a bright future
- Themed displays and tours around green dates, eg Biodiversity month, World Environment Day— including street banners, social media, pop-up signage and tours
- Extensive signage relating to biodiversity and ecosystems present across the parklands

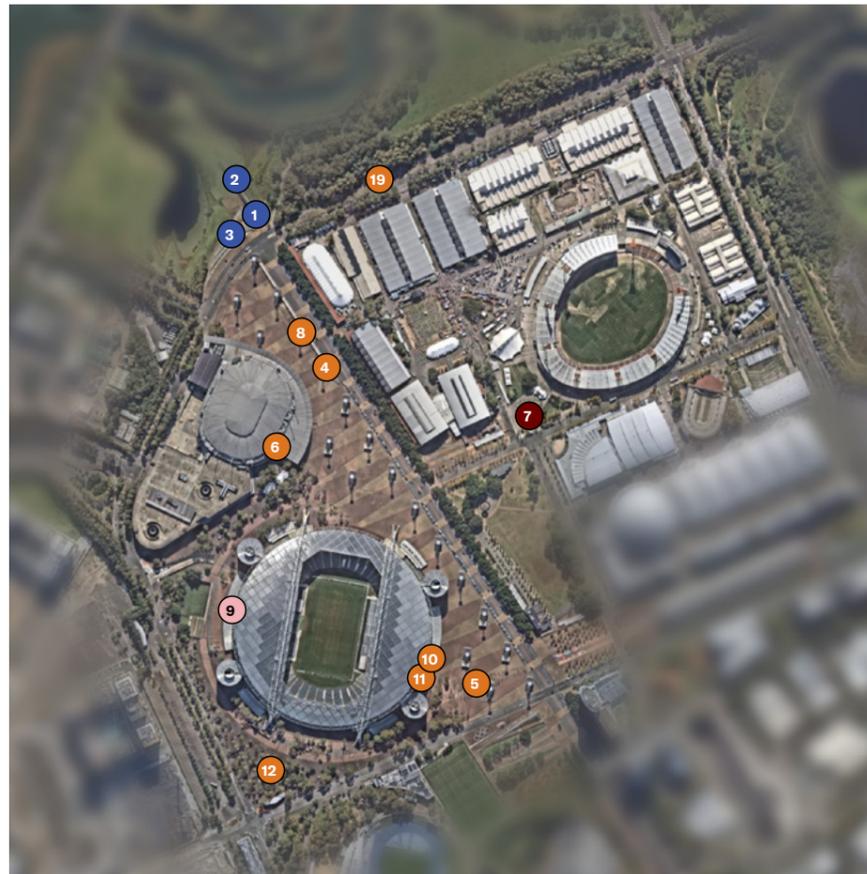
Existing on-site interpretation

Please note: GML has mapped these items based on available desktop, web and site information. Not all items may be present.

Existing interpretation	Story/theme	Type
1. Osmosis	Nature	Public Art
2. Wildlife Interpretive Signage	Nature	Signage
3. Northern Water Feature	Nature	Public Art
4. Munich Memorial	Olympic	Public Art
5. Games Memories	Olympic	Public Art
6. Lost and Found	Olympic	Public Art / Ground Inlay
7. Chiron	Industry/Agriculture (Royal Easter Show)	Public Art
8. Past Olympic Games	Olympic	Public Art
9. Stadium Glass Panels	First Nations	Public Art
10. Stadium Foundation Stone	Olympic	in situ Built Heritage / Signage
11. Feathers and Skies	Olympic	Public Art
12. 5000 Calls	Olympic	Public Art
13. Eight Women	Olympic	Public Art
14. The Cauldron	Olympic	Public Art
15. The Stride	Olympic	Interactive / Public Art
16. The Attractor	Olympic	Public Art
17. Cathy Freeman Park and Signage	Olympic	Place Naming / Signage
18. Paralympic Games Patron's Memorial	Olympic	Memorial
19. Street Naming	Olympic	Place Naming / Signage
20. Sheep Furniture	Industry/Agriculture	Interpretive Furniture
21. The Sheep Stock Route	Industry/Agriculture	Ground Inlay
22. Australia Map Mosaic	Industry/Agriculture	Ground Inlay
23. Bulls Head Mosaic	Industry/Agriculture	Ground Inlay
24. Drinking Trough Animal Memorial	Industry/Agriculture	Public Art / Memorial
25. Playfair Memorial Drinking Fountain		Memorial
26. Discobolus	Olympic	Public Art
27. An Eventful Path	Olympic/Sport	
28. The Sprinter	Olympic	Public Art
29. Olympic Rings	Olympic	Ground Inlay
30. Fig Grove Fountain		Public Art

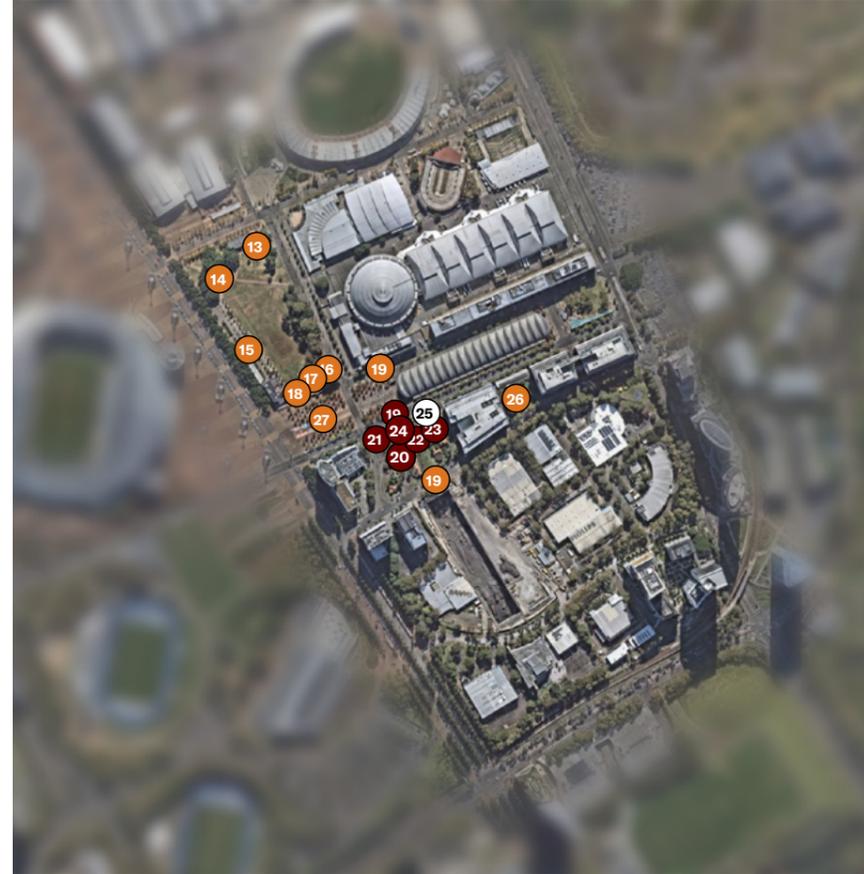
Existing interpretation	Story/theme	Type
31. Athletics Centre Mural	Olympic	Public Art
32. Relay	Olympic	Public Art
33. Boral Olympic Dream Pathway	Olympic	Public Art
34. Olympic Park Foundation Stone	Olympic	in situ Built Heritage / Signage
35. Rivers of Light and Path of Champions	Olympic	Public Art / Ground Inlays
36. The Thin Blue Line	Olympic	in situ Built Heritage / Signage
37. In the Shadows	Nature	Public Art
38. The Friends of Tennis NSW Champion Pathway	Sport	Public Art / Ground Inlays
39. Luminous Threshold	Olympic	Public Art
40. Haslams Marker	Olympic	Landscaping
41. Sydney Olympic Park Welcome	Olympic	Public Art
42. Pole Forest	Olympic/Nature	Public Art
43. Bay Marker	Olympic	Landscaping
44. Green and Golden Bell Frog and Sun Baking Lizard	Nature	Public Art
45. Brickpit Ring and Machinery	Industry	Public Art
46. Shipwrecks	Shipwrecks/ Maritime History	Signage/Viewfinder
47. Nature Walk Signage	Nature	Signage
48. Sundial	Bicentennial	Public Art
49. Peace Monument	Global Affairs	Public Art
50. Cyrus the Great	Multiculturalism	Public Art
51. Treillage Tower		Architecture
52. Powell's Creek Bridge	Nature	Public Art
53. Obelisks	Bicentennial	Public Art
54. Migration	Nature	Public Art
55. Bicentennial Park Water Feature	Bicentennial	Public Art
56. Bicentennial Marker	Olympic	Landscaping
57. River Marker	Olympic	Landscaping
58. Newington Armory	Military	Signage / Adaptive Reuse / in situ Built Heritage
59. Silverwater Marker	Olympic	Landscaping

Stadia and Entertainment Precinct



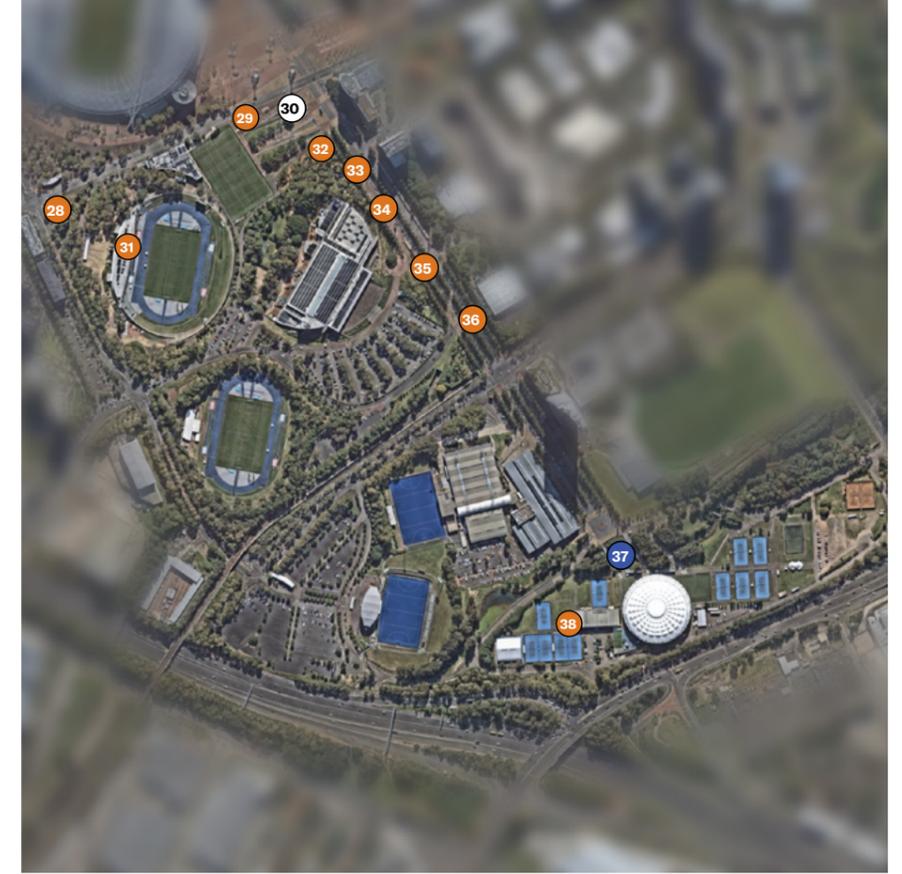
- 1 Osmosis
- 2 Wildlife Interpretive Signage
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- 5 Games Memories
- 6 Lost and Found
- 7 Chiron
- 8 Past Olympic Games
- 9 Stadium Glass Panels
- 10 Stadium Foundation Stone
- 11 Feather and Skies
- 12 5000 Calls
- 19 Street Naming

Urban Centre



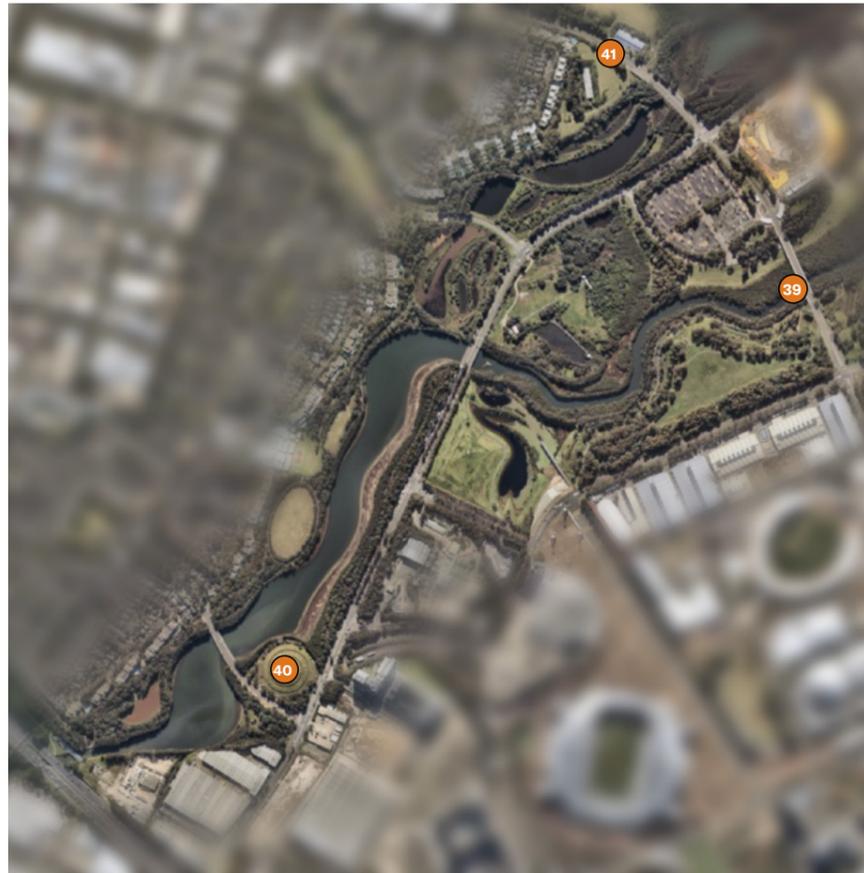
- 13 Eight Women
- 14 Olympic Cauldron
- 15 The Stride
- 16 The Attractor
- 17 Cathy Freeman Signage
- 18 Paralympic Games Patron's Memorial
- 19 Street Naming
- 20 Sheep Furniture
- 21 The Sheep Stock Route
- 22 Australia Map Mosaic
- 23 Bulls Head Mosaic
- 24 Drinking Trough Animal Memorial
- 25 Playfair Memorial Drinking Fountain
- 26 Discobolus
- 27 An Eventful Path

Recreational and Civic Precinct



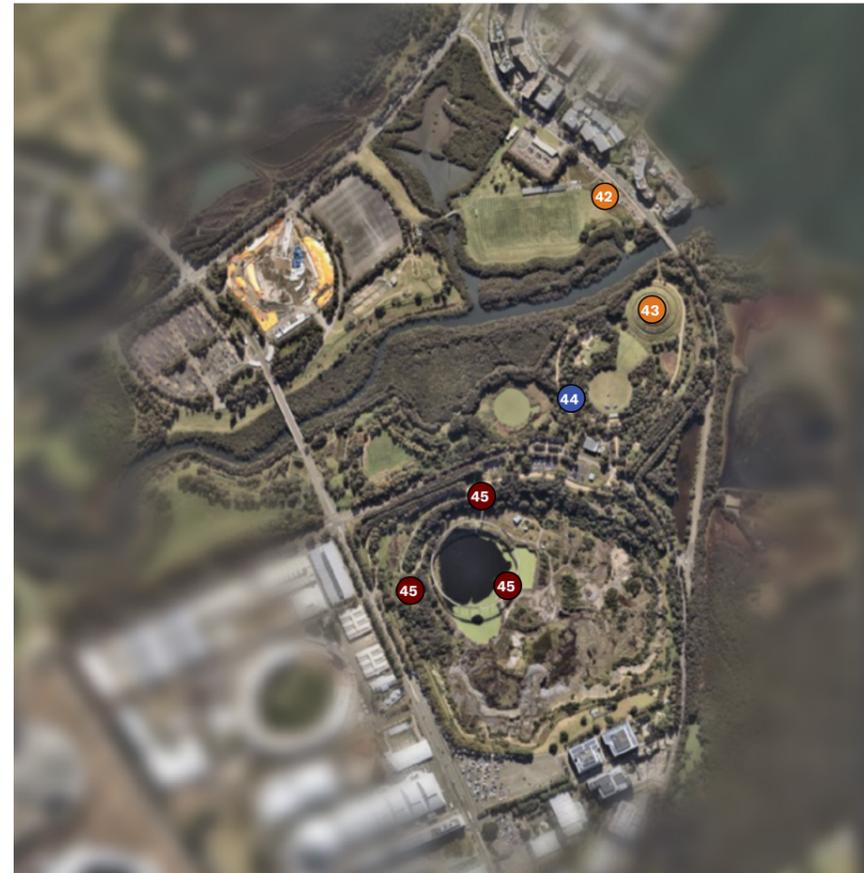
- 28 The Sprinter
- 29 Olympic Rings
- 30 Fig Grove Fountain
- 31 Athletics Centre Mural
- 32 Relay
- 33 Boral Olympic Dream Pathway
- 34 Sydney Olympic Park Foundation Stone
- 35 River of Light and Path of Champions
- 36 The Thin Blue Line
- 37 In the Shadows
- 38 The Friends of Tennis NSW Champion Pathway

Haslams Ecopark—West



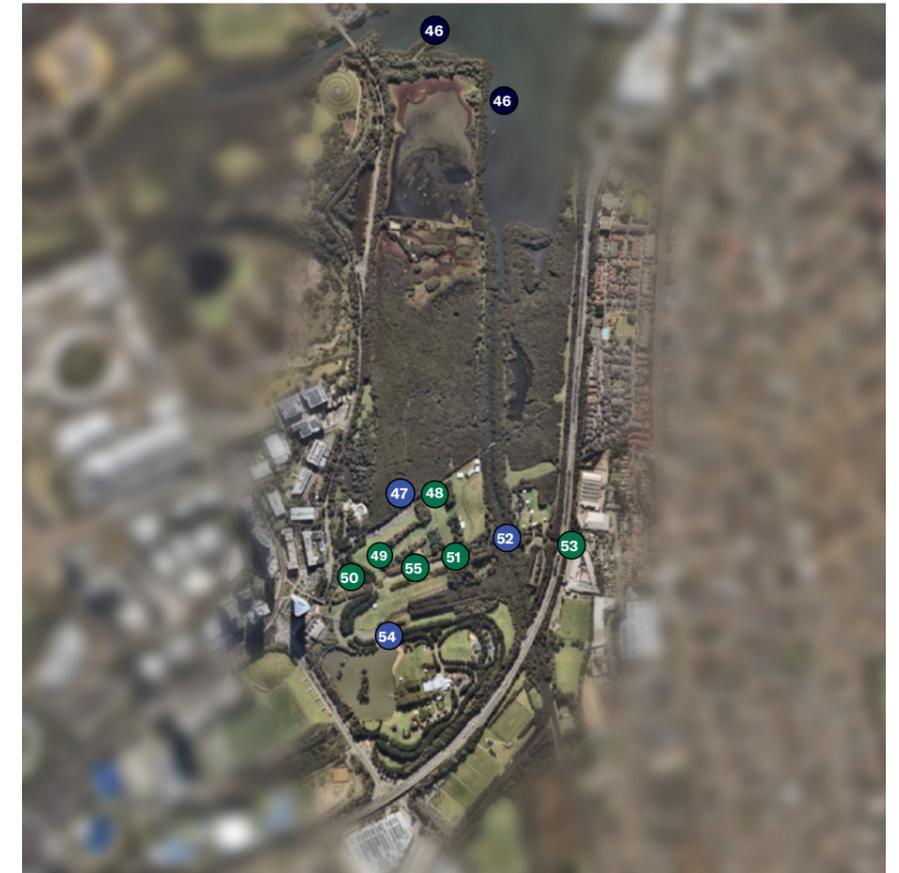
- 39** Luminous Threshold
- 40** Haslams Marker
- 41** Sydney Olympic Park Welcome

Haslams Ecopark—East



- 42** Pole Forest
- 43** Bay Marker
- 44** Green and Golden Bell Frog and Sun Baking Lizard
- 45** Brickpit Ring and Machinery

Bicentennial



- 46** Shipwrecks
- 47** Nature Walk Signage
- 48** Sundial
- 49** Peace Monument
- 50** Cyrus the Great
- 51** Treillage Tower
- 52** Powells Creek Bridge
- 53** Obelisks
- 54** Migration
- 55** Bicentennial Water Feature

Eastern Neighbourhood



No known interpretation

Southern Neighbourhood



56 Bicentennial Marker

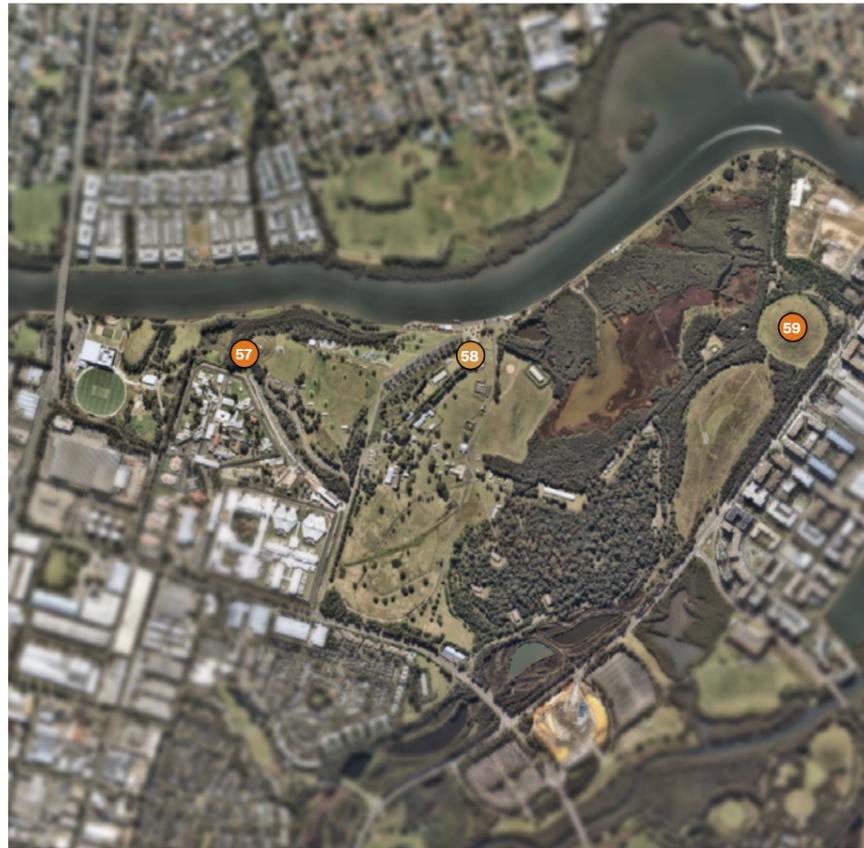
Haslams Neighbourhood



No known interpretation

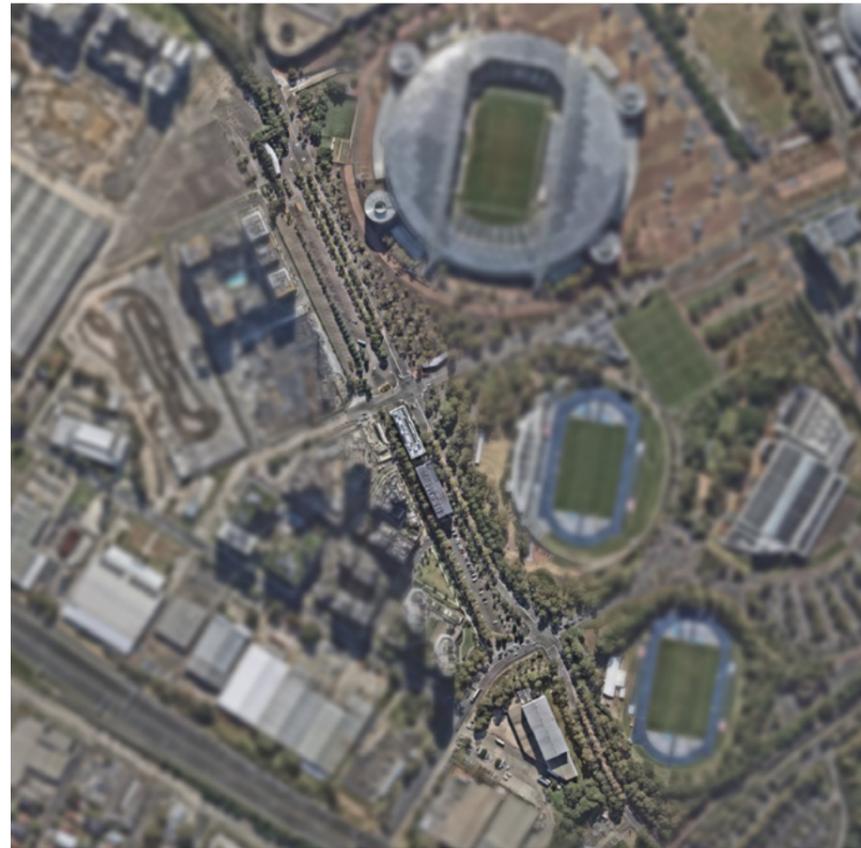
- Nature
- Military
- Olympic
- Shipwrecks
- Industry and agriculture
- Other
- First Nations

Riverfront Park



- 57** River Marker
- 58** Newington Armory
- 59** Silverwater Marker

Edwin Flack



No known interpretation

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Analysis

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Analysis

By auditing the current collection of interpretation and public art, a number of challenges and opportunities have been identified for Sydney Olympic Park.

A clear vision is needed to articulate the interpretation of history and heritage in future initiatives and to make sense of the past collection.

The purpose of some interpretive devices has become blurred with other outcomes of commemoration, marketing, the advertising of commercial tenants and current sports or entertainment event programming.

Existing on-site interpretation

As demonstrated by the mapping there are:

- a large volume of existing interpretation including public art and signage;
- educational on-site tours that have an emphasis on environmental history; and
- Olympic historical content that is the prioritised narrative.

Missing stories

The social history and intangible heritage of the site are currently missing from the interpretation of Sydney Olympic Park.

First Nations stories are represented in the heroic win of Cathy Freeman and artwork by Donny Woollagoodja (the artist for three poles that are a part of Games Memories) The Sydney 2000 Games are the dominant narrative, although the voices and experiences of everyday volunteers and some of the less well-known athletes are not present.

The story of labour on this site is told at the Brickpit Ring (with signage panels in need of renewal or replacement) but not at the State Abattoir and not visibly at the Newington Armory.

Commemoration vs interpretation

Commemorate: to remember and give respect to a person or event

Interpret: to describe the meaning of something; examine in order to explain

Over 50 pieces of public art and landscape features aim to provide a record of the cultural history of Sydney Olympic Park. A majority of the commissions commemorate the Sydney 2000 Games—from the star athletes, to the administrators and volunteers, or the highlighted sporting event. Other installations reflect on the industrial past of the Brickpit and State Abattoir.

The challenge with commemorative pieces is that, in trying to capture the movement, spirit and excitement of events in solid form, they become static, mundane and a:

...lingering presence part of the un-reflexively apprehended routine environments in which we work, play and consume, objects that are habitually passed by but rarely considered, part of the design of the urban fabric, regularly maintained and only occasionally relocated.¹

Without activity, events or programming to reconnect with monuments, they lose relevance and audiences lose connection to their meaning.

The challenge with commemorating those individuals who participated in the Sydney 2000 Games is how their stories, experiences and connections to this moment in time can be communicated to new audiences that visit this site.

Commissions funded by donors, diplomatic or sporting entities should be regarded as memorials rather than interpretive pieces. The fact sheets provided on the SOPA website have limited interest for audiences outside of those commemorated by these installations. However, the tangible presence of the Sydney 2000 Games has great social importance to the Games volunteer community, in whose living memory connections to Sydney Olympic Park remain.

Existing heritage items

The heritage listings cover all aspects of heritage—cultural, built and natural heritage. However, their locations are geographically spread out. Interpretation of heritage items has focused on the environmental history rather than industrial and military associations. Interpretation of Aboriginal cultural heritage is also lacking on-site.

Summary and recommendations

Get to know the audience better

Before further public art, interpretation or landscape features are installed, consultation with visitors, university/school groups, workers and commuters should be undertaken:

- What do they think are the important stories?
- What would they like to find out more about?

A more detailed portrait of visitor types would help target content development, drive programming, develop online content and connect people to Sydney Olympic Park:

- Why do people come?
- Do they come as individuals or in a group?
- Are they repeat visitors?
- How long do they stay? What would make them stay longer?



Games Memories by Tony Caro Architecture (architects) in collaboration with Root Projects Australia, Donny Woollagoodja (artist for 3 Poles), Emery Vincent Design (graphic design) and Wax Sound and Media (multimedia programs).

Tell the industrial and social history of the site

Industrial history is key to understanding the way this landscape was changed and then reclaimed.

Contemporary associations with Sydney Olympic Park in the living memories of migrants to the area and new communities could provide a new layer of storytelling.

Don't sell the destination, sell the story

Content online and on-site that offers an interpretation of place in some instances has been conflated with advertising or marketing initiatives.

If further investment is made in self-guided tours via audio experiences such as the Walking Sounds Tour, the storytelling of place should be the focus. Prompts to visit commercial outlets such as cafés detract from the immersive potential of this experience.

Similarly, on-site signage should focus on storytelling rather than the Sydney Olympic Park Authority brand, corporate history or visioning.

Know the story will evolve and how the site will be refreshed and maintained

It's important to recognise that this is an evolving thing, this is a living organism. Although the Olympics were great, the last thing anyone should want to do is wrap it up in a time capsule and leave it the way it is. It's important that we keep changing the site and evolving.

Michael Knight AO, Minister for the Sydney Olympic Games

In the twenty years since the interpretation was installed, maintenance issues can now be seen in terms of conservation, superseded technology and need for upgraded content. Future design initiatives and public art should be staged accordingly and with reference to the audit of existing devices.



Signage commemorating Juan Antonio Samaranch.

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Strategy

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Narrative strategy

The following themes form a strong and cohesive narrative that aligns with the SOPA vision and helps rehabilitate and grow Sydney Olympic Park's sense of place through rich stories that visitors find fascinating and a community is proud of.

The following themes should be used as a resource for all phases of development and ongoing programing, such as when content is being created and devices are designed.



Country-first and nature-positive



Energised everyday



Where Sydney comes to live and play

Country-first and nature-positive

Key stories:

- **Environmental ecosystem**
- **Aboriginal connections to Country**
- **Reclamation and rehabilitation**

In the journey from freshwater to saltwater, Sydney Olympic Park is Tucoerah (where saltwater and freshwater meet to form rich ecological systems). The ancient Parramatta River, Badu Mangroves and remnant eucalypt forest bind the landscape. The Badu Mangroves, situated on the perimeter of Sydney Olympic Park, support life by—and on—the water as a nursery for river fauna. Mangroves are important habitats, providing large amounts of organic matter that are eaten by detritivores. Small aquatic animals, in turn, provide food for larger carnivorous fish and other animals. Additionally, mangrove pneumatophores provide algal and bivalve habitat. The mangrove provides critical habitat for fish, molluscs and other small water-based lifeforms.

The reclamation of these wetlands for military (200 hectares alone), industrial and commercial purposes drastically changed the landscape before its rehabilitation in the late-twentieth century.

For Aboriginal people, this Country has a complex range of associations from pre-1788, to contact and conflict, to contemporary cultural connections as well as challenges. As a strong but lightweight wood, the grey mangrove provided Aboriginal people with material for the construction of boats, spears, shields and boomerangs. Aboriginal people foraged for fruits and hunted crabs, clams and fish in the area's mangroves.

Rose Hill, in late-1788, was the first permanent encroachment of Europeans on Aboriginal lands along the upper Parramatta River. Relationships with European landowners ranged from mutual friendship, play between children and violent conflict. The colonialisation and institutionalisation of Aboriginal lives as successive waves of government policy sought to control their movement is also part of this landscape's story—up to today with the incarceration of Aboriginal inmates at Silverwater Correctional Complex.



The precinct's importance as a cultural and economic hub for Aboriginal people grew during the mid-twentieth century. The harvesting of grey mangrove tree wood by the Simms and Timbery families revived a millennia old practice of boomerang making:

When I was 16 and I was going out to Homebush Bay in my late teens and getting timber out there, We used to go out in the truck and stay there all day. We'd have to wait for the tide to change, when the tide would start slowly going out, then we'd go in and get as much mangrove as we could, and then when the tide went right out we didn't want to go back in there because it was just all mud and it's too heavy so you had to sort of work out how far the water would come up ... cos I was the shortest out of the lot of us and, y'know, y'made sure the water would come say shoulder height.

Greg Simms

Other Aboriginal men from across Sydney and regional NSW found work in the State Abattoir.

During the Games, Aboriginal culture and athletes were celebrated on an international stage, with some of peoples' fondest memories of the event relating to Cathy Freeman's performance and participation in the opening ceremony.



La Perouse man Joe Timbery cutting mangrove elbows to make boomerangs, Kurnell Peninsula, Botany Bay, New South Wales, 1963. (Photograph: Jeff Carter) (Source: National Library of Australia)



Close up of a four-pronged Aboriginal fishing spear, purchased by Australian Museum in 1884. (Source: Australian Museum)

Energised everyday

Key stories:

- Working lives
- Blood, bricks, ballistics
- Shipwrecks

The degradation of Country commenced with agricultural colonial estates—such as the Wentworth Estate—carving up their contours. By 1909, the State Abattoir had infused Homebush Bay with blood and the Brickworks had filled it with sediment. The Newington Armory dramatically altered the topography in order to store, test and distribute gunpowder, explosive shells, cordite, fuses, depth charges, torpedoes and rockets. The bay itself became the graveyard of ships involved in seismic military manoeuvres, including the HMAS Karangi, which had been stationed at the Monte Bello Islands for British atomic tests and participated in the defence of Darwin during the Japanese bombing raid.

The dramatic impact on the landscape should also be understood in relation to the manual labour and social history of the men and women who worked on sites within Homebush. Their hands moulded, cut and carried the weight of industry there, building, feeding and arguably defending the city.

By the time that the State Abattoir at Homebush was fully operational in 1923, it was the largest abattoir operation in the Commonwealth and one of the largest in the world, employing 1600 workers and with a killing capacity of up to 20,000 sheep per day, 1500 cattle, 2000 pigs and 1300 calves. With 117 cool rooms available, the Abattoir could store 23,000 carcasses of mutton, 3000 of beef, 5000 of veal and 4000 of pork, with the cold store having a further capacity of 2000 mutton carcasses in its 16 freezing stores. At its peak in 1927, the State Brickworks produced 60,300,000 bricks.

While the quantities and sheer scale of these operations is impressive, interpretation of this story is currently missing from the precinct, as are the voices of those who lived their working lives here.

Today, working at Sydney Olympic Park looks very different for its range of white-collar, science and tech, arts and recreation, emergency services and seasonal event workers.



(Source: GML Heritage)

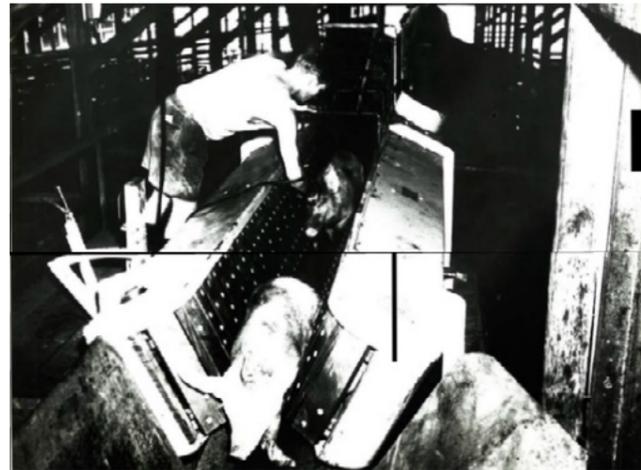


My grandfather started working at the abattoirs from the age of 15 years old and he worked there every day of his life till the abattoirs closed down and he was old enough to retire by then. I remember many different stories growing up as a kid from my grandfather about how he would cut the throats of around 1000-plus sheep a day and seen many a cut on the flesh part of his palm too.

Glen Schmidt



The export lamb freezers, photographed in about 1925. (Source: NSW State Archives)



The humane pig restrainer and stunner, installed 1966. (Source: NSW State Archives)

Confidential ASO letter of 7 May 1943

At the request of Admiralty in February 1942, arrangements were made to store at Sydney approximately 5,000 tons of explosives as a reserve for the Eastern Fleet. This ammunition has been received and is stored partly at Homebush and partly at Newington; both of these depots are served by land and water transport, being situated on the Parramatta River. Homebush was originally the N.S.W. State Brickworks and The Kilns have been converted into Explosive Storehouses, the nature of ammunition kept at the Establishment being as follows:

- Q.F. Cartridges (separate and fixed)
- Shell (6-inch and below)
- Fuzes, Tubes and Small Arms Ammunition
- Pyrotechnics
- Detonators
- Practice Projectiles



State Brickworks in 1910, Rex Hazlewood. (Source: State Library of NSW)



State Brickworks, Homebush, 1912. (Source: State Library of NSW)



Male employees storing 6-inch naval shells in a shed on the wharf before they were loaded onto HMAS Sydney, 1940. (Source: Australian War Memorial)



Male employees storing 6-inch naval shells in a shed on the wharf before they were loaded onto HMAS Sydney, c1940. (Source: Australian War Memorial)

Where Sydney comes to live and play

Key stories:

- **Sydney Olympic Games**
- **Sporting and cultural life**
- **The country comes to the city**
- **A place to call home**

Following the industrial era, Homebush Bay emerged as a platform for play and spectacle. Even as 'more than nine million cubic metres of waste was being dumped at Homebush Bay in the 1960s and 1970s, an investigation was commissioned by the Askin Government [raising] the possibility that Homebush Bay could be rehabilitated as a future Olympic site.'²

The Sydney 2000 Games earned the title of the largest peacetime operation in Australia's history.³ 10,651 athletes participated in 300 events with between 200,000 and 400,000 spectators daily at Sydney Olympic Park.

Since 2000, Sydney Olympic Park has continued to function as an important event space, hosting a wide variety of sporting, concerts and other cultural events, and the annual Royal Easter Show.





I feel like I'm being protected. My ancestors were the first people to walk on this land. It's a really powerful force. Those other girls were always going to have to come up against my ancestors. For the first time, I feel the stadium, I feel the people, I feel the energy. I feel like I'm being carried. I know exactly what I need to do. I know how to do this. I can do this in my sleep. I can win this. Will win this. Who can stop me?

Cathy Freeman (cited in *The Australian*, September 15, 2020).

Those who call this place home hail from diverse countries and are also descended from some of Australia's earliest migrant communities. The Chinese market gardening economy, established in Sydney in the late-nineteenth century, became the core of the Sydney Markets at Flemington, which was built over the site of the cattle saleyards. Following the Vietnam War, Vietnamese and Cambodian migrants also moved into the market garden trade. Today the biggest populations, after the Chinese community, are Indian and Korean residents. Agencies also support the resettlement of new generations of refugees and migrants. The Horn of Africa Relief & Development Agency (HARDA) in Homebush supports North and South Sudanese women in the search for employment. The program helped find jobs for 31 of the 48 women who participated between 2017–2019.

The changing community offers rich stories to tell as people make their home in Sydney Olympic Park and reflect on their family's journey.



After a long journey of escape from Vietnam on a boat, living in the Hong Kong refugee camp, and moving from home to home over the years, my immediate family settled in the suburb of Strathfield, which borders Homebush. We were close to the Sydney Olympic Park and the shorelines of Parramatta River.

When my family visited my Vietnamese family in the Quang Dien district, they would describe their home in Australia as 'the home near the Olympic stadium.' It was a way of expressing pride, to be close to an iconic place. We enjoy the shorelines where we go cycling, have a picnic or go night strolling along these shorelines almost every weekend, along Sydney Olympic Park.⁴

Boi Huyen Ngo



Sydney 2000 Summer Olympic Games opening ceremony. (*National Indigenous Times*)



Adol Kanach shows off an African head wrap at a session to celebrate a program that has helped Sudanese refugees find work. (Source: Steven Siewert, *Sydney Morning Herald*)



Growing since 1987, the Ung family began working in agriculture upon their migration to Australia from Cambodia. (Source: Sydney Markets)

Key interpretive challenge

Expansive site with a transient past and an unclear identity which is disconnected to place



Key interpretive objective

Connect the site and its community to its past through accessible, immersive and activated heritage experiences that create a greater sense of place and identity for the future.



Key Interpretive Message

A natural and industrial resource-rich past with a playful, diverse future grounded in Country and community



Key Interpretive Strategies

- Conservation**
- Accessibility**
- Activation**
- Education**

Interpretive strategies

The following high-level interpretive strategies are designed to work together to enhance the heritage experience for the site and its community.

The goal is for the strategies to build up into a perpetual cycle that maintains the site's heritage through conservation, access, education and activation for generations to come, culminating in a greater connected site and community that has a strong sense of place.

Each strategy is broken down into initiatives that help clarify the task into achievable goals for each discipline.

For over twenty years, SOPA has been cleaning up, rehabilitating, conserving and activating its extensive site, with much more work expected to come. The initiatives proposed are either currently activated or are planned to be activated by 2050.

Themes

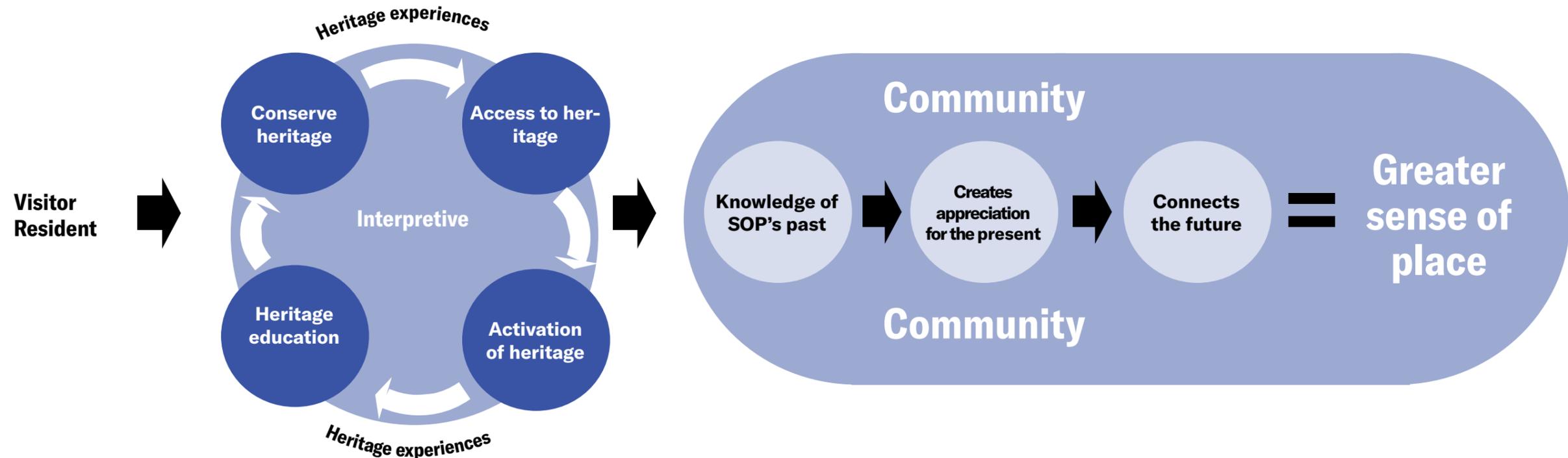
As the following strategies are high-level and involve all of Sydney Olympic Park's heritage items of cultural, natural and built significance, all three themes are relevant to these interpretive initiatives and will help shape their delivery:

- **Country-first and nature-positive**
- **Energised everyday**
- **Where Sydney comes to live and play**

Audience

The interpretive strategies are driven to appeal to all audience groups as the strategy encompasses the whole Sydney Olympic Park precinct and all the diverse heritage items within it:

- **Residents**
- **Workers**
- **Customers and general visitors**
- **Tourists and special interest groups**



Interpretive strategy 1 Conservation of heritage

The first stage and ongoing role of heritage interpretation is conserving the heritage item. The experience of heritage is greatly enhanced if the item still exists.

For heritage to be appreciated and conserved for future generations, its significance must be communicated.

With Sydney Olympic Park’s extensive heritage precinct and environmental conservation areas, it is vital that the community appreciates the value of its heritage and, in turn, can engage with ongoing and future custodianship of it.

Since the Sydney 2000 Games, SOPA has continued to foster ecological restoration and the conservation of Sydney Olympic Park’s natural, built and cultural heritage. These approaches are foundational pillars of this Master Plan that will connect community to place. The following initiatives will all work together to achieve this conservation goal.



Interpretive initiatives

Built conservation

The physical conservation of Sydney Olympic Park is varied. From maintaining buildings to rehabilitating ecosystems, SOPA has been working to clean up, rehabilitate and conserve the precinct for a sustainable future.

Therefore building and maintenance programs, finance planning and ongoing assessment is crucial to conserve the following tangible heritage items:

- Badu Mangroves
- Sydney Olympic Park Environmental Conservation Area
- Olympic Cauldron
- Newington Armament Depot and Nature Reserve
 - Millennium Parklands Heritage Precinct
 - Explosives Store (Building 87)
- Abattoir Heritage Precinct (Heritage Conservation Area)
 - Vernon Heritage Buildings
 - Maiden Gardens
 - Railway Garden
 - Historic Abattoir Administration Precinct
 - State Abattoir locality

Planning

Planning helps to conserve by creating restrictions and guidelines for development around heritage items. This helps maintain their character, access and sightlines.

Education

Communicated through cultural practices, tours, programs, storytelling, language, narratives, curriculum, signage and experiences, education is crucial to conserving intangible heritage and providing greater understanding of tangible heritage.

SOPA already has many educational initiatives active on-site or online. There are many other educational spaces and facilities planned for 2050. It is important to utilise these facilities and fill them with programs, activities and signage to link up and communicate key interpretive messages and conserve heritage.

Adaptive re-use

Re-use of the Abattoir Heritage Precinct and the Newington Armory allows for ongoing conservation of these areas due to the maintenance responsibilities of the companies, communities or programs that will occupy them.

This Master Plan proposes the following initiatives for the adaptive re-use of Sydney Olympic Park:

- heritage buildings and structures throughout the Newington Armory will be adaptively re-used to host a range of uses that are sympathetic to heritage values and setting; and
- the Abattoir Heritage Precinct will be adaptively reused to provide a range of community and commercial uses while responding sympathetically to its heritage significance.

Abattoir Heritage Precinct:

- Community programs
- Commercial spaces

Newington Armory:

- Arts and culture events
- Hospitality opportunities

Custodianship

Effective heritage interpretation can provide businesses, visitors and the community with an appreciation of Sydney Olympic Park’s rich layers of history. By connecting people with the story of a heritage place, and encouraging ownership of places, individuals can play a meaningful role in heritage custodianship.

Interpretive strategy 2

Accessibility to heritage

Following conservation of a heritage place, the next strategy is allowing the heritage item to be presented to visitors in an accessible and engaging way. Whether it be tangible or intangible heritage, its presentation is crucial to interpretation and understanding.

Sydney Olympic Park has a multitude of natural, built and cultural heritage items that it has been conserving and restoring for over twenty years and which are either accessible now or will be accessible by 2050.

Heritage can be made accessible to visitors of all ages and abilities, on or off-site, through conservation, views, spaces, structures, displays, websites and activities.

The following types of heritage access will allow the visitor to Connect to Country and feel a sense of place.

Interpretive initiatives

Landscape design

Landscape design opens up and provides access to—and through—heritage items via pathways, plantings, spaces and structures.

Landscaped features, such as spaces and viewing platforms, facilitate education and contemplation, while sympathetic responses to the natural typology of the land retains Country values and heritage sightlines.

This Master Plan provides for landscape interpretation of cultural heritage at Sydney Olympic Park by:

- creating spaces at the major entry points to Sydney Olympic Park which can serve as welcoming landmarks and provide information on how to access cultural spaces within the site. These spaces and the connections between them can integrate storytelling, language and narratives;
- providing opportunities for healing and gathering spaces close to the water and natural spaces;
- building a major playground at Blaxland Riverside Park with an enhanced river experience and connection to promote a sense of place and connection to Country;
- providing for a First Nations indigenous dance ground and healing space, a hub for an enhanced connection to Country, the river and adjacent ecologies; and
- linking up the river walk with the Badu Mangroves.

Landscape interpretation of natural heritage is provided by:

- providing opportunities to connect to the water through play, pathways and access points;
- encouraging opportunities for learning about the importance of water along these routes;
- connecting public domains, recreational parklands and protected ecological habitats with natural corridors; and
- increasing opportunities for gathering in green spaces throughout the site including community gardens throughout Sydney Olympic Park.

Activation

Activating heritage is a sustainable approach to accessing and using Sydney Olympic Park through initiatives such as the Badu Mangroves river walk, themed playgrounds, commercial leases within the Abattoir Heritage Precinct, and art programs at the Armory, markets and community gardens.

Wayfinding

Part of the responsibility for conserving and presenting heritage is allowing visitors to know what is available and where it is. One of the key initiatives to connecting neighbourhoods and their varied heritage items is signage.

Improving wayfinding across Sydney Olympic Park that will provide connections to diverse ecologies through signage and information boards is a major goal of this Master Plan.

Digital access

Digital platforms provides access to heritage for all audiences and abilities, such as the visually or physically impaired.

They also connect the vast heritage spread out across the Sydney Olympic Park site and makes it more manageable.

Sightlines

Sightlines are important as they present how a place was seen in the past and preserves it for the future. Sydney Olympic Park occupies a location that is rich

in ecological transitions, both topographically and from natural to the human-made: riparian and riverine zones, undulating topography, the seen shipwrecks of Homebush Bay and the unseen toxicity of the water from industrial pollution, the excavated landscape of the Brickpit, and the restored and designed open spaces. Maintaining views of these landscapes is critical for visitors' understanding of place.

In the Master Plan 2050, development will:

- maintain and maximise views to elements of Country;
- preserve and enhance important views, including views of significant landmarks and natural features; and
- reinforce the existing topography.

Interpretive strategy 3

Education and activation

Education and activation are key strategies for interpretation as they provide context of and a greater understanding of both intangible and tangible heritage through engaging programs and devices.

Education opens up access to heritage items via numerous on and off-site methods such as programs, landscaped spaces, signage and tours, and helps communicate heritage through experiences.

Education and activation are versatile devices that can be experienced within a group, such as tours, or communicated on a personal level via curriculum or signage. It engages audiences with heritage through sharing knowledge and connecting experiences.

Interpretive initiatives

Cultural education and activation

A substantial portion of cultural heritage is intangible, such as stories, narratives and practices. Facilitating the sharing of culture is important to truly tell the story of Sydney Olympic Park.

Tours, spaces, activities, programs and signage are initiatives to be used to communicate cultural heritage on and off-site.

In this Master Plan:

- Cultural spaces can be expanded and linked to other cultural spaces. These can be used as outdoor classrooms, where people can learn about the unique environment and local plants such as bush tucker and medicinal plants. These plants can also be incorporated into the public plant schedule for foraging and education, allowing the community to access traditional foods and become caretakers of the land.
- There are opportunities to connect cultural sites through narratives and stories along movement routes.
- Storytelling can be integrated with the Badu Mangroves.
- Aboriginal culture and language can be celebrated through public art and placemaking across Sydney Olympic Park.

Educational facilities

On-site and online spaces must be made available to provide these educational services. There are already educational facilities at Sydney Olympic Park but, as the site is growing rapidly, there are plans for three new schools and a new library and community hub.

The following is a list of current and proposed facilities from the Master Plan 2050:

- First Nations Dance Ground;
- Armory Gallery;
- Armory Theatre;
- Bird Life Australia Discovery Centre;
- Sydney Olympic Park Education Centre;
- proposed multi-purpose community and leisure facility;
- proposed primary school;
- Newington Public School
- Wentworth Point Public School
- Abattoir Heritage and Community Precinct
- Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre

Educational and activation programs

Once the facilities are built and the landscapes are preserved and rehabilitated, the sharing and engagement process is activated through programs. Educational programs are an ongoing responsibility of interpretation planning and have the advantage of being able to be customised to engage different audiences with ever changing stories and experiences.

Night-time activation

The modes of Sydney Olympic Park from day to night should be considered carefully in the planning of future on-site interpretation. The site's demands as an entertainment precinct attract diverse audiences travelling, spectating and staying at Stadium Australia, Sydney Olympic Park Train Station, and the Pullman and Novotel hotels. The opportunity to program interpretation through large-scale light or digital media displays could contribute to storytelling in this space. The current *Illuminations* program could be extended with greater depth to feature multimedia content with themes related to phases of the Sydney Olympic Park's history, key memorable events and anniversaries, with participants to highlight the social significance of the site.

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Next steps

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Next steps

Identify heritage for conservation

Build:

- restoration works;
- renovation works;
- educational facilities;
- signage; and
- landscaping.

Program:

- community programs;
- arts and culture events; and
- tours.

Activate:

- commercial spaces; and
- hospitality opportunities.

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Endnotes

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Endnotes

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- 3 Coltheart, L 2001 'Making the Magic: an outline history of the Olympic Coordination Authority NSW'.
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