

THINK DARLING HARBOUR 2050

KEY DIRECTIONS REPORT

May 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Urbis and Placemaking NSW would like to acknowledge the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of this land. We recognise and acknowledge the Gadigal people's continued connection to the land, the sea and the sky, a connection that spans more than 60,000 years.

We would also like to acknowledge and show our respect for Gadigal Elders' past, present and future and extend that respect to all First Nations Australians who are connected to and visit the Darling Harbour Precinct.

DARLING HARBOUR: A PLACE OF ENDURING SIGNIFICANCE

DARLING HARBOUR-TUMBALONG SHOULD BE A PLACE THAT REVELS IN 60,000 YEARS OF LIVING CULTURE AND REVEALS IT IN A VIBRANT AND CONTEMPORARY WAY.

Rowena Welsh Jarrett is a Dharawal woman born on Gadigal land; she has helped us to understand the intrinsic significance of Darling Harbour to urban Aboriginal communities from Redfern and La Perouse through the story of her mob – shared as part of our programme of shared discovery.

Nagganggi

I am a proud Dharawal Gumbaynggirr-Gamilaraay woman. I was born on Gadigal land with Gweagal, Bidjigal, Gadigal, Wangal among other Sydney Clan bloodlines and kinship links. My maternal grandmother is a Timbery and I come from an unbroken line of Kooris born here in Sydney pre-Cook.

Traditionally my people move about following fishing seasons in this very harbour and surrounding rivers from as far south as Shoalhaven; never taking more than we needed from our Land or waterways. Much like today, traditionally many nations gathered around the Sydney basin area because of its great cultural significance and abundance of natural resources. This coming together also ensured that cultural knowledge practice and lores were passed on.

Often moving around amongst our Sydney people and surrounding areas we would follow customs such as being welcomed onto Country by neighbouring nations and nations whose Country we would pass through for reasons such as ceremonies, marriage and trade. This traditional custom was carried out to acknowledge ancestors. People of the Land past and present; acknowledge their customs and lore and to respectfully adhere to them whilst on Country. In turn, this ensured our safe passage. It is these experiences and knowledge that has been passed down to me and the bloodlines within me.

My people continue to live & work on Country in places such as Lapa (La Perouse), Redfern and Pyrmont. As a child my family use to bring me here during the school holidays and or when our cousins and mob would visit from Country areas. We would walk from the Block to attend the youth discos at Sega World, enjoy the entertainment elements that modern Darling Harbour offered such as the Chinese Gardens, parks and water parks; and as an adult, enjoy sporting events and watch concerts. But these were also opportunities for my parents & elders to share the cultural significance of the water and our traditional practices as saltwater people. Telling us about the industrial & political post-colonial history that our mobs contributed to the and how acts of resistance, activism and industrial capabilities brought about the opportunities we, as the current communities, live with. Knowledge and stories I now as a mother and Auntie share with my children and younger generations when I visit the area with them.

Our connection to Country is continuous and moving forward we have an integral role in speaking for Country, informing planning and urban design. This Land is, always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Welcome and tread lightly.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Darling Harbour is a place of deep meaning. An inimitable place in Sydney's urban landscape and of irreplaceable value to its diverse communities. It anchors a complex and sometimes contested part of the city with layers of public and private influences and interests. At once a local place and a global destination where people from many cultures come together to share experiences and create memories; above all, it is an inclusive space where people can enjoy being outside in a magnificent waterfront setting.

The western edge of the CBD is embarking on a prolonged period of urban change. Infrastructure investment combined with the planned renewal of assets and proposed private sector development has the potential to impact both the future environment and experience of Darling Harbour. As new projects and participants emerge the opportunity for value creation grows exponentially but so too does the complexity; and in this context, a unified vision is a critical success factor for future decision-making.

Darling Harbour 2050 is the first important step, setting a Vision and Place Strategy to guide the future growth and development of the precinct. This 2050 Vision will define a progressive new purpose for Darling Harbour; reflecting a compelling shared view of success that respects its unique setting, cultural context and enduring significance to Aboriginal people. **This Vision must be both powerful and pragmatic.** Strong enough to be differentiated from its competitors (locally and globally) in terms of its future environment and experience, while safeguarding deliverability and operability.

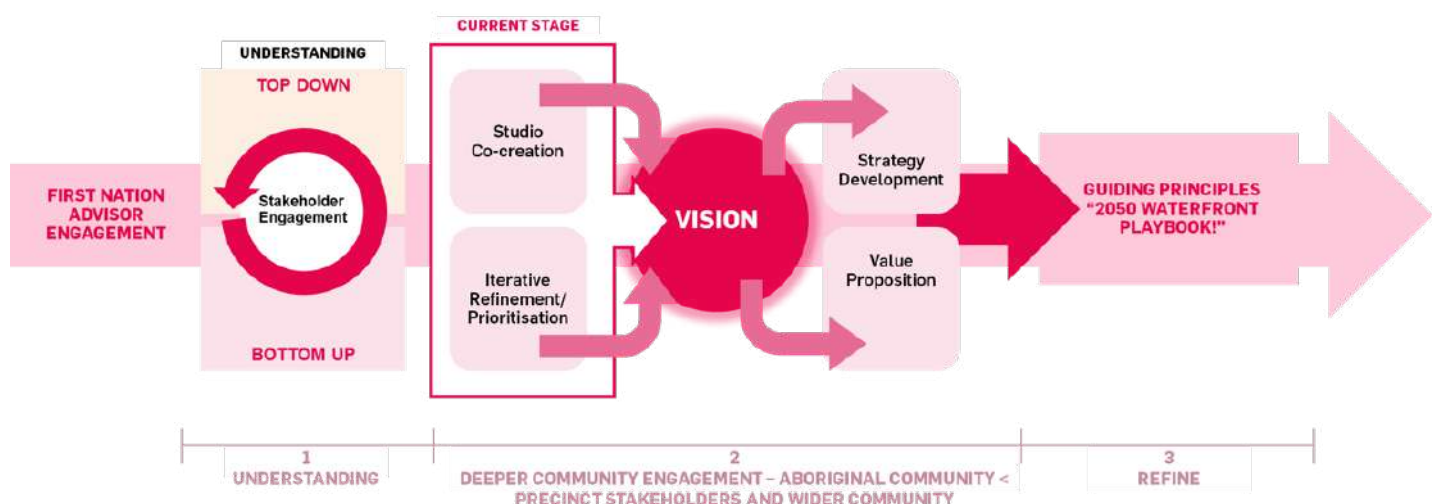
This will be accompanied by a principles-based 'Place Strategy' providing clarity about the real opportunities and constraints; articulating the objectives and desired outcomes and identifying both easy wins and BIG moves that can be championed or catalysed by the NSW Government over time.

This 'Directions Paper' reflects the synthesis of our structured discovery process through which a robust, but preliminary value proposition has been developed. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Identify the drivers for change and the lessons learned from national and international best practice;
- Articulate early insights drawn from representatives from the local Aboriginal communities and reflect the observations of other precinct stakeholders;
- Frame a clear culturally informed strategy for future purpose;
- Identify potential thematic directions that will inform a powerful vision, once deeper consultation with Aboriginal people and other stakeholders and community groups has been undertaken; and
- Propose potential design principles that could be influential in approaching a long-term master plan.

A 'Designing with Country' approach was applied, from the earliest stage and potential solution spaces identified in this report have been co-developed with Aboriginal representatives, who were engaged through a series of three structured workshops and multiple collaborative working sessions.

It was a collective endeavour. Undertaken through a collaboration between John Wardle Architects, Tyrell Studio and Urbis; supported by Aboriginal representatives Alison Page, Craig Kerslake, Rowena Welsh-Jarrett and Emily McDaniel (part). Mel Rumble from 'Reframeable' supported the development of the report. The PMNSW team were key collaborators at all working sessions contributing their precinct-specific knowledge and audience insight.



“

Darling Harbour is a really great place, we are lucky to have it for our city and our community; literally hundreds of thousands of people, families, get the benefit from it every year. ”

Participant, Workshop 1

Darling Harbour is where Land and Sea Country come together, where layers of ancient wisdom meet new knowledge and the stories of many cultures collide. It is a place of deep meaning and great emotion; imbued with journeys of hope and of disappointment.

Ultimately it is where local people and their visitors come together to understand what it means to be both a saltwater person and a Sydneysider.

This is a summary report, reflective of a deeper body of work that has been compiled within a series of companion volumes.

KEY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS



This document sets the scene for the project. It includes the project purpose, scope of work, and the refined purpose of Darling Harbour, of today, and for the future.

01



Understanding Darling Harbour in the changing landscape of Sydney and the world. This includes exploring the top-down and bottom-up drivers of change including policy drivers and global megatrends; exploring the evolving appetites for urban waterfront places, the emerging markets and our growing communities. **02**



Defining the critical success factors for great urban waterfront places and the principles of world-class waterfronts. **03**



Forming a solid understanding of the current place experience of Darling Harbour through an in-depth place experience analysis and site audit. **04**



Document the insights derived from the feedback and ideas discussed throughout the 3 co-creation workshops and stakeholder engagement. **05**



DARLING HARBOUR WAS A GIFT TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW SOUTH WALES AND IS AN IMPORTANT PLACE IN OUR CITY TODAY. IT HAS A NUMBER OF ROLES TO PLAY, WORKING HARD FOR ALL OF THE PEOPLE – ALL OF THE TIME.

Participant, Workshop 2

Darling Harbour fulfils a diverse range of local, regional, national and international functions which will remain significant in the future. They can be summarised as:



Cultural Significance

Darling Harbour is a place of irreplaceable cultural value, where Land and Sea Country meet. It is a unique place set within an extraordinary landscape, a place that has always, and will always bring people together.



Showcasing Creativity and Sharing Knowledge

It is a place of commerce and culture, where businesses and creative practitioners congregate to share ideas and introduce these to new markets.



A Big Day Out Destination

Playing a critical role hosting major events, festivals and celebrations. Home to singular national and regional scale assets, major events and experiences.



Natural Resource for Recreation

A 'gift to the people' that provides local residents and Sydney-siders a place of recreation, free entertainment and play; a democratic and inclusive place of community gathering and celebration with low barriers to participation.



Social and Spatial Connector

The precinct is a transition landscape and an important active transport corridor integrating the CBD, Haymarket, Pyrmont and Tech Central – Sydney's innovation precinct. Its diverse uses connect local residents with businesses, visitors to Sydney-siders and people from many cultures to each other.



Real Neighbourhood

A place where people live, work and study as well as spend their leisure time: its local community is eclectic, culturally diverse and growing.

AN IMPORTANT PRECINCT THAT SUPPORTS OUR VISITOR ECONOMY

Darling Harbour the place, its events and activations, is a critical driver of Sydney's liveability, lifestyle and visitor economy. Each sub-precinct has its own appeal; accommodating specific assets, institutions and experiences that contribute individually and collectively to the visitor economy. These assets are variously in public and private ownership and are at different stages of their lifecycle – from new and emerging, to well established or contemplating redevelopment.

Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM)	A place of entertainment, tourism and innovation. ANMM forms part of the Darling Island area, within Pyrmont Peninsula. It is a maritime cultural institution with a role of a visitor destination, showcasing Australia's Maritime history fleet and marina and an anchor to Pyrmont Bridge. The current waterfront promenade has limited hours access.
King Street Wharf	A living & active waterfront urban environment. The cultural uses of King Street Wharf sits within Darling Harbour Precinct. These include the city's major tourist attractions of Sea Life Sydney Aquarium, Wildlife Sydney Zoo and Madame Tussauds Sydney. This broader sub-precinct is a local destination known for its food & beverage offerings.
Cockle Bay	A metropolitan waterfront for the whole of Sydney + a place of celebration. Cockle Bay serves as a ceremonial waterfront to the city, and a public domain for significant public building including the ICC Conference and Exhibition Centre, Harbourside Shopping Centre, Cockle Bay Wharf/ Darling Park. It is one of the signature views of the city skyline, and one of the city's major visitor and event destination. The undulating ribbon form of W Hotel further defines the city skyline and the travel experiences at Darling Harbour. It will become a new attractor for Sydney's visitor economy when it launches in late 2023.
Tumblong Park	A gathering place for the city and a "regional harbour parkland" Tumblong Park is a key public open space for both local community and international visitors, predicated on culture, events, entertainment, outdoor play, and the serenity of the Chinese Garden of Friendship. An epicentre of both daytime and evening entertainment in the city. It repairs the ecological functioning of the water edge and protects against flooding and storm events.
Darling Quarter	A civic and cultural quarter – an International showcase for New Sydney Darling Quarter provides the platforms for developing a shared social and cultural life of the city, together with places to gather and celebrate. It is a new residential neighbourhood embed resilience + supported by local-regional scale community infrastructure including ample public open space.
Darling Square + The Goods Line	A new urban community hub at the edge of the city's creativity and learning centre Darling Square serves as a local destination with strong connections to Central Station and neighbouring education precinct. It has flexibility in place programme to act as a unique gathering place for visitors.

Permanent and temporary exhibitions at the Australian National Maritime Museum
ATTRACTS ANNUALLY 850,000

Offering 30 WORKSHOPS AND TOURS to educate school and university students

TOTAL VISITOR ENGAGEMENTS 2021-22 7,103,296

Tumblong Park's 5-acre open space has a performance space capacity of 8-10,000 people

ICC 2021/22
\$190 MILLION VISITOR SPEND

In 2021/2022, ICC hosted

300 EVENTS



ATTRACTING 470,000 attendees + 114,000 online audience

1/4 of visitors to ICC come to attend business events equating to more than **600,000 people in 6 months**

900 JOBS CREATED

83% TEAM MEMBER ENGAGEMENT SCORE

300,000 ROOM NIGHTS

UNDERSTANDING OUR VISITOR PROFILE

DARLING HARBOUR IS:

Darling Harbour is New South Wales (NSW) 3rd most visited destination after Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge amongst International Tourists.

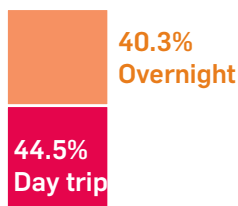
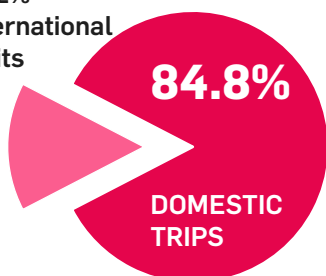


Darling Harbour is NSW's the 3rd most visited destination after Sydney CBD and Newcastle, amongst Domestic Visitors.



WHO IS VISITING DARLING HARBOUR?

15.2%
International
Visits



40.9%
Increase
from 2011



2.43 MIL

International tourists

2.29 MIL

22.8% increase from 2011

50+

years of age increase significantly - by 81% from 2011.

Domestic and international visitors have similar age profile, dominated by the mature age groups of 50+ years of age and millennials (between the age of 15 and 29).

50+

years of age have remained to be the dominant visitor group

15 – 29

years of age increased the most between 2011-2019; specifically 15-19 years of age increased by 42.7% and 20-29 years of age increased by 33.8%

WHY ARE PEOPLE COMING?



> 80%

Of all reasons for international and domestic trips were due to social activities

Outdoor/ Nature was the 2nd top activity amongst international visits.

Arts/ Heritage (whilst minimal at just over 20%) was the 2nd top activity amongst domestic trips.

No domestic trips were driven by the reason of Indigenous culture and attractions.

Of all reason for international visits, Indigenous culture and attractions represented close to 20%.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE DOING?



Top 3 activities that people are participating:

International Tourists

Domestic Visitors

95.2%



Eat out at a restaurant or cafe



77.6%

88.1%



Sightseeing/ Looking around



38.1%

83.1%



Go shopping for pleasure + Visit friends and relatives



37.2%

HOW ARE PEOPLE TRAVELLING TO DARLING HARBOUR AND WHERE ARE PEOPLE TRAVELLING FROM?

DOMESTIC DAYTRIP

56.7%

Private Vehicles



6.2%

Aircraft

37.1%

Public Transport



HOW LONG ARE PEOPLE STAYING FOR?



1-7 DAYS

Remains to be the most popular length of stays since 2011

Between 2011-2019, trips in length of 1-7 days have increased by:

40.4%

For International Visitors

49.8%

For Domestic Overnight Visitors

EXPLORING FIRST NATIONS' INSIGHT AND ASPIRATIONS

This is the moment for deep reinvention and restoration, through which we can re-establish a relationship with Country that is culturally significant to Aboriginal people and inclusive of all Sydney-siders and visitors to the city.

To design meaningfully with Country means engaging deeply and widely with local Aboriginal people; being guided by their wisdom as to how the health and wellbeing of Country can best be supported, as well as how to safeguard and enhance their cultural connection to it. At this first stage of the Darling Harbour 2050 journey, we benefited from the generous contribution of four Aboriginal advisors who shared with us their insights and perspectives. This represents a summary of what was shared during a series of workshops, and subsequent working sessions.

Participants were asked to reflect on the precinct at Darling Harbour today, and what was important to their community. Their conversation emphasised the importance of changing the focus from a short-term to long term, or a 'seven generation' approach. Building a future grounded in deep knowledge of what 'should be'; respecting the rhythm and seasons of this land. It revealed three key themes that have, in effect, set the brief at this early stage.

Intrinsic importance of healing Country

To restore and heal Country will demand a deep understanding of it and an approach that unifies traditional knowledge with advanced science. Darling Harbour-Tumbalong is at the threshold between Land and Sea Country, a place where salt and fresh water meet: *"drastic actions impacted the health of Country over the last two hundred years and major interventions will be required to effect a reversal"* (Participant, workshop 1).

In this regard, respect and care for Sea Country was regarded fundamental – *"our history is in the water"* (Participant, workshop 1) – recognising that in pre- and early colonial times it was a place of mangroves, a nursery for the Harbour and an important food source. Traditionally these land and seascapes had time to regenerate and replenish, today a conscious restorative approach will be critical if we want Country to thrive.

Enabling our deep sense of belonging

Proactively engaging with cultural practices, caring for and connecting with Country can be challenging for Aboriginals living in the city. As a continuous living culture, safeguarding the future of traditional practices is critical. Being on Country and fully able to participate is fundamental to making sense of ourselves in this context.

"Future Darling Harbour should be universally understood as Gadigal land, our connection to it must be recognised by everyone and our cultural protocols and practices respected" (Participant, workshop 1). Indigenous people want to feel, safe, welcome and acknowledged - seeing themselves and their children in the future of this place.

Taking leadership and telling a balanced story

We cannot bury the events of the last two-hundred-thirty-five years, we can however understand them and ensure that we learn from them and that the mistakes from the past are not repeated. Telling balanced stories about the events that have framed contemporary Australia is critical to moving forward together. *"Darling Harbour can be a place of truth telling and truth hearing"* (First Nations representative, Workshop 2). Telling a powerful story about positive action and elevating the cultural narrative in all forms is an important component towards the regeneration of this precinct.

CREATING A GREAT FUTURE PLACE BY RESPECTING THE PAST. CREATING A PLACE WHERE WE CAN FEEL AND IMMERSE OURSELVES IN COUNTRY, EXPERIENCE THE SEASONS AND ENJOY THE ELEMENTS.

First Nation's representatives were also asked to capture their hopes for the future, exploring what they would like a reimaged Darling Harbour 2050 to be like. The key themes emerging from this discussion were:

We are the acknowledged custodians

The future vision must recognise Indigenous people as the cultural custodians of this place, telling the stories that elevate our truth and experience. We feel we belong, and we are proud of this place and that we are valued.

Blue soul with green edges

Celebrating Sea Country: a living harbour with healthy water that we can connect to, deeply engage with and immerse ourselves in. Biodiverse, this is a place where you can literally feel Country, enjoying its seasons and elements.

Human and humane

A granular and fine grain, empathetic place which encourages civic life and has the feel of a community; counteracting the placelessness of large scale.

A really special place

Purposeful and progressive, a cultural village that speaks the language of this place, culturally distinctive and inimitable. You can really feel the spirit of this place which revels in traditional values.

There is an important emerging opportunity to develop a leadership position in how to design with and for Country in an intense urban setting.

EARLY LISTENING WITH PRECINCT STAKEHOLDERS









Precinct stakeholders were conscious of the exponential rate of change around and within the Darling Harbour precinct. They regarded this as an opportunity to refresh the identity, environment and experience of the precinct holistically – positioning it for a future that is better aligned to changing community aspiration and visitor appetites.

Seventeen precinct stakeholders with an ownership or operational footprint in the precinct were invited to comment about current precinct challenges and future aspirations from their perspective. A common question related to the precinct boundary and the extent to which it is fixed or flexible - the underlying sentiment being a desire to belong and to join in with this programme of re-imagination.








DARLING HARBOUR TODAY

Opinions about the precinct today were somewhat divided. Whilst all participants acknowledged the significance and primacy of the precinct as a city-wide asset and important local place enjoyed by millions of people every year, not everyone agreed whether it was an inclusive place or a place that locally people embraced as their own, or that had relevance to their daily lives.

Positive Attributes

-  **Walkability**
Relatively flat, and pedestrian oriented. Seamless connections to Barangaroo, and the future fish market
-  **Recreational Resource – Tumbalong Park**
An open space asset that is used by locals and visitors, by day and night. *"It is a great place, a playground - thousands of people use it"* (Participant, workshop 1).
-  **Convenience and Accessibility – Ferry & Light Rail**
Darling Harbour is easy to reach by public transport and will get even easier (Metro to Pyrmont).
-  **An Events Precinct**
With free and paid attractions and events, Darling Harbour is an inclusive destination. *"As a live-site it's a monster"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing). *"There are few places in the City to host large-scale events and community gathering like Darling Harbour, the city would be bereft without it"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing).
-  **New Energy**
Each new sub-precinct adds a layer of vibrancy, attracting new users who contribute their energy. *"Associate Darling Harbour as a place of gathering and fun – always a place of celebration"* (National Maritime Museum representative, workshop 2).
-  **Multi-Cultural**
Cultural expression through events and audience – strengthened by proximity to Chinatown.
-  **Playful and Family-Friendly**
It is an easy place to be with children, there is a lot to do. *"The water is terrific, go to the Chinese Gardens – the water is really successful for families"* (Participant, workshop 2).
-  **Community Asset**
Darling Harbour has a strong role within the city. *"The significance of the precinct and its component parts to the community and Sydney"* (Participant, workshop 1). *"It is and should remain driven by public purpose"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing).

Negative Attributes

-  **Wayfinding and Universal Accessibility**
General pedestrian experience and specific commentary about the access challenges from the west were most frequently referenced. Access for people with physical or sensory impairment was raised as a specific concern. Inconsistent and poor wayfinding was seen as an exacerbator, specifically on the lack of clarity moving through, in and out of the precinct.
-  **Ongoing Construction**
Concern about being a building site for a decade. Reflection that there was significant on-going impact from the 'W' hotel; Harbourside and Cockle Bay Wharf redevelopment coming up next with more to come. How to protect the experience for users is a critical issue.
-  **Increasing Competition**
Recognition that as the city matures and connectivity increases there is an increasing depth and diversity of opportunity competing for time and spend (of local people and visitors). There is a growing need to overcome the precinct proposition that only appeals to certain audience groups.
-  **Car Parking**
Clearly a vexatious issue, with recognition that large families coming from the suburbs for a whole day would be challenged to come by train.
-  **Avoid Over-Intensification**
Resident representatives were concerned about the impact of over intensification as private land holders redevelop their land-holdings.
-  **Assets in Flux**
The need for asset renewal and the refresh of dated concepts, upgrading a tired public realm.
-  **Hot and Hard Surfaces, Lack of Shelter and Shade**
On hot, wet days the precinct is inclement and uncomfortable in places, reflecting the lack of natural shades (tree canopies) and shelters. *"Since 1988, everywhere has continued to plant trees and yet Darling Harbour has become less green and treed"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing).

THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

Darling Harbour has significant existing brand capital and associated community goodwill. Moving forward, it will be important to balance a desire to protect that which is special, while creating more depth and diversity in the offer.

In thinking about the near and long-range future stakeholders were conscious of the importance of aligning with the changing needs of the existing and emerging customers; and equally creating new reasons to visit that would attract new audiences. *"What will it take for Darling Harbour to be one of Australia's top 5 'must see' destinations"* (Precinct Stakeholder: one-to-one briefing).

There was also broad recognition that future success in any form could be accelerated and amplified by increased cross-precinct collaboration and partnering.

The following themes surfaced as powerful aspirations for Darling Harbour 2050:

Central to any, and all futures for the precinct should be the significance of ensuring it has a First Nation's soul, a strengthened Indigenous identity. Positioned as a place of truth telling and truth hearing. Where we can all come to **learn about culture and Country**.

A great **local place for local people** that has real relevance to their lives. Protecting its importance as a place for **families and family activities** – easy to use and with low barriers to participation.

Water is the defining feature of the precinct (and to humanity) and central to its story and appeal. **Care for Sea Country**, education about the ocean and engagement with the water are all key platforms. *"More spaces for more people to be by the water in more and different ways".* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing).

The **maritime story** of this place is a thread that unifies communities over time, it speaks to the emotion associated with Darling Harbour as a place of arrival and departure, hopes realised and unrealised.

It's a more **organic and spontaneous place**, textured and less manicured. A genuinely local vibe with small community oriented events that are not perfect or over curated. Creating plural senses of place appropriate to diverse residential communities.

A place of increased porosity, where the monolithic buildings are reconnected to the precinct at the ground floor. **Small scale experiences and intimate places** as well as the grand gestures.

A place that is **creative**. Expanding on the recreational, conferencing, event and entertainment roles that are in place to build a more diverse creative scene. A place for creative start ups to scale.

Greater cohesion and navigability, **enhanced access and wayfinding**. Deeply integrated with the city seamlessly, building connections within and beyond the precinct to emerging destinations – including Sydney Fish Market.

Greener and cooler; **'doing sustainability smarter'**. More trees and more climatic attenuation; increased resilience and intelligent forms of circular and sustainable management practices. Reimagine the long term without the Western Distributor.

Challenging ourselves to plan for future agility or adaptability; and enable it through **flexible planning frameworks**. *"The real paradigm shift is to think of Darling Harbour as part of the city"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing).

Thinking and acting with one voice, as collaborators and not competitors. Encouraging a **more collective mentality** precinct-wide that facilitates visitors, embracing every opportunity within the destination.

Future Darling Harbour is Sydney's Federation Square, the **acknowledged host of the major events** that amplify Sydney's global appeal. The Harbour as the Blue Square has high level of event activation.

A more **granular and hyper local urban fabric** that is redolent of the surrounding neighbourhoods at Pyrmont, Surry Hills or Redfern.

Creating an **exciting food and beverage** offer that moves beyond the existing proposition; a place with a **fusion of cultures** – food, music, fashion, art and stories

Connect into Tech Central and the UTS campus creating more seamless interaction with its uses and users to expand the programme and relevance of the precinct to local users.

PLAYING TO ITS STRENGTHS

In contemporary terms, Darling Harbour is a 'public good asset' with unsurpassable potential to deliver intergenerational benefit. It is a place of intrinsic significance to Sydney, providing irreplaceable cultural and recreational amenity to its many communities – enabling them to come together in an amazing waterfront setting.

Moving forward, Darling Harbour has a series of existing strengths, comparative and competitive advantages which collectively create a strong foundation upon which to re-imagine a new future purpose and place experience. These strengths were explored through a review of policy, published literature and social media, contextual analysis and observation; and were confirmed both during the workshop series and in interviews with precinct stakeholders.

It is a public good asset that is an open and accessible space in an amazing location

Located adjacent to the Harbour and providing inclusive access to the water, with unrivalled views of the cityscape. Whilst there are ticketed events and experiences, there are also free and low cost activities that mitigate the barriers to participation.

"This is an inclusive space for the city, not just a place for the people who can afford to pay: a vibrant and family-friendly place. Not alcohol dependent." (Precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing)

A natural resource with high recreational value – and a place to play in the city

The contemporary precinct provides a range of green, blue and urban open spaces which are connected, walkable and supportive. These have a significant role to play in promoting an active and healthy lifestyle. The provision of the regional scale playscape at Darling Quarter is a significant asset for families from across the city – and enables a special, big day out experience.

A portfolio of cultural institutions and attractions, entertainment venues and singular experiences

Darling Harbour today represents of the most dense and diverse clusters of leisure, lifestyle and creative economy assets in Greater Sydney. Some of these assets are already considering the opportunity for future expansion, intensification or renewal within their own footprint. This will ensure that the gravity and magnetism of this precinct will remain – even as the competition from emerging precincts intensifies.

Major event infrastructure enabling large scale community events

This is an event space of state-wide significance which combines the provision of ticketed and non ticketed entertainment opportunities. The public realm assets themselves are one of the key locations where mass community gatherings, multi cultural events and celebrations are both possible and enabled by the infrastructure and management overlay.

Powerful and essential business infrastructure supports Sydney's position as a global business district

The International Convention and Exhibition Centre has an ascendant role in the global and national MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) industry scene. Its central location, reinforced by its hotel and lifestyle infrastructure, supports its international appeal.

Brand and memory

Darling Harbour has significant brand value and its digital footprint is powerful. Many Sydney-siders (and their out of state families or friends) have strong, inter-generational memories of time spent at Darling Harbour or have been in the precinct at times important times of national celebration.

"In my lived experience and memory, I associate Darling Harbour as a place of gathering, energy and fun; with different things to do – something for everyone." (Precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing)

Whilst these existing strengths are indisputable, the changing landscape of both Greater and Inner Sydney means that new experiences, cultural and visitor assets and lifestyle precincts will increasingly context the space that has been occupied by Darling Harbour. The precinct's relative strengths (comparative advantages) and the inimitable aspects (**competitive advantages**) are summarised graphically in Figure 1.

This reflect the importance of its:

- i. World class waterfront location;
- ii. Dedicated leadership team with a public benefit purpose to balance its commercial drivers;
- iii. The presence of multiple iconic or singular assets and institutions, contributing social and cultural energy;
- iv. A programme of major community events, gatherings and celebrations; and
- v. Increasing public transport connectivity.

CAPITALISING ON ITS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

Darling Harbour is a great place. It is a place of hearts and minds, enjoyed by millions of Sydney-siders and visitors each year. Its enduring competitive value exists at the intersection of its world class urban waterfront setting, its near unique placemaking-place management team and the portfolio of world class anchor institutions, events and experiences that cannot be replicated. These will be further ignited by the additive value of public and active transport investment.

This is not to say however that the public realm and event offer cannot be contemporised to meet emerging audience aspirations or that the prevailing sense of place could not be better aligned to changing values, needs or preferences.

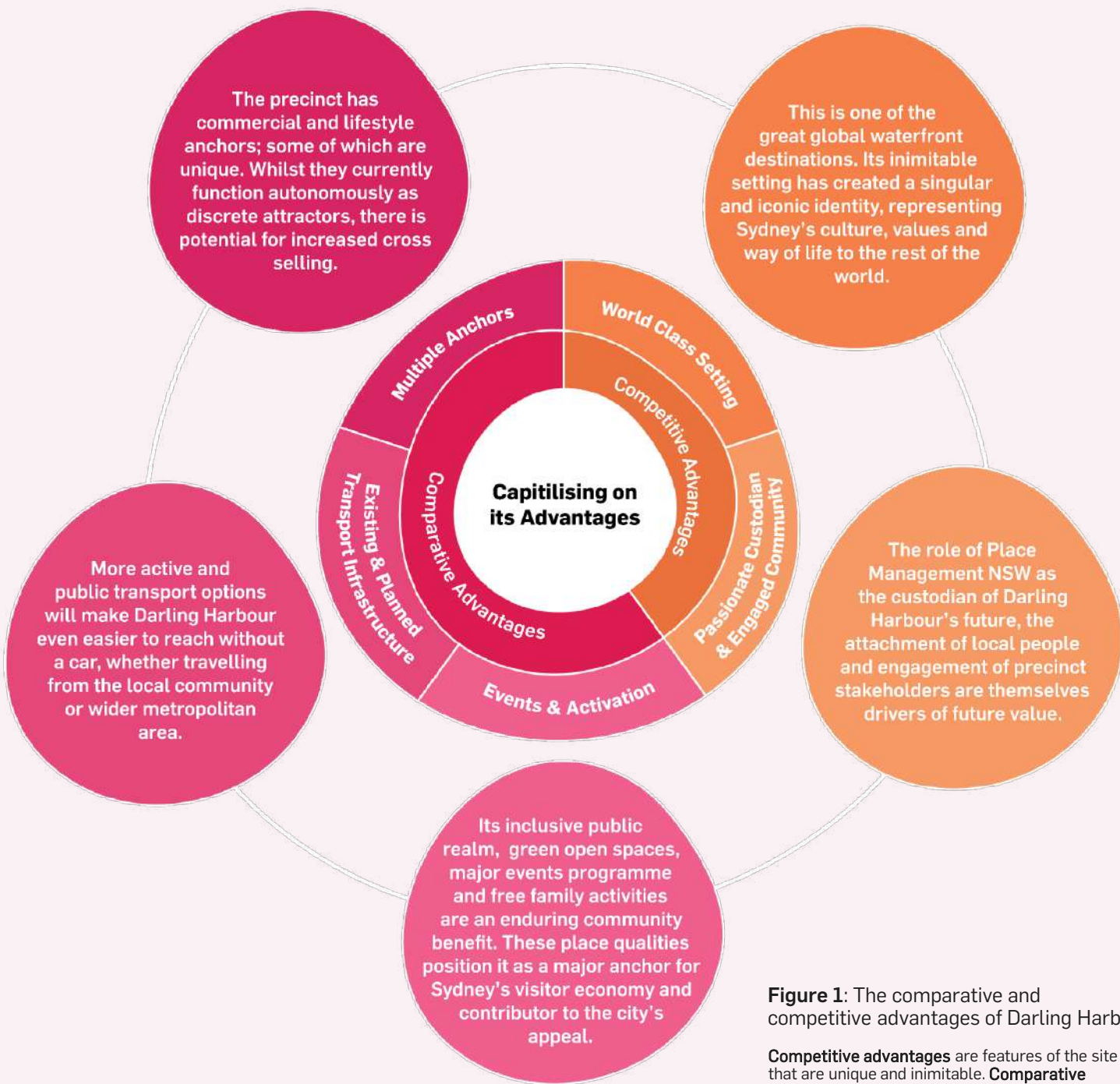


Figure 1: The comparative and competitive advantages of Darling Harbour.

Competitive advantages are features of the site that are unique and inimitable. **Comparative advantages** are features that are strongly represented in a location but may be equally available elsewhere.

ACKNOWLEDGING SOME OF THE CHALLENGES

Despite its enduring strengths, the environment and experience of Darling Harbour is variable across the precinct and known challenges are intensifying. Its perception and digital footprint may in places exceed the reality of what it delivers.

The following key challenges were identified through contextual analysis in conjunction with insight developed through workshops and interviews.

Lacking Local Relevance

In its entirety, the precinct has become less well aligned to its societal context and setting. Its character is compromised and confusing, reflecting the many tensions inherent in its positioning as a globally significant but local place. It was a gift to the people of NSW, but increasingly feels oriented towards visitors while some local people feel it has declined in hyperlocal relevance. *"It lacks of cultural soul – it could be anywhere in the world. Nothing exudes Sydney, its cultural, continent, time and people"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing).

Disconnection from Water

The Harbour is the most significant point of difference and yet we have become increasingly disconnected from it and have not safeguarded its health. Re-connecting with the water safely (walk in walk out solutions) and promoting ocean resilience is critical to maintaining that which is special and distinctive about his place, and equally that which defines and connects us as saltwater people.

Assets in Flux

Elements of the existing built form character and public realm are *"grey, colourless and soulless"*. Some key assets and experiences no longer meet their intended function and are ready for renewal. The next decade will see a period of increasing competition as major projects go live across the six city region.

Poor Connection to Country

This is a place of great significance to Aboriginal people and yet there is no connection to, or obvious care for Country. A restorative approach is needed to heal the impacts of colonialism.

It is a performative place with no clear or real connection to the First Nation's story. It will be critical to frame a more balanced narrative that encourages a deep understanding of Indigenous culture and what it means to be connected to Country.

Disaggregated, Incoherent & Inclement

The precinct experience is inconsistent. Sub-precincts are disaggregated from each other and are complicated by multiple ownerships and agendas. Connectivity to the west is compromised by level changes; movement into and around the precinct is not frictionless. The precinct is hard to navigate, hot and unpleasant during inclement weather.

Whilst the front of house is 'glorious', the back of house is degraded in certain areas and the sense of arrival is underwhelming.

Generic, Not Unique

The precinct has lost the essence of what made it special. *"Very little is unexpected"* (precinct stakeholder, one-to-one briefing). It has many elements which are generic and commoditised instead of concentrating on strengthening those things that are reflective of this time, place and community. Some of the assets are ageing and dated, requiring a refresh or re-imagination to align with community sentiment and audience aspiration.

Monolithic, No Grid & Grain

Anchor institutions and assets are large and lack porosity. They exacerbate the barrier between the place and its adjacent community. It impacts the human scale and negates intimacy, reducing personal connection. Existing built form is a barrier to movement and emotional accessibility. It pushes activities away from the water, towards the edges of the precinct like a donut – losing its heart and not well integrated with the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Community Misalignment

Whilst the precinct is still successful and provides a high amenity day out for many people, the needs and aspirations of its communities are changing. Mass gatherings and celebrations remain intrinsically significant to this place and are core to its purpose, however they could be re-imagined to meet contemporary aspirations.

It is not a place where local people feel their needs are really met or that Indigenous communities feel welcomed or able to participate. Major events cause a sense of physical and emotional dislocation for local people; and can be intimidating

Decade of Change

The success of the precinct as a high-quality event and recreation space for Metropolitan Sydney to enjoy will be compromised for a decade by the planned redevelopment of major assets.

Without a clear vision and purpose, coupled with place principles to guide future development – this renewal could compromise the lasting ability of Darling Harbour to deliver competitive advantage for Sydney or benefit to its community. During this time coherent and collective governance and a unified vision will be critical to immediate and sustained success.

🗨️ **To safeguard and enhance its future value we need to address the negative impacts of decisions that have been made over the last two hundred years, re-imagining it for a more potent future.** 🗨️

Participant, Workshop 3

THE MACRO DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Sydney is Australia's only global city; networked internationally and part of an increasingly competitive international economy. A city of six cities, its urban value proposition, natural environment, lifestyle and liveability are critical to its appeal – and they are all evolving rapidly in response to new macroeconomic and community drivers.

There are many kinds of trends, those that are systemic and drive seismic shifts at a global scale; together with structural changes specific to a market or driven by hyperlocal community needs and aspirations in localised areas. Exploring how these shifts will shape the future of Darling Harbour is critical to how we frame a vision for success in 2050. The following reflects a summary of the mega and macro market trends that have been considered during this exercise:

Climate and Carbon

The urgency of climate change and the commitment to a zero-carbon future are hastening decisions about energy transition, increasing the awareness of reducing waste and building resilient, circular systems. The NSW Government has made a commitment to reduce emissions by 70 per cent on 2005 levels by 2035, achieving net zero by 2050.

Cities that are Growing and Changing

The rate of population growth, urbanisation and globalisation are collectively influencing the size, shape and resident base of cities. Greater Sydney has moved to a six-city model; their distinctive identity, collective liveability and combined economic success will drive the global competitiveness and appeal of the metropolitan area into the future. New South Wales is expected to grow by circa 85,000 people per annum until 2041, by which time Greater Sydney's population is projected to be 6.1 million.

Technological Advance and Economic Transformation

Globally, the pace of technological change, quantum computing and the rise of artificial intelligence, is exponential. Sydney is at the heart of Australia's tech innovation ecosystem and home to the largest share of its ICT businesses, research institutions and start-up founders; we are well placed to leverage this ecosystem to drive the environmental, economic and social transformation needed.

THIS IS A TIME OF PROFOUND GLOBAL AND LOCAL REINVENTION: IT DEMANDS A NEW WAY OF THINKING ABOUT URBAN LIFE & ENVIRONMENT

Connecting with Country

The NSW Government recognises the importance of improving the health and wellbeing of Country and is committed to thinking about urban change in a different way; one which values, respects and is guided by Aboriginal people. The Connecting with Country Framework provides a starting point to building an inclusive and equitable city and community, grounded in recognition of the Traditional Owners and cognisant of their aspirations for the future.

Transport Investment

Greater Sydney's Six-Cities strategy is being underpinned by a sustained investment in public and active transport investment to enhance accessibility. New transport connections will change patterns of movement in the city, enabling 33 per cent more Sydney-siders to access Darling Harbour within a 30-minute journey time without the need to use their car; this supports the policy direction of healthy places and healthy movement.

Urban Evolution

Collectively intensification of development to the western edge of Sydney CBD, investment at UTS and into Tech Central will expand the local resident, student and business populations. While the proposed expansion or renewal of ageing tourism and lifestyle assets has the potential to intensify the appeal of the precinct as a visitor destination for domestic and international markets.

The Rise of Cultural Authenticity

Cultural tourism is the fastest growing domestic and international market, and cultural tourists tend to stay for longer, embed themselves more intrinsically and spend more; immersing themselves in local lives and local landscapes. New frontiers in place-making and tourism privilege local responses and emphasise the importance of cultural heritage and practice as the foundation for great contemporary places.

LEARNING FROM BEST PRACTICE

Future Darling Harbour aspires to be at the forefront of world class waterfronts. Uniqueness is critical to achieving and maintaining this position. Nonetheless insight can be drawn from international precedents.

From a long-list of waterfronts, the experience and environments of Halifax Canada, Cape Town South Africa, Valencia Spain, New York's Hunters Point South and Marina Bay in Singapore were explored in greater depth. The lessons learned from each of these waterfront places are presented in figure 2; the overarching critical success factors that characterise excellence are summarised as follows.



Real places that are locally loved

A local identity that becomes a global brand, one that cannot be replicated.

Intentional and innovative

Underpinned by purpose and conscious decision making.

Restorative and resilient

Environmentally responsible, low carbon and climate adaptive.

Engage our imagination

Be creative and deliver a space for our imagination; invite discovery.

Progressive and eclectic

Unexpected, experimental and imperfect – potentially even gritty and organic.

Destinations of micro destinations

A string of pearls inviting discovery; fine grain + generous gestures.

Culture and creativity as catalysts

One of a kind—strong creative vibe, cultural place making tells our story—our way.

Many moods and moments

Infusing mood and fostering emotional attachment. Different every day.

Easy, intuitive and frictionless

Universal, inclusive, safe, enjoyable and without barriers.

Agile Reinvention

Dynamic leadership, active partnering and collaboration.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM INTERNATIONAL EXEMPLARS

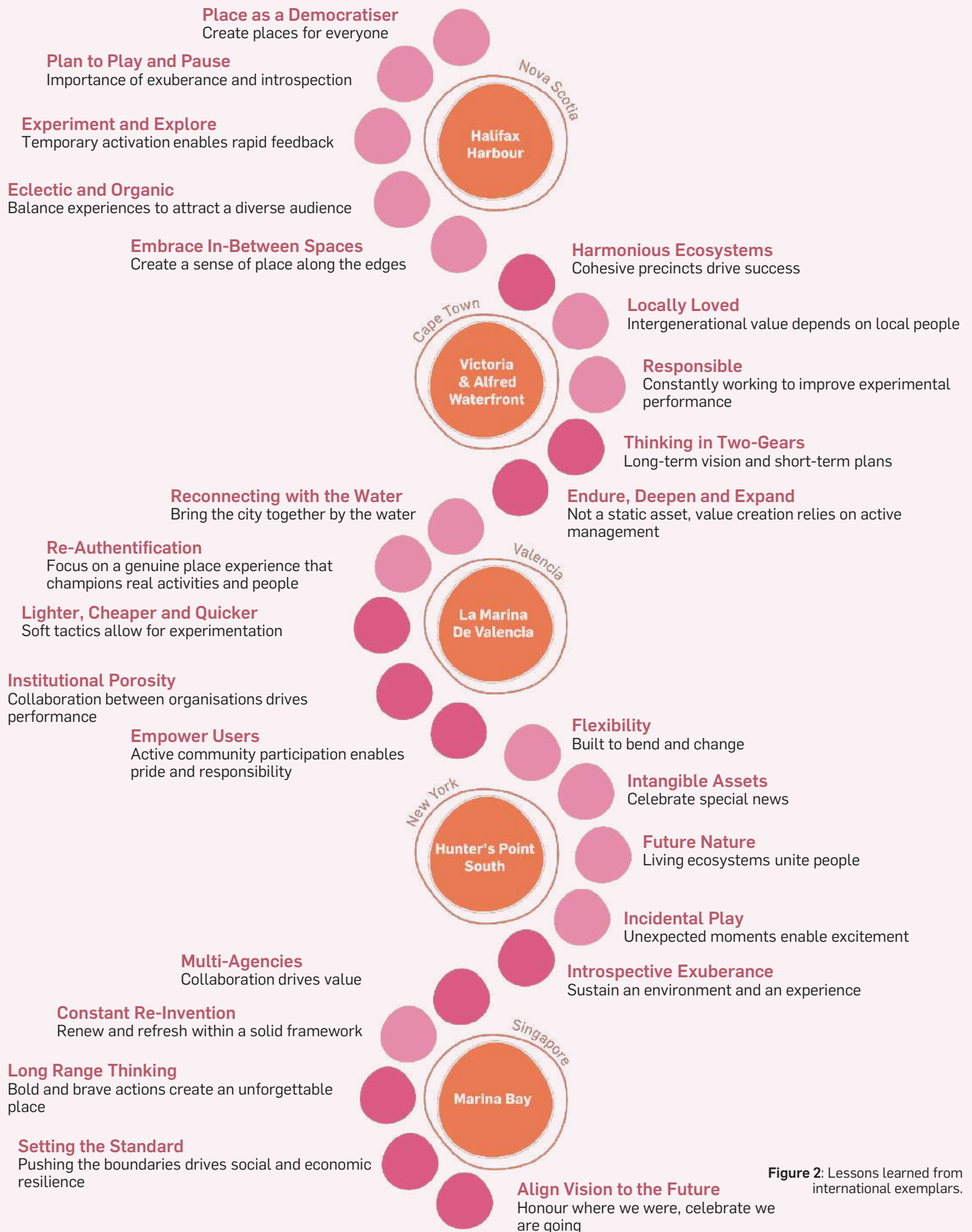
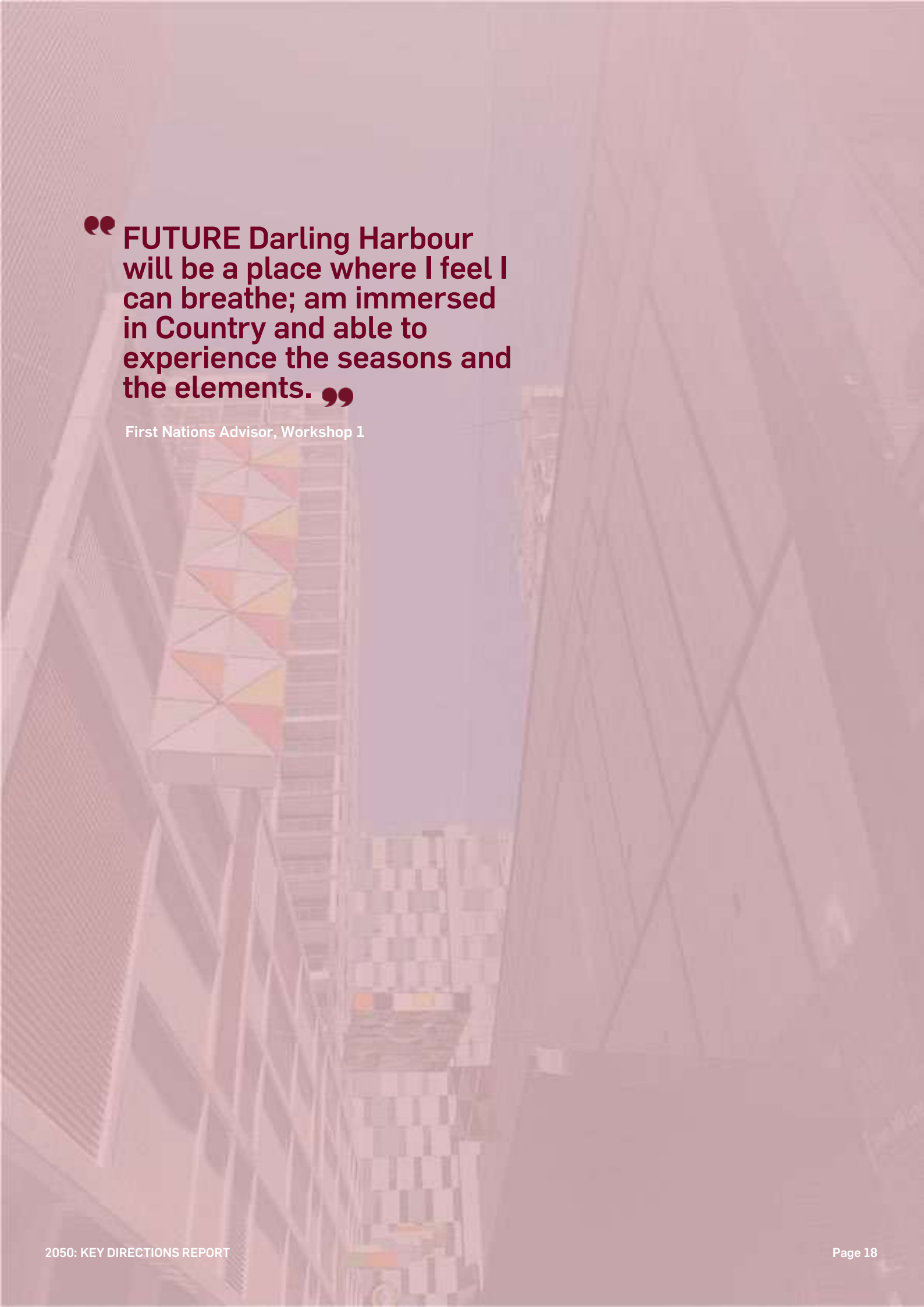


Figure 2: Lessons learned from international exemplars.



**“FUTURE Darling Harbour
will be a place where I feel I
can breathe; am immersed
in Country and able to
experience the seasons and
the elements. ”**

First Nations Advisor, Workshop 1

EVOLVING A NEW AGENDA

DARLING HARBOUR IS, AND ALWAYS WAS, A PLACE OF MANY VOYAGES; A PLACE YOU CAN COME AS YOURSELF AND BECOME PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER.

Darling Harbour has always been a place where nations and cultures **gather** to **celebrate** and **exchange**. These three aspects will remain foundational to its future: it is literally and metaphorically a 'brackish place' where flows of people, like water, mingle and interesting or unexpected things happen. **It is a place of thresholds where powerful connections can be made** – between people, ideas, the east and the west of the city, Land and Sea Country, the built and natural environments.

Blending the insight and aspiration expressed by our First Nation's representatives with the early precinct engagement outcomes, contextual analysis and drivers for change suggests that Darling Harbour will retain a balance of purpose between being a great local place and an identity-maker and marker for Sydney globally; a place that reflects Sydney's real culture, identity and values. It's existing role as a place of entertainment, celebration and creativity will be enhanced and expanded.

But equally it will become a place of balanced stories; of truth telling and truth hearing. A place that revels in its history and reveals it in a vibrant and contemporary way.

Figure 4 summarises what is important to our new purpose and agenda. Positioning Darling Harbour 2050 as a place:

- That cares for and connects to Country
- Is defined by water
- Where we tell balanced stories
- That is inclusive, relevant to and great for locals
- That is enjoyed and discovered together
- That is brackish, where interesting things happen
- That portrays our contemporary culture and values
- Where creativity is fostered and showcased.

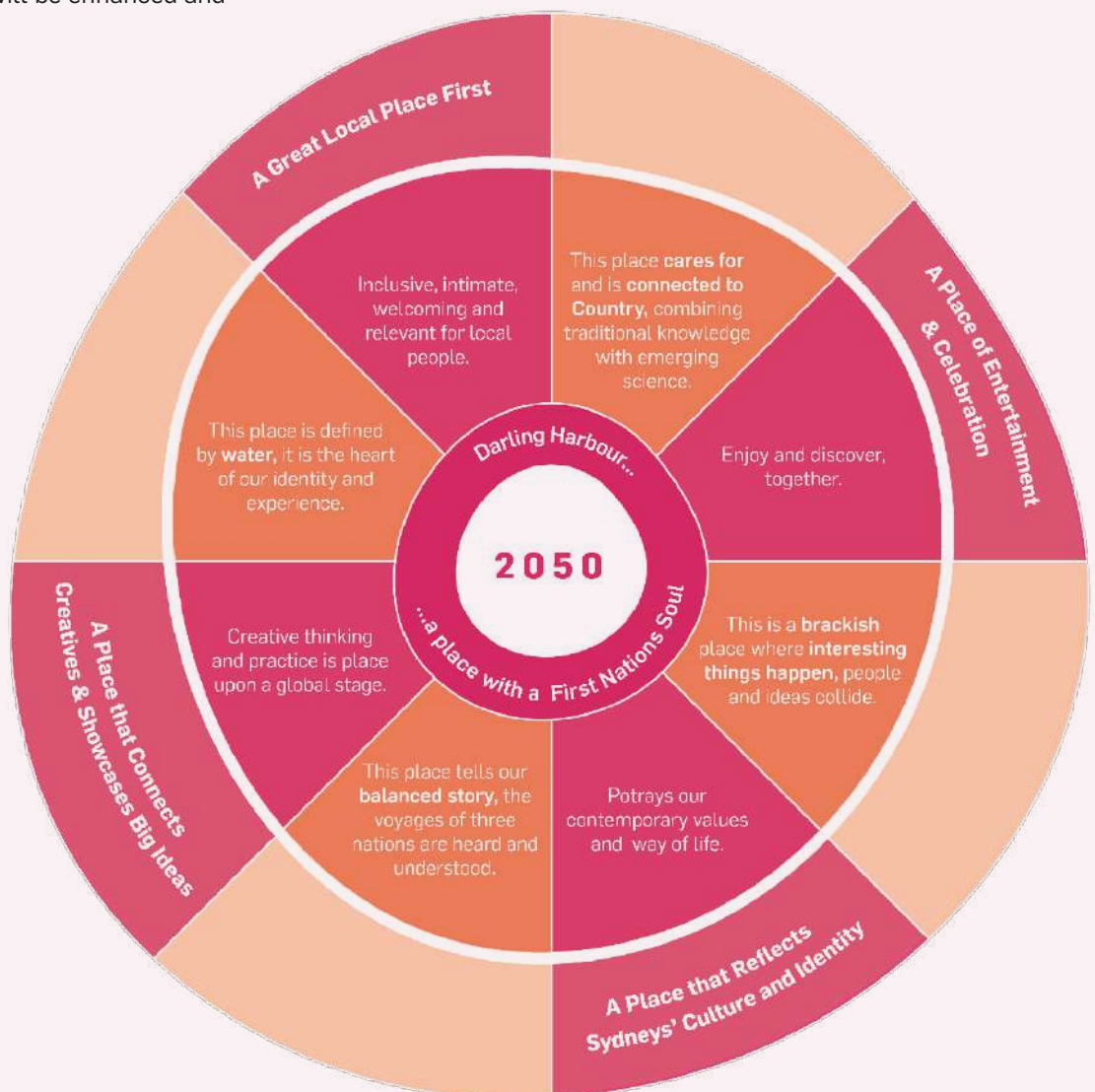


Figure 4: Framing the DNA of Darling Harbour 2050

THE FUTURE PLACE DNA

Darling Harbour 2050 will have a unique place in the six cities of Greater Sydney; it is the central meeting point where all people come together to share their stories and celebrate life. A place of balanced storytelling where ancient culture and contemporary identity converge; and we celebrate shared lives.

It will be Sydney's 'brackish' place where human energy flows drive unique collaborations and impromptu experiences, creating value from unexpected encounters.

We are taking the first step in re-imagining Darling Harbour for future generations; acknowledging, learning and restoring mistakes of the past.

Whilst recognising that the precinct must retain its existing role, participants saw four objectives as central to its future:

- Restoring and healing country;
- Telling balanced stories;
- A great local place; and
- A distinctive city asset.

Through collaboration they identified five characteristics as critical to defining the environment and experience of future Darling Harbour – and these are explored further below.

First Nations Soul

Designing with Country is at the heart of the future story. It is a resource for the nation, where we can learn how to unify knowledge systems for the restoration and care of Sea Country. Darling Harbour can be a place of truth telling and truth hearing, where Sydney-siders and their visitors come to learn about Country and culture in meaningful ways.

Celebrate Water

This is a place where we can all come together to celebrate being salt-water people. Water is the story of Darling Harbour and of all our people; fundamental to its role as a place of arrival, trade or exchange and industry. We can discover and experience the ocean at Darling Harbour, reimagining our relationship with it and immersing ourselves in it.

Place for People

The legacy of gathering, ceremony and celebration is central to Darling Harbour. In 2050 this place must be people positive – human and humane. A family place, a place for making new friends or reuniting with old ones; where we are encouraged to linger and join in. A friendly local place where all people feel welcome, included and safe.

Smart & Sustainable

This is active learning site at the intersection of traditional knowledge, showcasing cutting edge science and technology. Greener and cooler, restorative by design and investing in its own resilience. Sensor technology provides real time feedback about the health of Land and Sea Country; we are working smarter not just harder.

Creative Grit

Creative grit is at the heart of the future precinct; a place where the impromptu happens every day. It is an intense hive for creative thinkers and practitioners, facilitating new commercial and community partnerships. introducing small scale, intimate and imperfect experiences to counteract scale.

PURPOSE: A BRACKISH PLACE OF BALANCED STORY TELLING, WHERE WE CELEBRATE OUR SHARED LIVES

This is a place of balanced story-telling, where ancient culture and contemporary identity converge. Where we tell and hear the truth about our voyages; moving forward together as Saltwater People with respect for everyone's story.

It is the place where we celebrate water as the enduring thread that connects humanity over time, and across geographies. Where we understand the stories of travellers and learn how to care for Sea Country.

In 2050, Darling Harbour will be a world class restorative waterfront.

A place of future nature with layers of re-imagined landscapes fundamental to the identity, social and cultural life of the city. A place that repairs and regenerates natural systems, promoting human health and wellbeing. It is the magic of Sydney, bringing understanding and joy to Sydney-siders and her visitors.

Future Darling Harbour is imbued with a First Nations' soul and sensibility; its immeasurable cultural significance is understood, protected and respected. And it has become a place where First Nation's people see themselves and their story reflected, where they belong, feel welcome, and can connect to or care for Country.

A place of many places and moods and moments that express metaphorically the bays and headlands of Sydney harbour: combining charisma and exuberance at times and in places, with moments of introspection or respite. It is at heart of Sydney's great place ecosystem, its most 'brackish' place where the diverse flows of human energy and cultures create unexpected or inspiring opportunities and big ideas. At the same time its collection of cool and shaded stay-a-while places encourages people who were passing through to linger and immerse themselves in the amazing waterfront setting.

The original shoreline is revealed, and the soft living edge enables people to reconnect with, immerse themselves in and care for the Harbour. The thread of water and its story is the life force that unifies the precinct and defines its unforgettable experience. We recognise Australia's maritime and migration stories in this place and capture the intensity of dreams - realised and unrealised. Recognising the significance of the ocean as a source of food, transport and identity.

A great local place first, where the needs of local people are a foremost consideration, a backyard and breathing space for adjoining communities – whilst equally being a regional playground and recreation resource capable of hosting large scale events. A place of flex and flow that is great everyday and not just in some place or some modes or weathers. A place of diverse environments and unforgettable experiences, where we make memories.

Across the city, throughout the state and around the world, Darling Harbour is a renowned destination, complementing and connecting its unique cluster of cultural and knowledge building assets with an outstanding public realm. It is a place of cross pollination between cultures, creative people and milieu, and knowledge holders. Recognised around the world as an address for business and an entertainment showcase: this future place is both a meeting point and a platform for creative thinking and innovation.

Darling Harbour 2050 is the maker and the marker of Sydney's global identity, where we celebrate Country and community; a place where 'magic' happens.

“Imagine a future worth wanting.”

First Nations Representative, Focused Working Session

At the third co-creation workshop stakeholders were invited to re-imagine the experience of Darling harbour 2050, using an image palette designed to prompt and inspire. It provided creative stimulus relating to three components of place: the water’s edge, the thresholds (as places where we come together) and the stay-a-while or midden spaces (where we dwell).

The themes of colour and nature were common across all participant selections. The interplay between defined and porous boundaries emerged as an interesting tension—as was planned versus organic activity. Overarchingly, four key themes were identified as worthy of further exploration:

1. An ecotone (or region of transition between two biospheres) with blurred edges – natural and human systems meeting, co-existing and intermingling add value to eachother;
2. Mutualism, whereby natural systems are used to control or support other natural systems;
3. Organic and fluid treatments rather than hard and defined edges; and
4. Places for socialization (small and mass celebrations), creativity, and discovery-based play.

WATER'S EDGE

RECONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE WATER

Meeting and reconnecting along the water’s edge

LIVING EDGES

Creating places of significance that promote social and economic resilience

NO HARD EDGES OR SPACES

Champion natural and soft places over hard, built spaces

MOMENTS OF PLAY

Creating wild and free spaces that are exuberant, inclusive and diverse

THRESHOLD SPACES

INCIDENTAL AND INGENIOUS

Dual-function spaces that add value to the human experience

RE-WILDING AND BURSTS OF NATURE

Opportunities to reconnect and explore the natural experiences through varying moods (moments of contemplation and of fun)

SPACES TO MEET

Reinvention of ‘threshold’ spaces into places of human connection

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating moments of fun and intrigue, functional and aesthetical

STAY A WHILE SPACES/ MIDDENS

VIBRANT AND DISTINCTIVE

Creating a unique experience through a multitude of moments of colour and interest

RECONNECTING NATURAL PLACE EXPERIENCES

Biophilic design interventions that promote a greater natural experience

COMFORTABLE AND SAFE

The use of shade, weather protection and lighting to ensure that these places are safe and ‘clement’ day and year round

PLAYFUL AND FUN

Places to prompt play and fun

A FIRST CONVERSATION

WHERE IS THE MAGIC?

In late 2022 Placemaking NSW brought a diverse group of thinkers together to discuss what we all thought about Tumbalong (Darling Harbour) and what we all thought it could become.

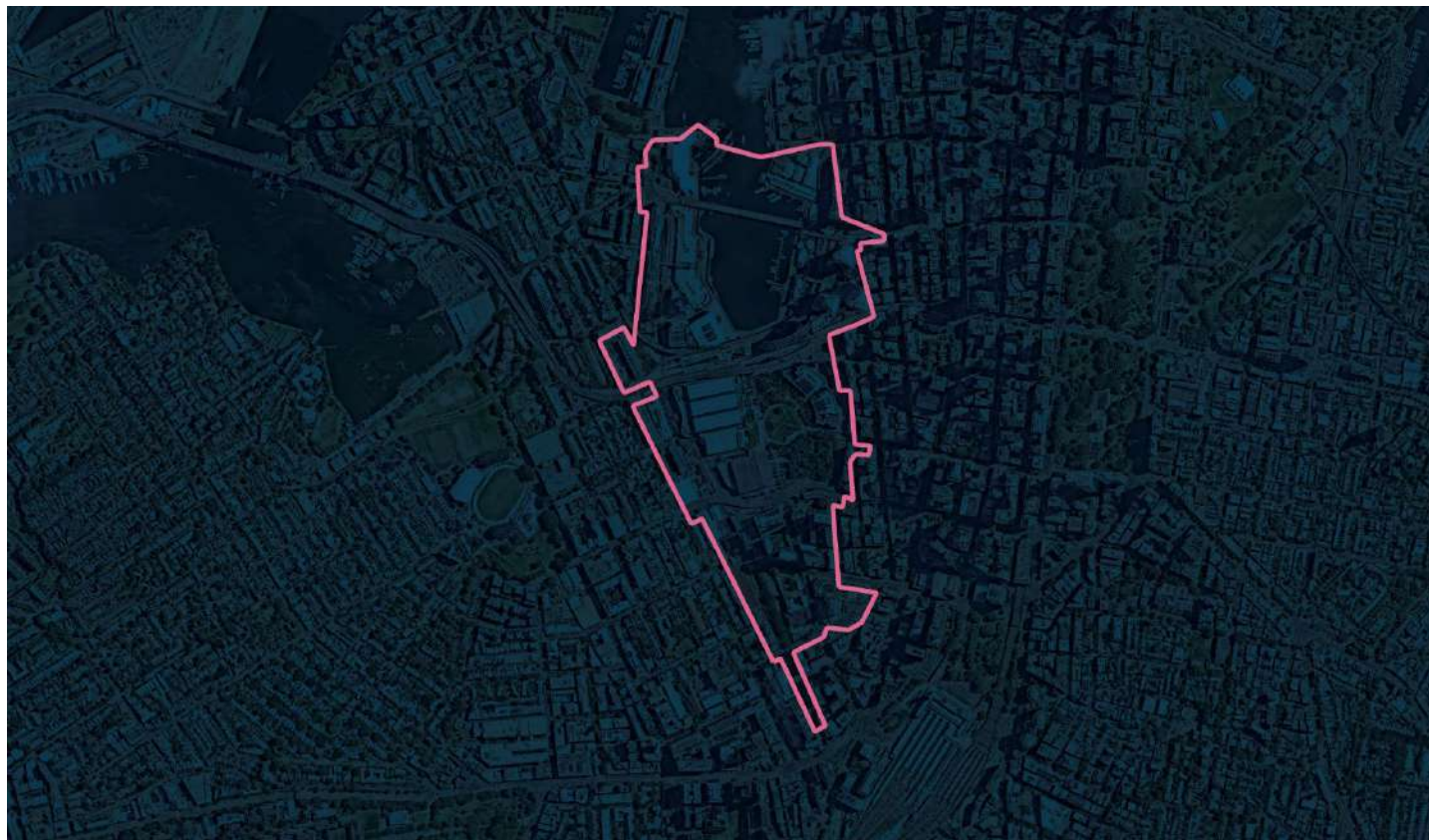
The setting for this gathering wasn't the formal workshop setting with specific deliverables but rather a series of open-ended discussions, sharing of stories, sometimes divergent, and many laughs. We walked the site numerous times, across and around its edges, observed its ebbs and flows and began to unpack some of the many previous studies and frameworks.

What we quickly came to agree on was that the future of Darling Harbour as a place for Sydney wanted to capture a certain egalitarian spirit. Our conversations have led us to ponder what it will take to create a truly diverse and inclusive public space; one that recognises its Indigenous history and a place that embraces the Harbour and begins to feel a greater connection with the city, on all of its edges.

The immediate work for us as a design group wasn't in the detailed mapping or analysis but rather to outline the rich possibilities of a place full of magic come 2050. To do that, we listened deeply to the stories of those who know the place in its current form, those who recall what it once was for them as locals and those who have a view of what it truly needs to become.

Through analysis and observation, we brought our varying perspectives to the conversation, concluding with a shared high-level understanding of the physical and commercial constraints and challenges, but also a collective view of the cultural and social opportunities and areas of future potential.

What follows is a consolidation of the results of these conversations and an optimistic view of the way forward for the future of Darling Harbour 2050.



A COUNTRY CENTRIC INTERVENTION

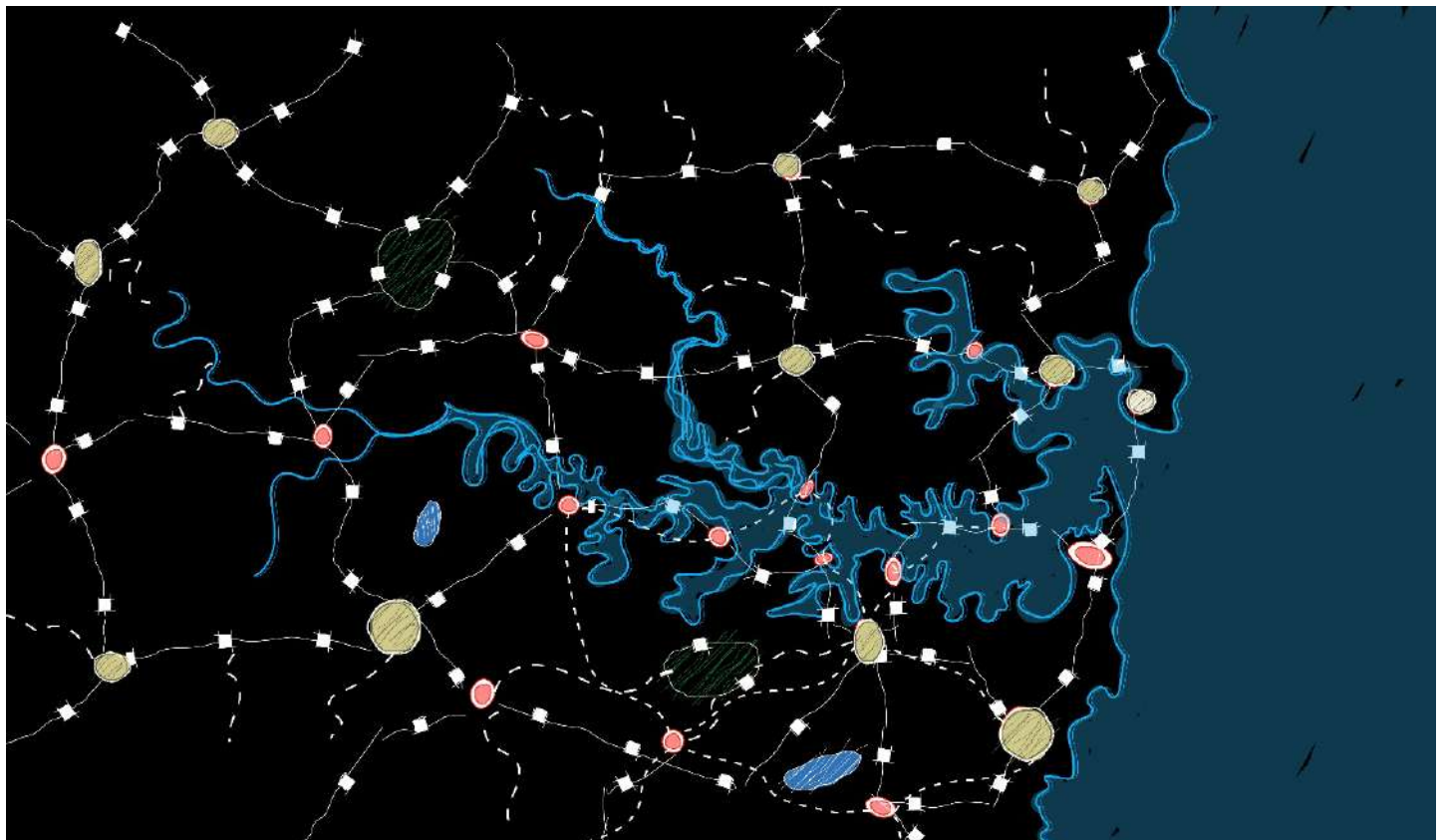
CREATING STRONG BONDS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Within the making of Darling Harbour, free market drivers have led to a conglomerate of land uses focused on large functions, corporate events and the mass scale public outdoor spectacle. Although catering for sizeable numbers of people, there lies a transactional focus of the individual and their autonomous experience. There is a limit as to what can be sustained under this urban design model. Instead, the measure of success could be understood, not by how many people that can physically fit into the public arena, but by the quality of relationships that endure.

Through an Indigenous lens, or a "Country Centric" approach, we seek to create strong relational connections between people and then connect people with the natural world in which to find belonging. These relationships then extend outwards to other meeting places, all interconnected. With many meeting places, we experience social equity and further layers and scales of social connection.

A Country-centric design approach deliberately finds ways to create moments of incidental social connection. To invigorate meaningful relationships, at the edge of each of the large gathering node, spaces could evolve that facilitate smaller meeting places, all focused on bringing the local relationships alive and activating the everyday use elements of Darling Harbour. Within the tidal 'brackish' waters, on the edge of the city, where water meets land, people ebb and flow within brackish spaces. These spaces are ever changing and are ephemeral in character. These threshold spaces are after-all where we traditionally come together.

As a Country-centric intervention, the aim is to create a dual use that resides within these thresholds, within 'brackish' spaces, layering the relationships of place from that of the anonymous impersonal event goer, and that of the local users who live and work in the area. By doing so, the personality of the place comes alive and becomes multilayered with a diverse offering. At times full to the edges, while on other occasions activated only by strongly bonded local activities.



THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

A PLACE OF FORGOTTEN IDENTITY AND SPIRIT

The modern-day Darling Harbour carries with it the legacy of much of Sydney's industrial past, re-imagined almost 40 years ago as a place of public gathering and celebration.

The place as we know it today is largely the result of a reclaiming of a harbour bay which at one time afforded the production and movement of various goods and the comings and goings of many people across the generations.

Prior to that it was a place for the ancestors of our local First Nations people to come together by the water in search of food and sustenance. The contemporary, post-industrial Darling Harbour is still a place that partly fulfills that role, but at a scale and in a way that is not necessarily inclusive of all.

A FRAGMENTED NARRATIVE

Darling Harbour is predominantly a tourist destination catering to a transient population, varying in scale and demographic characteristics.

How can Darling Harbour become more embedded into the fabric of the city for its residents?

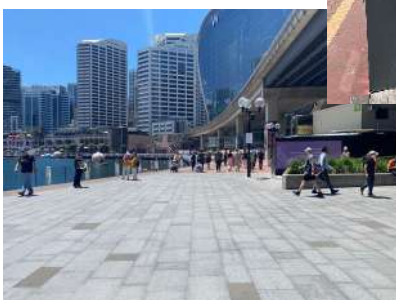
Sydney Harbour is defined by various bays and headlands each with their own identity. Darling Harbour is a part of this ecosystem, with its own unique heritage and relationships with the Pyrmont Peninsula and the City.

How do these characteristics illustrate a clear identity for Darling Harbour?

By virtue of previous decisions around infrastructure and planning Darling Harbour is clearly a city district comprising of four or five precincts of varying density and sense of public engagement.

How can these precincts better work together to create a diverse but cohesive experience that better defines the spirit of Darling Harbour?

Large, open, unsheltered spaces define the pedestrian experience.



Barriers, fences and gates keep the visitor at arm's length from the water's edge.

AN OUTDATED PUBLIC REALM

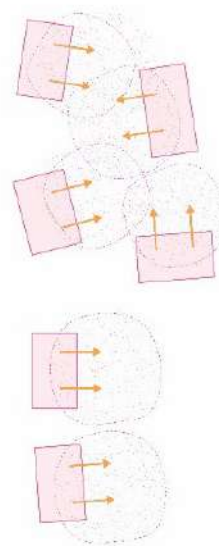
The current form of Darling Harbour is the legacy of a time when the approach to urban renewal was of wiping the slate clean. Despite some successful localised sub-precinct interventions—public street art and water play—this attitude has largely continued with the new ICC and Darling Square developments.

How can this perspective be reframed to work towards a more appropriate public realm, sensitive to the human scale and experience of the Harbour?

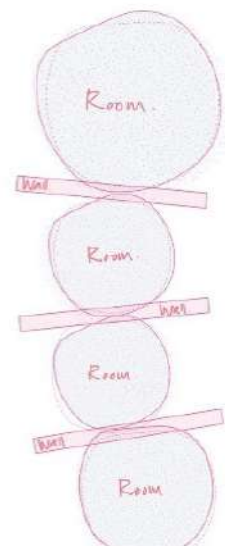
AN ABSENCE OF EXPERIENTIAL DIVERSITY

The experience of Darling Harbour is largely of a mono-scale. Big buildings dictate to space and there are very few moments of relief or intimacy.

How can the type, scale and programme of built form and public space be varied to create a mixed grain of atmospheres and experiences?



Giant Buildings Dictate to Spaces



Hard Boundaries Create Disconnected Rooms.

NO CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Apart from a couple of key industrial remnants there are very few traces of history and nothing of the pre-colonial history of the site.

How can the richness and importance of the First Nation's stories be represented on the site?

The connection to the water is exclusively visual and visitors are kept at arms length from the harbour. The interface between land and water is mostly represented by a hard edge, prohibiting any meaningful interaction between people and nature.

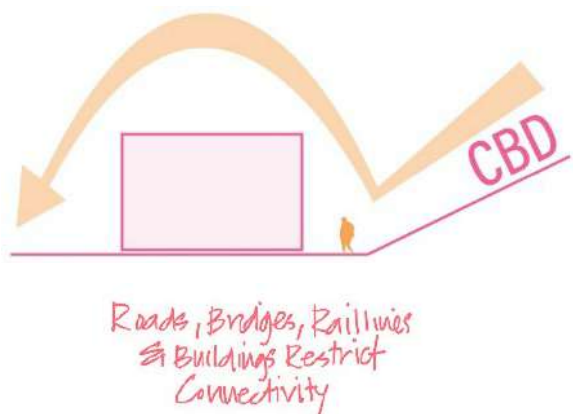
What does a healthier and more accessible waterfront look like? And how can it better represent the Indigenous significance of this place?



LACKING A SENSE OF ARRIVAL

The East and West edges of the precinct are relatively impermeable, restricting connectivity with the Pyrmont Peninsula and the City more broadly.

How can the topographical and formal challenges of the site be overcome to achieve clarity of arrival and navigation in and around the precinct, sub-precincts, and its assets?



The character of a place can be measured in terms of social 'glue' that exists in the ability for people to form connections with each other and with the natural and built form of the place. Darling Harbour needs to rediscover its social glue.

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES

MANY PEOPLE ALL CONNECTED

Australia's First People, considered the terms at which we came together in purposeful resolve. Yindyamarra winhanganha - the harbour, and the water and the visitor – is a Wiradjuri saying, meaning: “The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a life worth living in.”

The centrepiece of this thinking is relationships. We exist within an ambiguous space of self, community and nature. The tension of how we prioritise each can loosely be referred to as “Belonging to Country”.

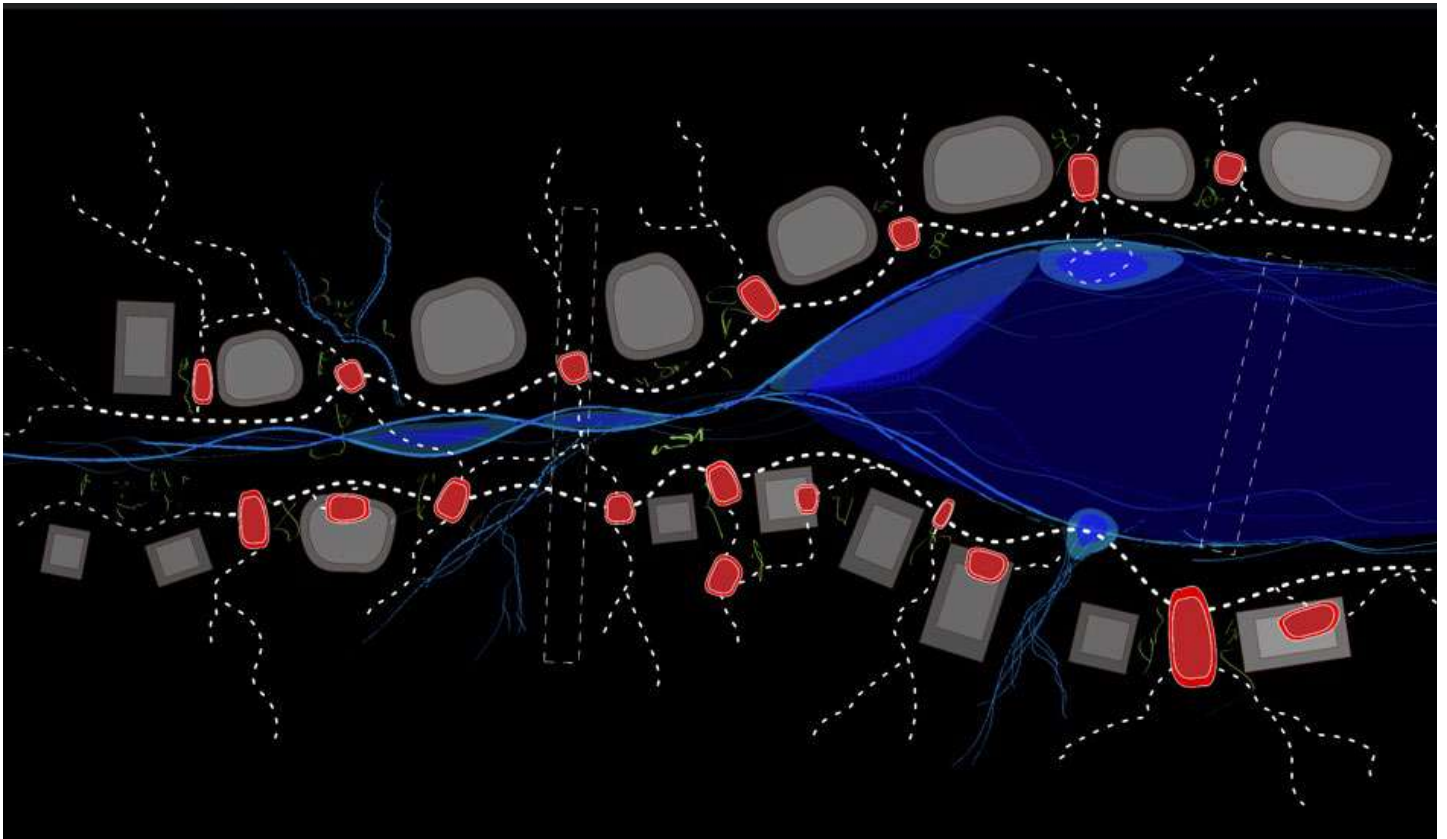
With strong social bonds people become responsible for each other. With equally strong bonds with nature, at times prioritising this relationship, neighbourhoods become responsible for the wellbeing of the natural world as well. Self, community, nature—one is never considered without the other.

Built within this social system is an intuitive form of sustainability.

THRESHOLDS

With the ebb and flow of each tide, the mixing of Freshwater with Saltwater creates a transformed landscape. Indigenous Elders speak of the sacredness of this 'magic space.' As custodians we must make sure the space is well kept and safe. In our cities, we can design-in sacred spaces to emulate this thinking.

A mixed grain of spaces and moments that break down the boundaries between the precinct and the peninsula, the distinct neighbourhoods within the harbour, and the water and the visitor would start to blur the hard lines between formal and informal, and between people and nature allowing for a more varied and explorative experience of place.





The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a life worth living in.



Craig Kerslake

TAKING BACK THE SCALE

There is a limit to mass gathering – notably, multi-scaled gathering opportunities lend to an enriched place experience. As the scale of functional relationships has a limit, the size and nature of gathering needs to be considered based on the relational outcome that it can provide.

What this suggests is that we look to the terms of how we come together, leaning towards more localised, decentralised solutions. Every place needs its place.

Redressing the balance between large scale, mass gathering spaces and more intimate and varied experiences to build upon the character of existing assets and diversify the time, type, and audience of activities, events, and spaces in the precinct.

Public open space should provide a rich, layered and networked experience.

Open space delivered as part of privately owned built form should deliver part of the strategic public domain network.



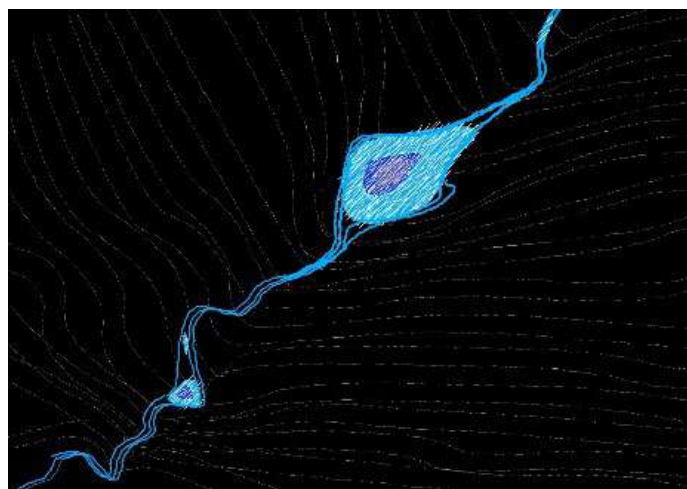
STAY-A-WHILE PLACES

As a Country centric intervention, the aim is to design a purposeful layer which is to activate the neighbourhood character on the thresholds of the mega venues. To create a dual use, layering the relationships of place from that of the anonymous impersonal event goer, and that of the local users who live and work in the area.

By doing so, the personality of the place becomes multilayered with a diverse offering. At times full to the edges while on other occasions activated by strongly bonded social activities.

Designing for moments of pause through reflection, observation and interaction, that engage with the unique characteristics of Darling Harbour will create a more varied socio-temporal rhythm that better represents the diverse community of the Pyrmont peninsula and the city.

New public open space delivered as part of commercial or residential development should be on accessible ground and woven into a broad and varied network of public spaces.



A FUTURE FORM FOR THE CITY

Darling Harbour is uniquely placed to anchor the emerging, future focused armature of development between Central Station and Pyrmont.

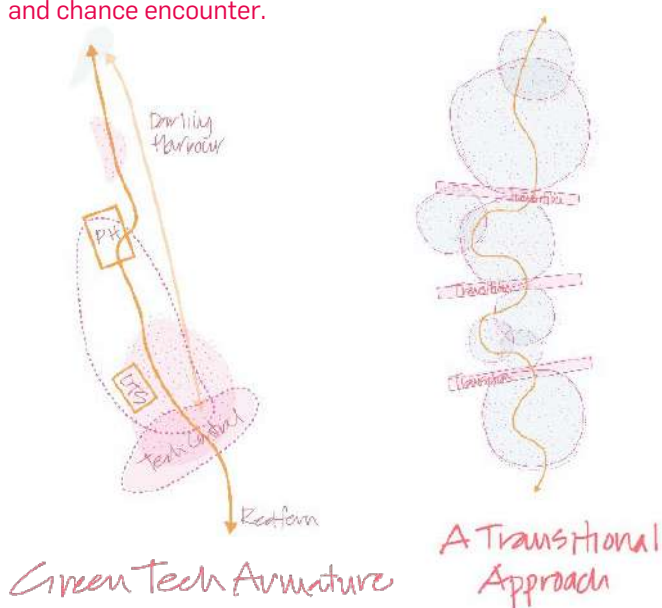
Restoring and celebrating the Harbour's relationship with Country and its Indigenous significance can help redefine the city as a leader in sustainable growth, creativity and innovation.

Reimagined as a contemporary working harbour with a healthy, sustainable, and spiritual connection with the water.

DESTINATION VS JOURNEY

The site can be understood as comprising four distinct precincts divided by topographical, visual, and typological barriers.

By exploring the possibilities of the "in-between" spaces and breaking down the distinctions and boundaries between zones the visitor experience can become one of transition and exploration with the potential for discovery and chance encounter.



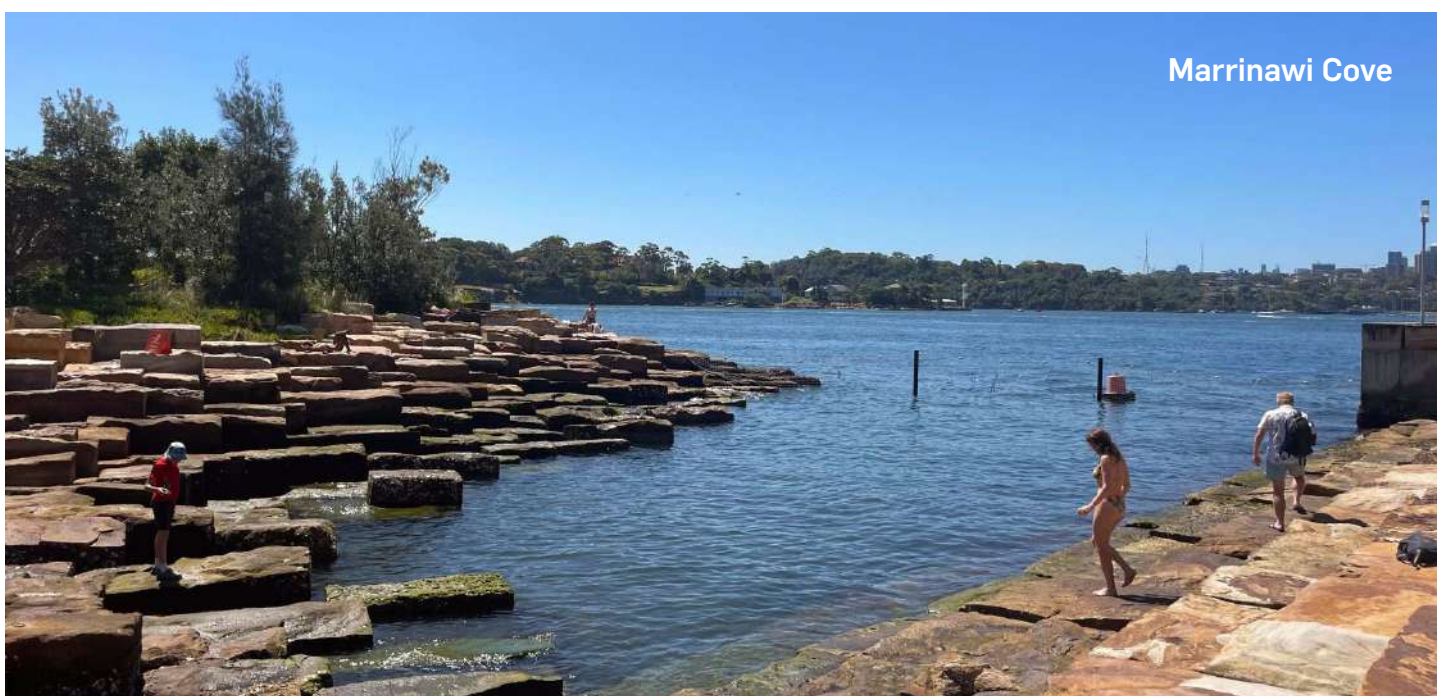
RE-ENGAGING WITH THE WATER'S EDGE

At the highest level of Indigenous knowledge is the analysis of social and ecological systems as an inseparable, interconnected triangle of reciprocity - self, community, nature. One is never considered without the other.

In Dharug the phrase "Budi Bagi" means skin of person, bark of tree. When said together, this means that they are one and the same. In Wiradjuri we speak of being close to nature - "Milang Guwarra" - walking closely together, so close we are hip to hip.

Re-habilitating and re-engaging with the water and the lost landscape of the harbour in a direct and meaningful way will provide opportunities for active recreation and for people to dwell in public, by and in the water – connecting with the inherent soul and spirit of place.

Generous foreshore access, promenades, seating and destinations should be prioritised in any proposed development of built form.



EMERGING THEMES

MANY PLACES, CULTURES, AND PEOPLE ALL CONNECTED

A series of discussion points have filtered through in our collaboration to date. We have called these 'Emerging Themes' as they are just that.

These strands of early conversation are certainly not yet principles but have been reoccurring. It is intended that these themes can guide the direction of future studies for Darling Harbour.

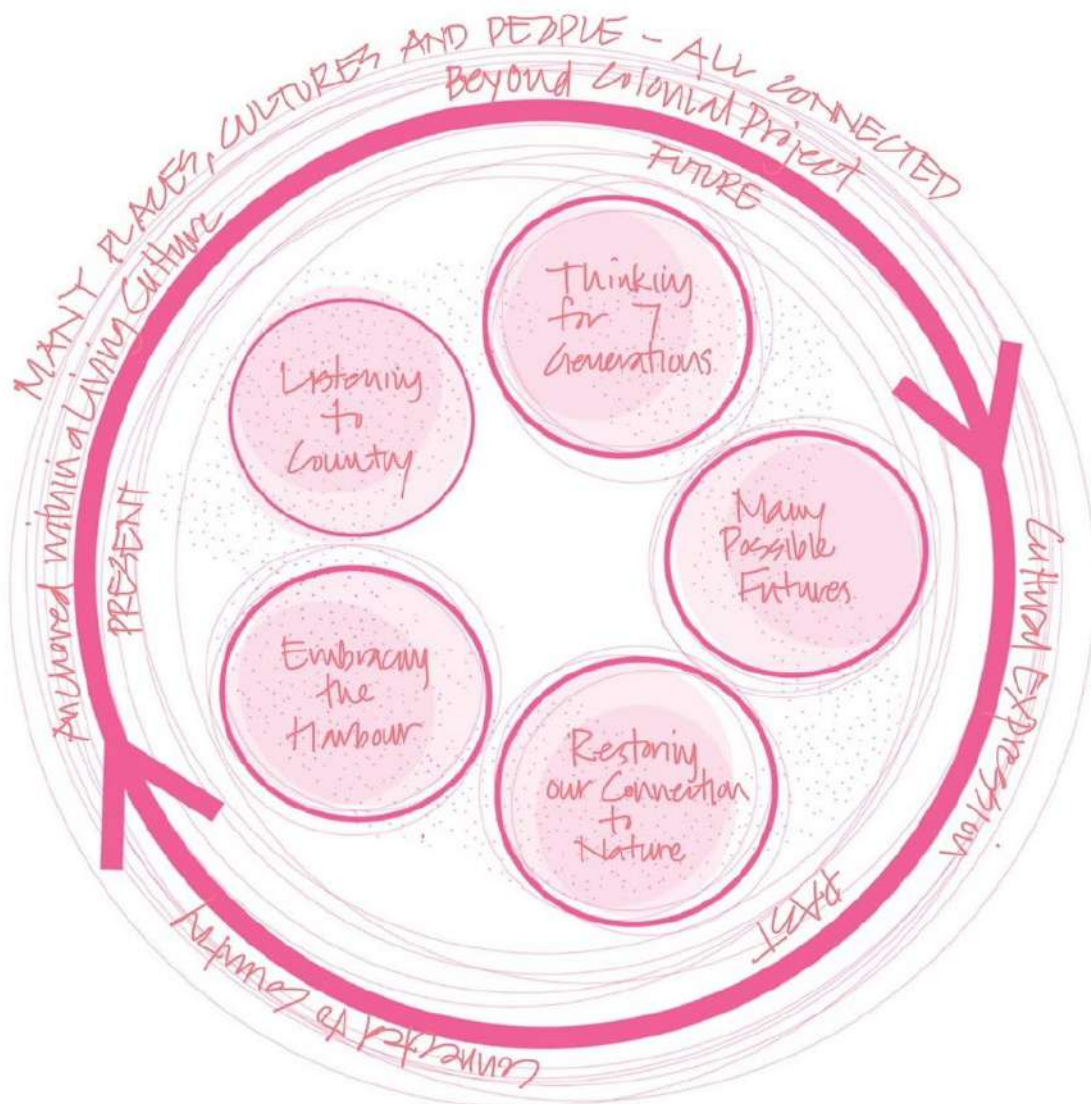
We imagine Darling Harbour in 2050 to be a coherent collection of many diverse places suited for many people, many purposes and many cultures.

We imagine the ebbs and flows within the 'brackish' spaces that characterise the future Darling Harbour to have continued but have now evolved to become a generous landscape for people to feel safe and welcome and to move through in all regards.

Like the smoothing of sedimentary layers on the shoreline – metaphorical eddy's, hollows and pools of activation and movement are created – these spaces become soft, interesting, and inhabitable.

“ Within the tidal 'brackish' waters, on the edge of the city, where water meets land, people ebb and flow within 'brackish spaces.' ”

Craig Kerslake



WE SHAPE FUTURES

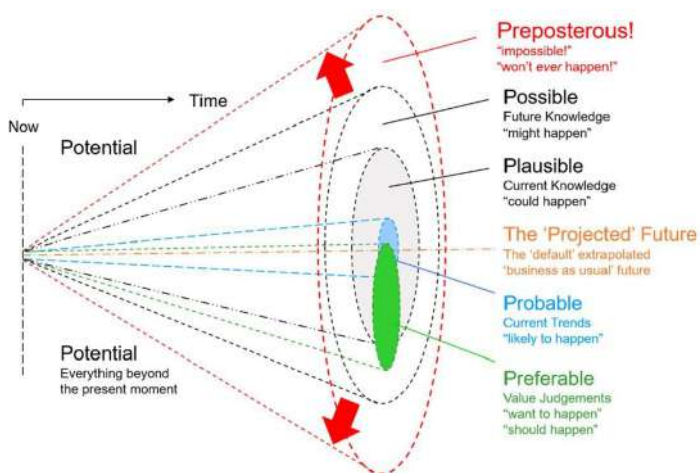
MANY FUTURES, SHAPED BY ALL

MEL RUMBLE FROM REFRAMEABLE

There is often talk of “the future” like it is something that is tangible and inevitable. But the future is not set in stone. The future is not preordained. In fact, the future does not (yet) exist. All there is is now, and what we do right now, which can play a part in shaping what eventually comes to pass.

We have many possible futures ahead of us. The Futures Cone (developed by futures thinker Joesph Voros) shows us that there are a range of different possible futures, depending on what lens we’re looking through.

If we’ve got our BAU glasses on, then an unimaginative extrapolation of now is all we will imagine. Voros calls this ‘The ‘Projected’ Future’. If we account for current trends, we can broaden the Projected Future out to Probable futures: what we think is “likely” to happen based on the limits of what we currently know. Then there’s Plausible futures, based on our current knowledge: what “could” happen. Possible futures encompass what might happen when we take into account future knowledge (what we don’t yet know). Things start to get interesting with Preferable futures, based on what we want to happen (what “should” happen). This is the realm of value judgements, and is both limited and liberated by mindsets, beliefs, habits and social norms. And more interesting still are Preposterous futures: these are the futures we think will never happen, as they are supposedly “impossible” or “ridiculous” by today’s standards.



The future is not “out there”. Which future emerges from now is shaped by the decisions we make today, as well as who is included in those decisions. The future is also shaped by what we assume will happen, and what we unconsciously bring with us from the past. If we have the habit of just more of today, or rely on what we think will probably happen, we leave ourselves open to being caught out “by surprise”, as with Covid and the 2020 bushfires.

And we’ll be unconsciously stepping into futures that just happen to us, rather than to ones that we have imagined together in a fair and just way. By envisioning futures together, we allow our community to be open to the power of our collective preferable futures (futures worth wanting) that also anticipate and “pre-hearse” for the “preposterous” futures that may one day be our reality. But pre-hearsing and intentionally envisioning doesn’t just happen. These are societal skills that need to be cultivated and nurtured. As Paolo Lugari so aptly said, “we are not confronting an energy crisis but one of imagination and enthusiasm”. What if we enabled collective imagination that included everyone?

Sohail Inayatullah’s Futures Triangle reminds us how the weight of history, the push of the present and the pull of the future all feed into the futures we shape. How conscious we are of each of these elements and which voices are part of the process is also key to which futures unfold. The images of the future that we hold – continuously or by accident–really do matter. In *The Image of the Future*, written in 1973, Fred Polak underscored the power of the images of the future that we collectively hold: “The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society’s image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive.”

“If you see a better world, you’re morally obligated to create it.”

Genevieve Bell

NEXT STEPS & TIMELINE

Which lens are we looking through... and what are we bringing from the past that might be a habit of thought that leads up to an unconscious projected future? And who is “we” in all of this? Who is part of making those decisions today? And who is not able to play a part?

What if we made the envisioning and shaping of futures a conscious process? What if we consciously drew on the immense wisdom of thousands of years of Country-centric knowledge? What if diversity was fully embraced and all voices could play a part in shaping the future that comes to pass?

Just as there are many places, cultures and peoples, there are many futures, informed by this richness and diversity.

Darling Harbour/Tumbalong has the potential to play an incredibly important part in which futures emerge in Sydney. We imagine Darling Harbour/Tumbalong as a place that enables futures worth wanting ... futures that are envisaged and co-created by a rich diversity of people from many places and cultures. A place where we can all be part of shaping “the future”. A place that enables a reframing from “the future” to the shaping and co-creation of these futures worth wanting by the many places, cultures and peoples that intermingle in the ‘brackish’ substrate that Tumbalong holds.

