

The Co-ordinator General

North Bank Project Director, Strategic Development
Department of Infrastructure
PO Box 15009 City East Qld 4002

14th March 2007

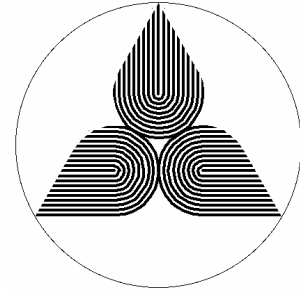
Dear Sir

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (Queensland Division) welcomes the opportunity to make comment on the proposed North Bank project and I am pleased to attach our submission on behalf of the Institute. In preparing the attached submission AILA has consulted with its members both in Qld and Nationally. The AILA membership represents a diverse range of Built Environment Professionals engaged in areas of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design in both public and private sectors.

The AILA would like to acknowledge the openness of the process for the North Bank master planning and design selection. We acknowledge that this city edge location is in serious need of review and represents a significant opportunity to provide improved access to the river and the city. We further acknowledge the complexity of addressing the challenges of the site, including the at times steep topography, the presence of the Expressway and its continuing operation, the desire for a commercially self contained development which delivers outstanding public benefit. For these reasons AILA has undertaken to make a detailed review of the proposal and looks forward to building a continuing relationship with government to over-see the projects development.

Should you have any enquiries or comment about this submission please do not hesitate to contact our Queensland office via the noted contact details.

Yours faithfully



Submission on the North Bank Proposal

Introduction

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (Queensland Chapter) is pleased to make the following submission on the North Bank Proposal for your consideration. The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) represents a diverse range of Built Environment Professionals engaged in areas of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design in both public and private sectors. Our response below reflects the range of responses received from members following a call for submissions by AILA Qld.

Firstly we would like to acknowledge the openness of the process for the master planning and design selection for the North Bank precinct. We acknowledge that this city edge location is in serious need of review and represents a significant opportunity to provide improved access to the river and the city.

We note that the Riverside Expressway is largely seen as a highly efficient transport artery of which many AILA members are beneficiaries. Very few however admire its form, or believe its presence on the river bank (and often in the river) a successful solution to Brisbane's transport future or exemplary of progressive riverside development.

Integration with the Freeway.

The North Bank Master plan appears neither to embrace nor conceal the Expressway. Acknowledgement by Multiplex that construction over the freeway is cost prohibitive appears to have driven a design response which pushes the project into the river.

An opportunity to explore the form of the freeway and capture this dramatically in the form of the proposed towers and plazas appears to have been overlooked. As a fundamental component of the proposed site, it is felt that the incorporation and expression of the expressway warrants significantly more consideration.

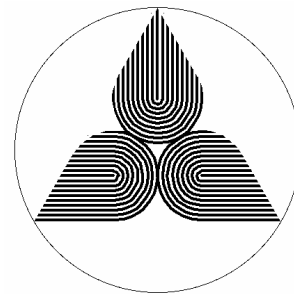
Sense of Place

The single developer approach to this significant downtown site is without parallel in Brisbane and risks the creation of a monoculture of built form and experience. References to Southbank's master planned 'pleasure gardens' as a similar site are without substance given the vastly differing ground level separations between Brisbane City and the North Bank, as compared South Bank to Grey Street.

The injection of a diversity of design talent to the project both at the grand and the intimate scale would significantly contribute to a diverse set of experiences and development types on the site. Large scale projects often lack the element of surprise which is achieved through projects which have grown organically. A significant challenge for this project will be the creation of public spaces that actually engage people's interest over the longer term, rather than a 'once seen easily forgotten' experience.

Public Access / Access For All

The North Bank site is currently typified by linear pedestrian and vehicle traffic movements – Riverside Bikeway and Riverside Expressway respectively. Inclusion of a significant cultural venue at the intersection of the site with the Victoria Bridge presents opportunities not only for pedestrian Gateway Access to the lower reaches of the North Bank, but destinations in their own right. This cultural facility as a GATEWAY to the city needs careful consideration in relation to routes to the city from West End and the Riverside Expressway.



As a CITY GATEWAY this venue is preceded to the south by air right developments in North Bank and therefore can not reasonably be argued as a City Gateway.

Similarly Southbound Traffic on the Expressway would not recognise this site as a Gateway due to its concealed nature behind the Elizabeth Street off ramp and Victoria Bridge.

Less than a Gateway, this location is a significant opportunity to create a dramatic riverside public venue whose justification is its elevated vantage of the River, South Bank and Cultural Precinct, and clear urban connectivity to the city via Elizabeth Street and Queens Park.

High Speed Bicycle connections along the Riverside Bikeway to the City and the QUT Campus are important links whose alignment should be considered carefully in relation to the heavily pedestrianised North Bank plazas.

Celebrating the River

There is much reference to celebrating the River in discussions about the North Bank Proposal. Much has also been said of the discrepancy between the publicised 40m extension of the project beyond the edge of the freeway into the river, and the suggestion that the river extends for some tens of meters below the freeway.

Clear identification of the actual distance that the site projects into the river would be useful.

The precedent that this 40m minimum reclamation and narrowing of the visible river establishes for Brisbane is of concern.

Simulations of the project show a considerable expanse of tree planting throughout the pedestrian plaza areas. It is noted that the River continues to flow beneath the plazas of the project. At face value this covering of the river and replacement by podium landscapes seems less a celebration of river than it does a display of technological building advances facilitating cover and concealment of the river.

Celebration of the river might include significantly more exposure of the river by reducing plaza area and creating more intimate use areas adjacent to built forms and public use areas.

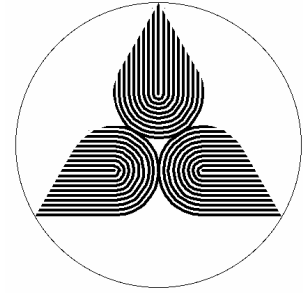
Interactive river artworks and riverside public pools are noteworthy, and expected of projects with stated international aspirations, but does this capture the opportunity to truly celebrate the River as a natural functioning system?

The resilience of the sites design to environmental / climatic change is also questioned given issues associated with global warming and projected sea level rise. A full EIS is recommended as an appropriate step towards addressing these concerns.

Funding versus Cost

It is frequently noted that this project will deliver significant public benefit at no public cost. This proposition significantly devalues the cost of covering large portions of the Brisbane River which must be 'contributed'.

Similarly concerning is the proposition that the management of Brisbane City should not include identification of appropriate long term funding mechanisms to support less commercially driven responses to addressing this EDGE of the CITY.



Is it appropriate that the solution which has worked so well at the Riverside Centre reach of the River be appropriate here at North Bank, where the topographic and transport conditions are vastly different?

Built Form

Recent 'BCC City Shape' forums have shown that few would argue that the height of city buildings be incrementally increased within a manner which respects the overall city shape and preserves and enhances view lines from within and too the city. The relationship of the proposed building heights relative to the low set historical buildings on George and William Streets seems to contradict the consensus on City Shape.

Conclusion

North Bank as a precinct from North Quay to QUT is an engaging challenge which is awaiting the identification of a publicly minded solution which suitably addresses issues of sustainability, river access, city connectivity, equitable funding and sensible and appropriate built forms. There appears to be opportunity missed for leadership for public realm community / green space. The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects congratulates the Qld State Government for undertaking a process which seeks to deliver a balanced solution to these challenges and looks forward to participating in the ongoing resolution of this significant area of Brisbane.

Darren Mew

Yours faithfully