City Hill... a concept for the future
Only rarely do opportunities arise to consolidate a capital city’s central area and to address elements that remain unfinished 100 years after they were first conceived. The combination of the release of the ACT Government’s Canberra Plan, with the subsequent establishment of the Canberra Central Program, and the Australian Government’s Griffin Legacy has created this unique opportunity.

Griffin’s vision for Canberra was that it would be ‘an ideal city’ – a city that expressed in its form and in the vigour of its community, the values of a strong, democratic nation. In 2012 Griffin’s vision will be 100 years old, but the National Capital Authority’s work on the Griffin Legacy has proved that this vision is equally relevant today.

The National Triangle symbolises the links the city has to its landscape and gives spatial definition to the values underpinning Griffin’s Plan. Griffin conceived City Hill as the apex of the Triangle that would represent the territorial, or municipal, functions of the National Capital.

For the ACT Government, City Hill’s symbolic importance provides the inspiration and starting point from which to resolve the current and future challenges for Civic in a contemporary way. There is no doubting that the ACT is a vital, prosperous and egalitarian community and, as such, it is fitting that its public buildings and spaces help realise this.

To this end, the ACT Government is developing a conceptual framework for the appropriate siting of buildings to house our paramount Territorial administrative, legislative and legal functions. This will need to be within the context of appropriate consideration being given to road and car parking infrastructure, public open space and other key developments.

The 12 March 2013 Centenary of the naming of Canberra presents another unique opportunity for Canberra to demonstrate to the nation our strength of community, our innovation and the beauty of our city. The concepts outlined for City Hill will focus our vision and help us seize this opportunity to mark in an enduring fashion, not only the establishment of the City as a National Capital, but also our maturity as a city.

Simon Corbell MLA
MINISTER FOR PLANNING
THE CONTEXT

CANBERRA CENTRAL – A DYNAMIC HEART FOR THE CITY

The central area of Canberra is the unfinished part of our city’s planning and development. The ACT Government’s Canberra Central initiative, a product of *The Canberra Plan*, is a comprehensive program based on three objectives to:

- Develop a central area that is vibrant, of exemplary urban quality, imbued with local and national symbolism and is the focus of the Territory and region’s administrative, business, social and cultural activity;
- Establish a shared approach between the Australian Government, ACT Government and key stakeholders to the actions and priorities for the development of the central area;
- Create a system of governance for the planning and development of the central area that is clear, accountable and will foster excellence in design, creativity, economic prosperity and cultural vitality.

These objectives and the mission, *Bringing Life to the City*, ensures that Canberra Central is a program that considers all the issues of making City an appropriate symbol of Canberra’s community spirit and energy. These issues include:

- Improving access to and through the city;
- Economic prosperity, environmental and urban quality, social equity, cultural expression; and
- The proper stewardship of the public realm.

Addressing these issues will necessitate short-term actions and long-term directions, and while the work will centre on City, other projects will be needed that build on the physical, administrative and cultural links to other precincts in the central area.

Both the ACT and Australian Governments have made considerable planning investment in the central area. Canberra Central will turn this investment into action, prioritising and managing the efforts of all the key government, industry and community stakeholders. Canberra Central will develop the theme identified in *The Canberra Plan* - to create City as ‘a dynamic heart’. The conceptual framework presented here has the potential for City Hill to be the perfect venue for celebrating the Centenary of the naming of Canberra.
GRiffin legacy

The Griffin Legacy sets a new course for Canberra as the nation’s capital with its strategic framework for the city’s development in the 21st century. At a crucial stage in the city’s development, the National Capital Authority has initiated a study that clarifies:

◗ What components of Griffin’s design and intent have been implemented;
◗ What elements must be protected;
◗ What elements have been lost;
◗ What elements have been altered, to the benefit or detriment of the city;
◗ What elements no longer have continuing relevance; and most importantly;
◗ What elements can still be recovered or adapted for the benefit of Canberra in the 21st Century.

We need to reignite the philosophy of innovation in Griffin’s design and to revisit the social and cultural beliefs that underpinned that philosophy. In 1911, the Griffins firmly believed that they were planning a city for a nation “of most democratic tendencies and bold radical government.” This aspiration need never lose its currency.

THE GRIFFIN LEGACY ~ National Capital Authority, 2004

Current activity

In 2005 there is an unprecedented level of activity in the planning, development and promotion of central Canberra. In addition to the Canberra Central initiative and Griffin Legacy, significant land releases have facilitated a major expansion of the Canberra centre, the development of a new office building for the Department of Industry, Trade and Resources, the submission of plans for the development of a 29,000 sq m office building at Section 61, as well as the anticipated development of a home for National Information and Communications Technologies Australia (NICTA) in the west of the City.

The Government’s recent announcement of a University Precinct in the City’s west will help deliver the objectives of the City West Master Plan and the future development of the Belconnen to Civic Busway will help redefine the operation of public transport within the City. The Government has awarded the contract for construction of a new City Library and the private sector is developing what is anticipated to be a number of new residential buildings in the City at Section 6.

The ACT Planning and Land Authority and National Capital Authority are working closely to help overcome some of the real and perceived impediments to development by minimising duplication in planning controls through the establishment of a single planning control process for Civic. As a foretaste of this collaboration, current changes to both the National Capital Plan and Territory Plan will result in a reduction in some of the constraints to architectural expression and confused objectives.
THE ISSUES

SYMBOLISM

When identifying a suitable site for any new public building it is vital to consider that building’s function, its significance and relevance to the community. It would be truly ‘city making’ to ensure that a building’s symbolic importance is both captured and enhanced by its location.

Griffin conceived City Hill as the place that expressed ‘city life’ and where the National and Municipal functions coalesced. City Hill is imbued with great symbolism – it is Canberra’s ‘meeting place,’ however, it is blighted and under-utilised through the dominance of both roads and surface level car parking.

To retain the integrity of the Griffin Plan and give expression to the symbolic value of City Hill:

◗ This apex must be physically connected to the other points of the National Triangle and to the landscape elements of the Griffin Plan;

◗ The paramount Civic buildings, a new Legislative Assembly and the Supreme Court, must occupy sites of significance; and

◗ Plazas, forecourts and gardens must be developed with the public buildings to promote public events, ceremonies and cultural expression.

Most importantly,

◗ City Hill itself must be preserved as an open space accessible to all. It must be retained as a symbol of our City’s association with its setting and to the primacy of our egalitarian values.

CLARITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Memorable cities have a ‘natural’ order – they are easily navigated, provide a choice of paths and destinations, are safe, have great amenity and enrich our experiences.

City Hill provides an excellent opportunity to establish a network of streets, paths, public buildings and spaces that focus on this signature and connect the adjacent commercial and lake parkland precincts.

City Hill is surrounded almost entirely by car parks, a consequence of past planning that emphasised access by the private motor vehicle. Unfortunately this changed the role of the streets and public spaces from that envisaged by Griffin. They were no longer destinations in themselves, offering opportunities for social, cultural and commercial exchange, much like St Kilda Road in Melbourne or Martin Place in Sydney.
To improve access to and around City Hill and provide greater clarity in the City’s urban structure:

- The Avenues must connect to City Hill and traffic speeds and volumes must be managed to give priority to vehicles that are coming into the City, rather than passing through;
- Northbourne Avenue from Barry Drive to City Hill, and Vernon Circle should be altered to give primacy to pedestrians rather than through traffic;
- Paths must be established, quite clearly linking City Hill to adjacent precincts, and especially to the Lake;
- Routes and networks traversing the City must offer obvious choices;
- Paths and routes must offer destinations or places for people to gather, meet, rest, refresh or observe others; and
- Significant changes in the City’s presentation should be marked with elements that express civic and community life. These ‘expressions’ not only enrich our experience of the city but also become important cues in navigating our way around.

QUALITY

Cities are the physical manifestation of the activities and values that bind us as a community. The quality and the character of a city’s public spaces and buildings determine much of how members of the community and visitors perceive it.

Canberra is often described as beautiful in its monumental simplicity but lacking in vibrancy. Most certainly, Griffin understood the need to ensure that the Australian landscape and people’s egalitarian nature had to be expressed in the form of Canberra.

Just how the nation will view us when we celebrate the naming of Canberra in 2013 will depend on the sense of vitality in our public spaces and the spirit encapsulated in the architecture. City Hill, as the symbol of community life, as Canberra’s meeting place, will be in the centre of the celebrations and it must:

- Establish an identity to City that reflects the unique character of the Bush Capital;
- Recognise and enhance the City’s natural topography and the geometry of the Griffin Plan;
- Provide a range of spaces and functions that meet community expectations and enrich community life; and
- Place public buildings where they will enhance the sense of community and civic endeavour.
GROWTH AND INVESTMENT

Griffin’s vision has informed and inspired Canberra’s planning for nearly 100 years and the strength of the vision is not in the ‘blueprint’ he set out but that the plan has accommodated the layering of values from each generation.

We have an opportunity to add another layer to the Griffin Plan around City Hill and to begin to express the maturity of self-government in Canberra. In doing this we can:

- Reinforce the spirit and intent of the Griffin Plan as captured in the National Capital Authority’s Griffin Legacy work;
- Express our contemporary values and aspirations; and
- Respect the rights of future generations and preserve their opportunities to express their ideals.

THE CONCEPT IN FOCUS

THE GOALS

On behalf of the ACT Government, the ACT Planning and Land Authority, in collaboration with the National Capital Planning Authority, has responded to these conceptual issues and has outlined three interrelated goals for the planning of City Hill:

- Conserving City Hill’s symbolism in regard to Canberra’s association with the landscape and as Canberra’s meeting place;
- Streets, paths and public places networks must focus on City Hill, establishing obvious civic destinations and clear connections to the adjacent commercial and lake parkland precincts; and
- Respecting the intent of the Griffin Plan in reflecting our community’s contemporary aspirations, including the incorporation of principles of sustainable design.

These goals are encapsulated in the conceptual framework for City Hill, which:

- Reinforces City Hill as the city’s symbolic centre;
- Places key public buildings on sites addressing City Hill and where the buildings’ symbolic importance aligns with the symbolism of the Griffin Plan;
- Recognises the distinct precincts and establishes a focus, or destination in each of these, around City Hill; and
- Creates visual and physical connectivity between these destinations.

This conceptual framework allows clarity and vision in the decisions to be made about the siting and design potential of new public buildings, such as a new Legislative Assembly and Supreme Court.
City Hill...a concept for the future

- City Gateway
- Northbourne Avenue realignment
- City Heritage Precinct
- Hotel development with public car parking
- Law Precinct
- East West City Pathway
- ACT Supreme Court
- Edinburgh Avenue connection
- Commercial and residential developments with public car parking under
- City to West Basin connection
- City Exposition
- Meeting Place
- City Hill as city symbol
- ACT Government Offices
- Constitution Avenue connection
- Public Forum with public car parking under
- ACT Legislative Assembly
- City Lake Pathway
- Commercial and residential developments
THE OPPORTUNITIES

Legislative Assembly

The location of the Legislative Assembly building is a key determinant in the overall conceptual framework for City Hill, and is relevant to the location of other buildings – in particular, any Government office building. While the existing Assembly building is adequate for the present Assembly membership, over time the Assembly will almost certainly increase in size. Accordingly, when the time comes for the Assembly to move it is appropriate and consistent with the conceptual framework for City Hill that the Assembly move to an iconic purpose-built building appropriate to the Assembly’s role and status within the lives of the ACT community.

It is contemplated that a new Assembly could be built on the land immediately south of the proposed Constitution Avenue extension, between Vernon Circle and London Circuit. This site provides:

- A symbolic relationship to City Hill in its role as a city icon and to Griffin’s Municipal Axis (Constitution Avenue);
- An opportunity for strong association with adjacent administrative offices;
- For the Legislative Assembly to be associated with a public gathering space that interplays with City Hill;
- Opportunity for the design of the building and its associated plaza to take advantage of views to the lake and the Brindabella Ranges;
- The greatest potential to create an iconic building with a strong public identity with views from key locations; and
- A symbolic relationship between the Australian and ACT Government legislatures across the Lake.

Supreme Court

A new Supreme Court building has been under consideration for some time. A preferred site is land immediately to the southwest of the existing Supreme Court, adjacent to Vernon Circle. This site would place the Supreme Court:

- In the ‘law precinct’ reinforcing the area’s character and symbolic role;
- Where its co-location with the other courts will improve its security and operational requirements;
- In a prominent and corresponding position to the Magistrates Court, creating “bookends” to the law precinct; and
- Where it would be afforded frontage to Vernon Circle and provide a strong address to any future extension of Edinburgh Avenue.
Government Office Block

The ACT Government is considering the advantages and costs of investing in its own administrative office block. Not only could this yield long term savings but also showcase the Government's commitment to better, more sustainable design and building management.

Several sites and options are being considered with a site on the northern side of the proposed extension of Constitution Avenue, between London Circuit and Vernon Circle, preferred because it provides:

- An opportunity for a landmark building addressing City Hill and Constitution Avenue, which is the Municipal Axis in the Griffin Plan;
- Promotes development of Constitution Avenue;
- Enhancement of City Hill as a city symbol;
- An appropriate relationship with the existing City Square government precinct and any new Legislative Assembly building;
- The opportunity to incorporate the existing Legislative Assembly building as a government administrative gateway and providing for greater pedestrian activity in City Square; and
- Adequate area to accommodate required floor space.
Connecting the Conceptual Framework

EXTENDING CONSTITUTION AND EDINBURGH AVENUES TO CITY HILL

The National Capital Authority’s Griffin Legacy underscores the importance of connecting these avenues to City Hill. Not only will they ensure that the National Triangle is defined and expressed as Griffin intended it but they will give priority to traffic whose destination is the City and greater pedestrian access to City Hill.

NORTHBOURNE AVENUE PLAZA

A re-alignment of Northbourne Avenue from Barry Drive to Vernon Circle would reduce or remove the median and give primacy to the verges and hence pedestrians. This would minimise the impact of Northbourne Avenue as a barrier between City East and West, and give this precinct a function and character similar to Federation Square in Melbourne. It would help reinstate a commercial hub around the Melbourne and Sydney Buildings.

The creation of venues for people to meet and socialise on sites south of the Northbourne Avenue and Vernon Circle intersection would support this and provide greater vitality to the precinct.
A possible new hotel and entertainment facility opposite the Sydney Building would help provide a critical mass of activity around the intersection of Northbourne Avenue and London Circuit, providing increased opportunities for social and cultural transactions in and around the precinct created by the historic Melbourne and Sydney Buildings. Any structure designed here would need to provide an appropriate built-fabric definition for the Law Precinct and be located to provide City Hill with clear views to the Melbourne Building.

On the eastern side a development that extends and reinforces the cultural activities of the Canberra Theatre and Canberra Museum and Gallery would be most appropriate. This could be an exposition building showcasing the ACT and region’s endeavour. As with any building proposed for the site opposite, a development in this location will need to be of a very high architectural standard to complement the significance of the building opposite.

PUBLIC PLACES

Each public building presents an opportunity to establish public plazas, courts and gardens that are civic destinations in their own right. They should address City Hill and be visually and physically linked to entice pedestrians to move through and around City Hill to either the lake or commercial precincts.
Their character and quality should integrate cultural and landscape expression into the city’s social, heritage and built fabric and encourage the community to spend time in them.

**IMPROVING PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS**

Measures to improve pedestrian connections across the city and with City Hill include:

- A pedestrian path from the Melbourne and Sydney Buildings to West Basin and linking the series of public spaces proposed to be built in conjunction with the new public buildings;
- Establishing a path from Petrie Street in City East to the law precinct and future office development in the south west of Civic;
- Enhancing the connection between the City’s eastern retail precinct to Commonwealth Park and Central Basin via City Walk and Allara Street; and
- Defining the pedestrian route between City East and West that is afforded by London Circuit and Hobart Place.
TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT AND CAR PARKING

A framework such as this cannot be complete without having regard to traffic and car parking in achieving the concepts being presented. Already a significant amount of work is occurring in respect to transport modelling and car parking analysis to assist in reducing the negative impacts of a city centre segmented by through-traffic and land-consuming car parks. It is recognised, however, that this infrastructure provides a significant purpose in sustaining the City’s economy and activity and that the proposals contained within the conceptual framework will have a need for their own car parking requirements.

In keeping with the Government’s commitment to a more sustainable future, access to improved public transport will feature in the development of City Hill and City generally, as will access by walking and cycling. There will, however, be a need to compensate for displaced car parking on any of the development sites and have regard to what is an appropriate level of additional car parking to cater for the operations of new buildings. An important consideration will be the opportunity to develop multi-purpose car parks, where daytime car parking becomes available for after hours activities instead of being idly locked away. Calming traffic conditions within the city centre to promote a safer and more convivial pedestrian environment will be an important complement to the developments envisaged, as well as discouraging through traffic from speeding through the centre of the city.
Commenting on the concepts

If you wish to comment on the concepts for City Hill you may do so by:

- Visiting our website: www.actpla.act.gov.au for information about progress
- Emailing your comments and suggestions to: cityhill@act.gov.au
- Contacting us by phone on 02 6207 2935
- Mailing to City Hill Concepts, Urban Design & Projects
  ACT Planning and Land Authority
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