



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park master plan

Engagement summary report



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.



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Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

Cover photo: Discovery tour, Heritage foreshore scenic walk Nielsen Park Sydney Harbour National Park. David Cottrell/DCCEEW

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Acknowledgement of Country

The project team acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park, the Gadigal and Birrabirragal people and their continuing and unbroken connection to the land, water and sky.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and express our gratitude for their sharing of knowledge and culture.

Through authentic engagement with Aboriginal people and the landscapes within which we work, we strive to deepen our understanding of Country and our relationship with its people.

Introduction

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has been preparing a master plan that will enable us to protect, conserve and promote the spectacular natural, cultural and historic heritage of 3 precincts in Sydney Harbour National Park, and build a valued legacy for future generations. The 3 precincts are Strickland Estate, Nielsen Park and the Hermitage Foreshore.

The 2018 transfer of Strickland Estate to NPWS, as part of the Sydney Harbour National Park, created an exciting opportunity to strategically plan for the 3 precincts as a single integrated site.

The master planning process represented a significant opportunity for NPWS to engage with the immediate and broader community to create a shared vision in planning for Strickland Estate, Nielsen Park and the Hermitage Foreshore as interconnected precincts. This included:

- NSW Government:
 - (former) Member for Vaucluse, The Hon Gabrielle Upton
 - Heritage Division NSW
 - Port Authority NSW
 - Transport for NSW
 - Create NSW
 - Government Architects Office
 - Sydney Living Museums
- local government:
 - Woollahra Municipal Council General Manager Craig Swift-McNair and staff
 - Councillors Susan Wynne, Mary-Lou Jarvis, (former member) Claudia Cullen
- La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council
- local groups:
 - Woollahra Heritage and Historical Society
 - Vaucluse Progress Association
 - Watsons Bay Association
 - Headland Preservation Group
 - Bondi to Manly Walk
- National Trust Australia
- community
 - residents next to the reserve
 - Carrara House open day registrations
 - park visitors
 - online via the Environment NSW engagement portal
- consultants
 - Tanner Kibble Denton Architects
 - Context Landscape Architecture
 - WSP Consulting.

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Throughout the master planning project, the community was encouraged to be involved, have their say and play a leading role in the key phases of the design process.

A Stakeholder Reference Group, representing the interests of a broad range of stakeholder groups, organisations and land managers, was established to act as a key consultative body throughout the master plan project. NPWS and the project design team met with the Stakeholder Reference Group to discuss concepts, constraints, feedback and opportunities for the site.

NPWS is committed to engaging with Aboriginal people to guide decisions and involve Aboriginal people in the management and protection of their cultural heritage. The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council was a member of the Stakeholder Reference Group. NPWS will continue to work with the Aboriginal community to support aspirations for Country.

Widespread community engagement was carried out over 2 phases:

1. **Phase 1** focussed on seeking feedback on ideas and priorities for the site. From 17 June to 18 July 2022, the community was invited to take part in an initial online survey, contribute to an interactive map of the area and attend a community workshop that was held on 28 June 2022. The outputs of Phase 1 contributed to the development of a draft master plan.
2. **Phase 2** sought feedback on the draft Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park master plan which was on public exhibition from 22 December 2022 to 15 February 2023. During this period, the community was invited to take part in an online survey, contribute to the interactive map of the area and attend the community drop-in session, which was held on Sunday 5 February 2023. The information gathered during this stage informed the final master plan (NPWS 2024). See Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Figure 1 Phase 2 engagement ideas board. Photo: JOC Consulting

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Figure 2 Phase 2 engagement. Photo: JOC Consulting

This report provides a high-level overview of the key findings from the Phase 1 engagement and a summary of the findings from the Phase 2 engagement.

The draft master plan included an overarching vision, 7 guiding principles, 7 key strategies and design drivers, and detailed concept plans and 'key moves' (i.e. proposals) across 3 precincts (see Figure 3 and Figure 4):

1. Strickland Estate
2. Nielsen Park
3. Hermitage Foreshore.



Figure 3 Map of Nielsen Park, Strickland Estate and Hermitage Foreshore

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4.1 Draft master plan

Key moves

1. New park entries
2. Thematic gardens and integration and remediated drainage
3. Passive recreation and estate interpretation zones
4. Hermitage Foreshore Track with new harbour lookouts
5. Steele Point lookout and interpretation
6. Non-commuter wharf to improve access
7. Milk Beach jetty interpretation
8. Mount Trefle summit walk
9. Greycliffe House terraced gardens
10. Nielsen Park active zone and picnic area
11. Bottle and Glass Point picnic area
12. Bottle and Glass Point foreshore loop
13. Passive parkland and interpretation corridor
14. Consider retention of shark net for year round swimming

Caring for Country recommendations

1. Investigate and consult with Aboriginal knowledge holders to find language name opportunities for each area / region of the park to help with identity and wayfinding.
2. Provide signage including map showing pathways, cultural (Aboriginal and colonial) features, picnic areas etc., at all park's entry points.
3. Create connecting pathways from Vaucluse Road.

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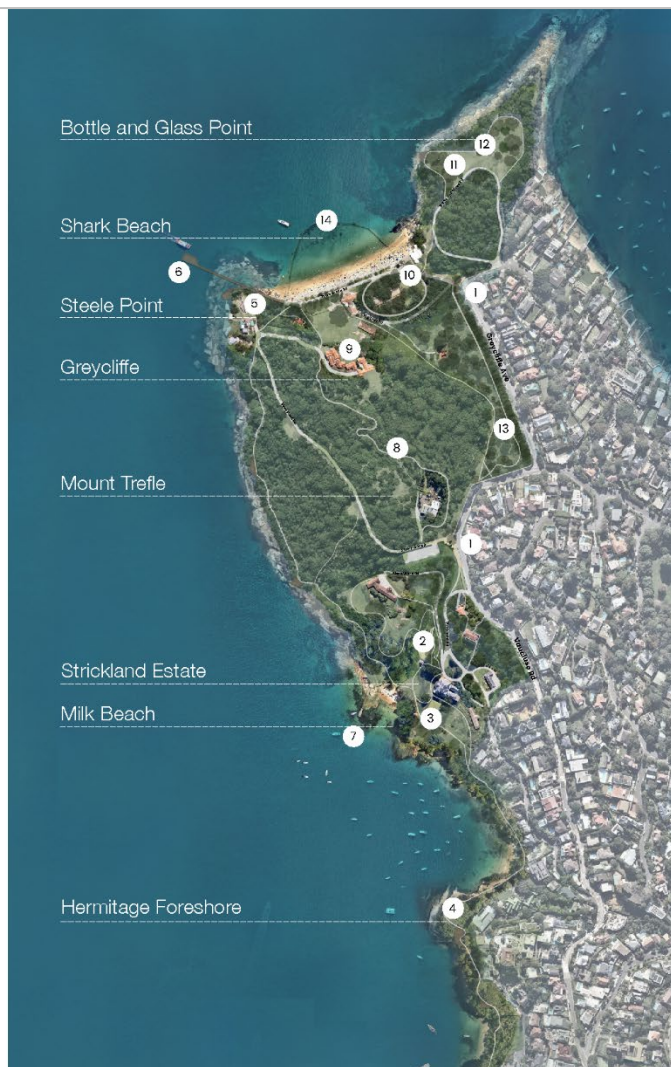


Figure 4 Extract of the key moves outlined in the draft master plan

Note: The key moves map has had been updated in the final master plan.

Consultation summary

Key findings

Throughout the engagement, the majority of participants expressed support for the draft master plan for Strickland Estate, Nielsen Park and Hermitage Foreshore and saw the value in creating a long-term strategic plan to enhance visitor experiences while conserving the site's natural environment.

Participants highlighted a number of concerns and made several suggestions that could elevate the draft master plan and better respond to community needs as follows:

- Concerns were raised about:
 - the proposed 'non-commuter ferry wharf' at Nielsen Park – feedback suggested the need to provide more detail on the usage and potential operation of the wharf because there was ambiguity around the description
 - the proposed 'Milk Beach jetty interpretation' – feedback suggested the need to emphasise mitigation measures to protect marine life and biodiversity that could be affected by the proposed development.
- Suggestions included:
 - prioritise the revitalisation of the bushland through ongoing maintenance and conservation of native species
 - complement the natural landscape with low-impact designs that respect Country
 - limit paved areas at lookouts, the water's edge, parking areas and formal recreation spaces; and prioritise natural materials wherever possible
 - activate the heritage buildings in a way that celebrates their history, complements the surroundings, and has a focus on sustainable operations.

Phase 1: Community ideas and priorities

Phase 1 engagement consisted of an online survey, interactive map and online community workshop that was promoted via the NSW Environment website, onsite posters, email to those who had registered interest, social media, local letterbox drops and other partner channels during June and July 2022.

Over 316 community members took part across all the engagement methods, including the Facebook post reaching over 322,300 people and the survey garnering 268 responses (Figure 5).

The community expressed a deep sense of pride for this special place and emphasised the importance of keeping and enhancing the natural environment while also providing new amenities and experiences for people to enjoy for generations to come.

The top priorities for the community included:

- creating more opportunities to learn about Aboriginal culture and telling the stories of this unique place
- providing more public facilities, but ensuring any development is managed sensitively
- making the park accessible and comfortable for the entire community to enjoy by improving accessibility through and into the park
- protecting and conserving the precious flora and fauna of the park.

Some of the community's big ideas included:

- using signage and creating passive educational opportunities around the park
- creating spaces to gather and facilities for visitors, such as picnic/barbecue areas and seating
- providing better access options, including public transport and more parking
- removing introduced and invasive plant species and increasing native vegetation.

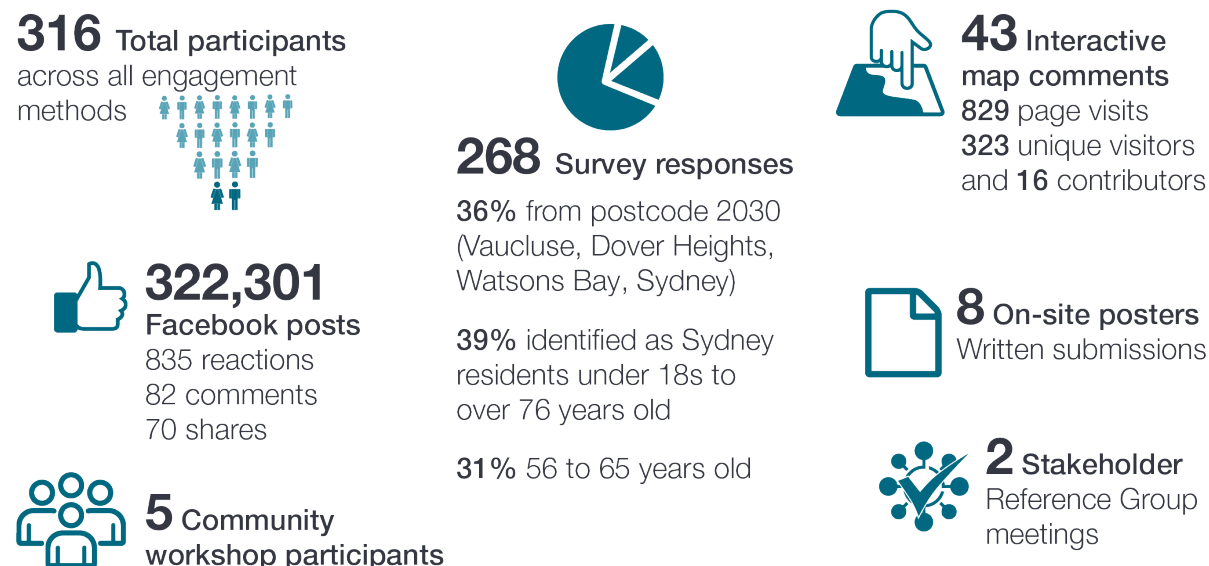


Figure 5 Phase 1 consultation summary. Source: JOC Consulting

Phase 2: Feedback on the draft master plan

Phase 2 engagement consisted of an online survey, and onsite ideas wall, a community drop-in session and option to provide written submissions. These engagement methods were promoted via the NSW Environment website, onsite posters, email to those who had registered interest, social media, local letterbox drops and other partner channels during 22 December 2022 to 15 February 2023.

Across all engagement methods, community members and stakeholders were asked to indicate whether they supported the draft master plan and to indicate which key moves (Figure 4) they liked, were concerned about, or if they had any additional comments that may help shape the future of the site.

Over **523** community members participated across all the engagement methods, including **40** online survey responses, **177** comments on the interactive map, and **6** written submissions (Figure 6).

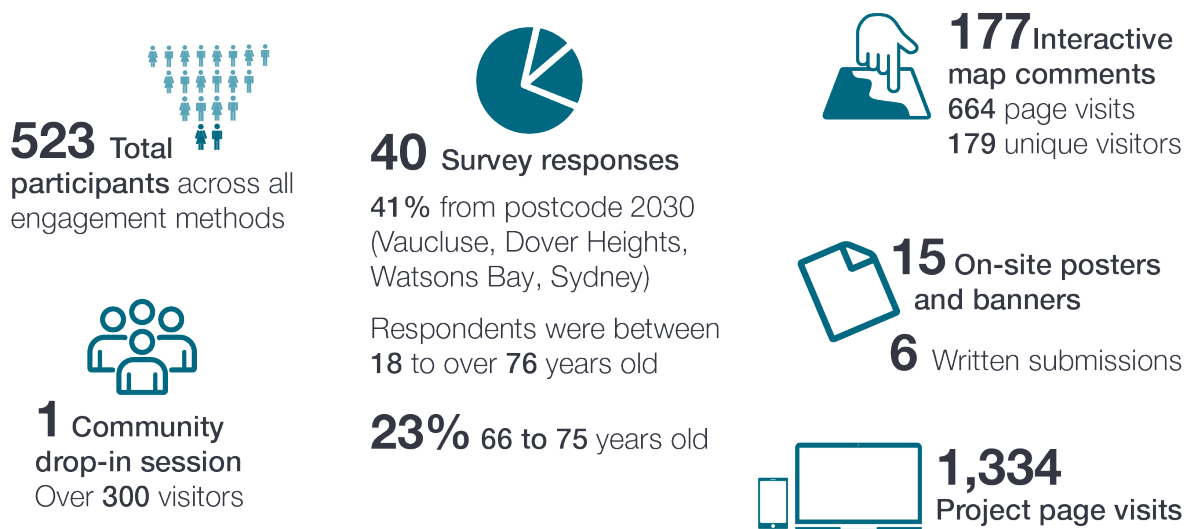


Figure 6 Phase 2 consultation summary. Source: JOC Consulting

General feedback

Overall, participants were supportive of creating a long-term strategic plan for the park and saw the value in making improvements that would enhance visitor experiences while conserving the site's natural environment.

Example survey comment

'[The master plan] appears to value simplicity and appreciation of the natural environment.'

Over half of survey participants (56%) expressed support for the draft master plan and agreed with the guiding principles (Figure 7). Participants were excited to see a cohesive vision being prepared for the overall site. Most participants expressed support for repurposing some of the key buildings and breathing life back into Strickland Estate, but also appreciated the master plan's sensitivity to the iconic history of the site.

In terms of the 3 precincts, plans for Strickland Estate and Hermitage Foreshore elicited more clarifying questions than negative comments at the community drop-in session and on the design wall. Proposals for Nielsen Park precinct received the most opposition.

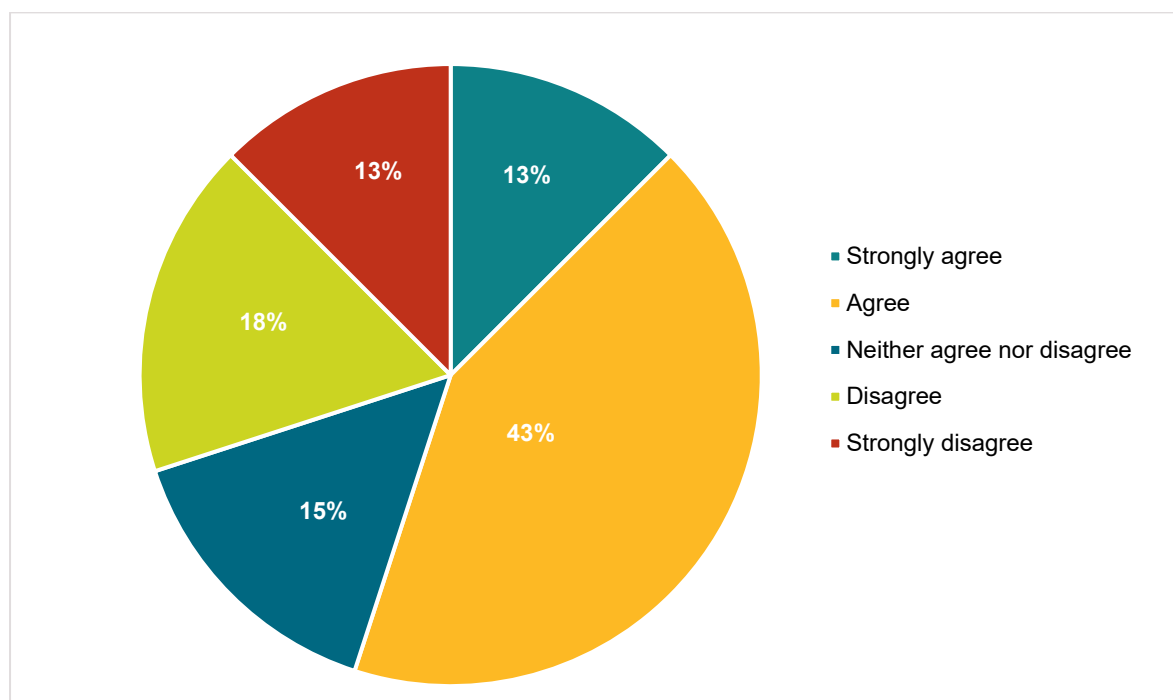


Figure 7 Overall feedback on the draft master plan

Survey question: Having now considered key elements of the draft Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park master plan, to what extent do you agree that this draft master plan will help us to 'enhance the visitor experience and allow for a broad range of visitors to access the park and to safely and comfortably cater for the current and future visitation while conserving, respecting and celebrating the natural, cultural, and historic heritage values of this iconic place'? (n = 40)

Guiding principles

Survey participants were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with the principles that guide the draft master plan (Figure 8). The principles that most people (n = 40) agreed with are:

- Guiding principle 1 – Conserve natural and cultural heritage
 - 93% of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the principle
- Guiding principle 6 – Conserve for the future
 - 90% of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the principle
- Guiding principle 2 – Manage sustainability
 - 80% of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the principle.

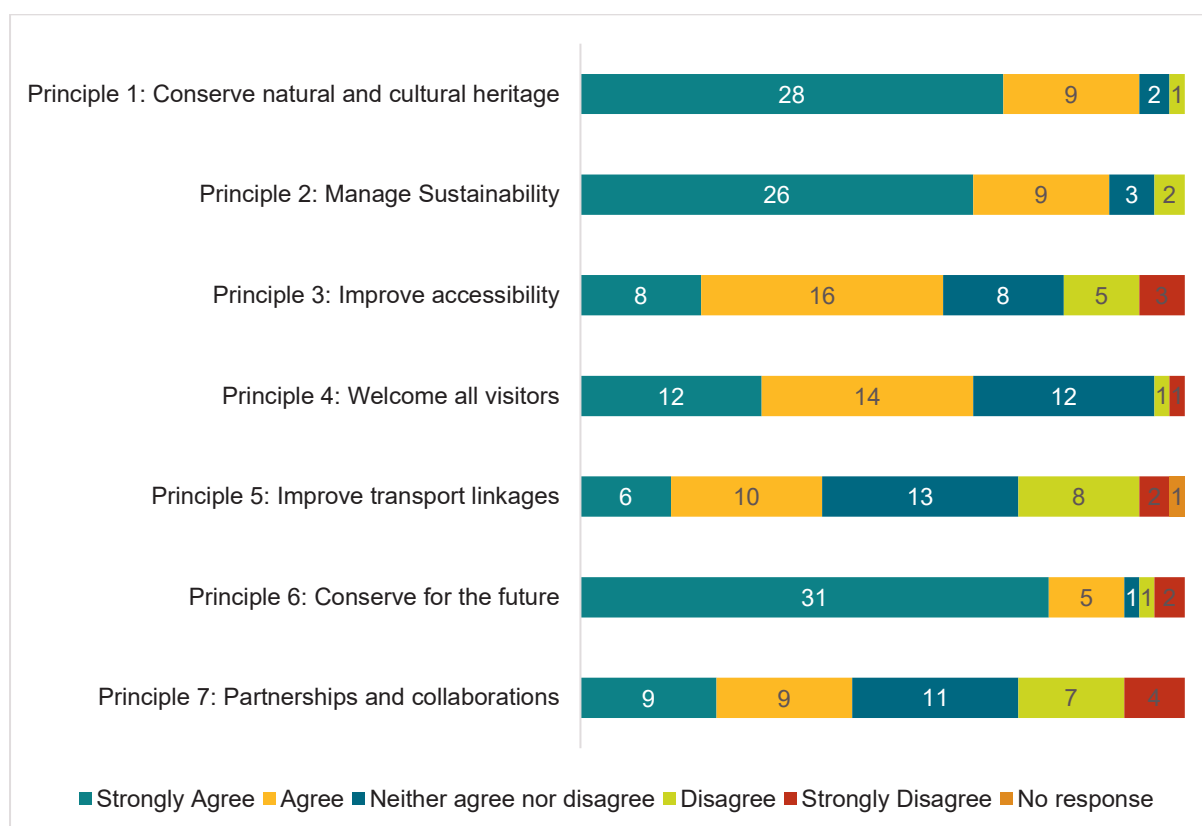


Figure 8 Feedback on the draft master plan’s 7 guiding principles

Survey question (3): The draft master plan is a framework for the next 20 years of use and operation of the site as a single integrated precinct. The draft master plan is guided by several principles. To what extent do you agree with these? (n = 40)

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Key strategies and design drivers

Survey participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the key strategies and design drivers that are being applied to the proposals in the draft master plan (Figure 9). The strategies that most people (n = 40) agreed with were:

- Improving the park with as minimal intervention and impact as possible
 - 90% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed
 - participants love the natural beauty of the site and noted that the natural landscape was their main reason for visiting
- Healing Country through rehabilitation and revegetation of native vegetation and staged removal of weeds and exotic plant species
 - 85% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed
 - participants value the conservation and revitalisation of native species
 - some participants commented that they were unsatisfied with the current state of the paths, trails and landscapes within the site and welcomed plans to improve them
- Connection to place and Country through art, stories, culture and caring for Country
 - 78% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed
 - Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park are deeply valued for their heritage and participants want to see a celebration of the history.

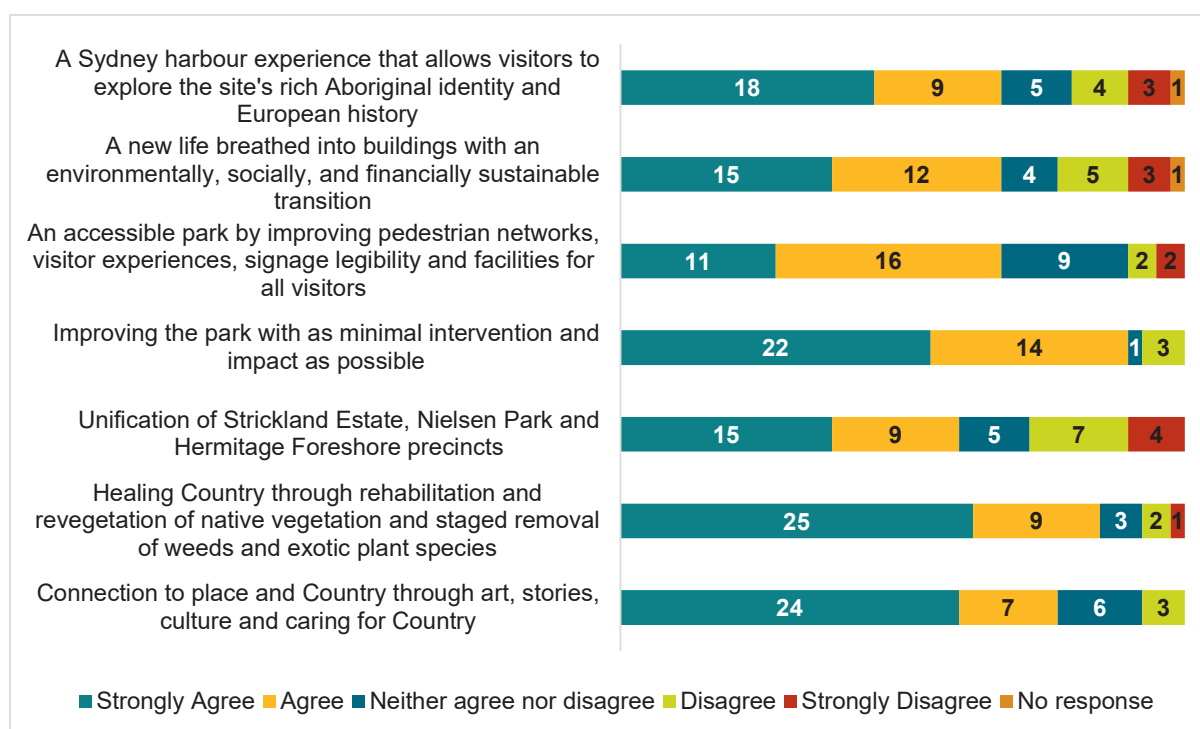


Figure 9 Feedback on the draft master plan's key strategies and design drivers

Survey question (4): Several key strategies and design drivers are applied to the proposals in the draft master plan. To what extent do you agree with these? (n = 40)

Overall, participants appreciated that NPWS is embarking on strategic planning for the site, but many wanted to see more specific details about the proposed interventions in the final master plan and had some concerns about the impact of some of the key moves.

Example survey comment

'We should focus on what is needed, not what others have. We need something unique here that works with the buildings and what makes it special.'

NPWS response

The guiding principles and key strategies will continue to be the foundation for decisions on improvements across the park. NPWS recognises the need to make improvements to enhance visitor experiences and safety while balancing the natural beauty of the park. Improvements outlined in the master plan will undergo further design and assessment prior to delivery to ensure compliance with the park's plan of management (NPWS 2011), as well as any cultural, environmental and heritage assessments to identify the proposal's potential impacts and measures required to mitigate any impacts.

NPWS acknowledges the role that volunteers play in Healing Country through rehabilitation and revegetation of native vegetation and staged removal of weed species across the park.

NPWS encourages the development of Aboriginal cultural experiences within national parks and will continue to work with Aboriginal custodians to support the development of Aboriginal cultural tourism products and other commercial opportunities.

Issues and considerations

The following issues were identified for consideration when finalising the master plan. These comments are sourced from across all engagement methods.

- **Marine environment:** Some participants were concerned that there was no mention of the marine environment in the draft master plan. Many felt this needed to be addressed, especially considering the proposed wharf and jetty improvements and the impact they may have on the harbour and marine life.
- **Sensitivity to heritage:** One participant at the community drop-in session noted that the draft master plan did not make reference to the heritage listing of the site, which is important for later designers to understand the full extent of the site's history. They also noted that there were inconsistencies in the naming of the buildings throughout the draft master plan. Most notably, the naming of Strickland/Carrara House was inconsistent.
- **Paving and concrete:** For some, the word 'paved' elicited a strong response, with many participants reading this as concrete taking over bushland. The ideas wall had over 22 strong comments opposing concrete and manicured walkways, and instead stated a desire to keep the 'bushland feel'. The perception by some is that the park is one of the last large, natural ('bush') open spaces in the eastern suburbs of Sydney and its character should be retained.
- **Overdevelopment:** Overall, people were supportive of change and improvement, especially to buildings falling into disrepair. However, they wanted to ensure the right balance is struck in keeping the park 'natural' and 'wild', given its national park status, and not adding too much 'man-made' architecture or making it too commercial.
- **Traffic management:** In part related to concerns about overdevelopment, many participants were conscious that increased activation of the site would create a level of traffic that the area may struggle to accommodate. Numerous participants suggested a shuttle bus to take people to and from the park from nearby train stations and ferry wharfs.

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- **Noise:** Some participants were concerned that increased activity from food and beverage operators and events would increase noise levels.
- **Integration of technology:** Some participants suggested using technology for data collection and 'citizen science' activations. Ideas included the promotion of a hashtag at key sites in the park encouraging people to upload real-time images which can be used by NPWS to monitor environmental conditions and maintenance requirements in the park. Additional ideas included using smart green technology like solar panels and stormwater collection.

NPWS response

The final master plan includes a section on the importance of the marine environment, the heritage significance and history across the park. Historical analysis from Aboriginal occupation through to the transfer of Strickland Estate to NPWS management as part of Sydney Harbour National Park, has been included. Reference to items listed on the NSW State Heritage Inventory have also been added to the plan.

NPWS recognises the need to balance infrastructure improvements and manufactured interference (hard structures and surfaces) across the park with conservation and keeping the park's natural setting. The final master plan includes a redesign of the proposed park entries, to reduce the scale of hard surfaces, in response to community feedback and to balance competing aims. Required environmental, cultural and heritage assessments will be conducted prior to works. Maintenance of facilities and the park more broadly will be undertaken by NPWS staff or contractors on an ongoing basis.

NPWS will continue to work with Woollahra Municipal Council and adjacent land managers to seek effective solutions to parking and traffic management that work to ease congestion, support the way our visitors access and engage with the site, service visitor demand and consider reducing impacts to residents. The final master plan includes provision for onsite parking to help mitigate parking and traffic impacts.

Smart technologies, including digital interpretation and storytelling, will be considered with significant infrastructure upgrades or park-wide signage improvements.

Strickland Estate precinct

While the ideas wall reflected mixed views on the draft master plan for Strickland Estate precinct, the overall sentiment garnered from the survey and drop-in sessions highlighted excitement for the rejuvenation of the estate and the surrounding buildings within the precinct. When asked ‘What do you like most about the draft master plan?’, many survey respondents stated reusing the heritage buildings, particularly Carrara House.

Example survey comment

‘I’ve lived in close proximity to the area for 37 years and it’s great to finally see a plan as the Strickland Estate has become run down.’

Adaptive reuse of buildings

From the community drop-in sessions, most of the community were excited by the prospect of the buildings in the park being reused and having new life breathed into them through sensitive uses.

Cultural facilities or food and beverage outlets were the most popular suggestions for future use, a sentiment supported by the survey results (Figure 10). A gallery/museum in the space being the top choice for building reuse with 31 votes from 38 participants.



Figure 10 Response to survey question about the adaptive reuse of buildings in the Strickland Estate precinct

Responses to survey question: The following permissible uses (under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*) are suggested for buildings within the Strickland Estate Precinct, being: Carrara House/Strickland House, Women’s Ward, Men’s Ward, Stables, Nurses Quarters, and Caretaker’s Cottage. Which of these options appeal to you? (Survey participants were able to select as many options as they wanted, with 223 selections made) (n = 38; 2 people chose to skip this response)

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For other buildings within the precinct, participants wanted to see low-impact uses such as amenities (toilets and changing rooms) and small artistic and cultural uses instead of visitor accommodation and extensive private use. Ensuring all operations were sustainable, with minimal impact on the environment through activities such as minimising waste, was a recurring theme.

Other creative suggestions for building use put forward by the community were:

- First Nations artist in residence studio
- education spaces and facilities
- music camp and small music events
- bush camp
- equipment hire services
- event hire (for example, weddings).

Many participants saw the potential to reuse Carrara House and other key buildings in the Strickland Estate for community use, with many noting how sad it was to see the buildings locked up all year, not being used or maintained. The need for sensitive designs and functions that complement the surroundings and keep the tranquillity of the park was a common theme.

Example comments

'I think it's a great idea to repurpose these buildings and make them more accessible to the community. The risk is turning it into a place that becomes too popular and therefore less enjoyable to visit. I think if done right though, it could be really great.' (Ideas wall comment)

'The park needs to generate revenue. There are too many buildings and not enough funding to improve them all.' (Community drop-in session comment)

'The draft master plan identifies potential space for short stay accommodation and artist workshops. Combining both uses can create an exciting opportunity for residential artist studios.' (Survey comment)

NPWS response

The master plan will keep all the current suggested uses to indicate the scope of potential options for the adaptive reuse of building across the park. The proposed options outlined in the master plan are consistent with permitted uses under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. Many buildings across the park, particularly within Strickland Estate, require significant upgrades, conservation and restoration works. NPWS will undertake heritage assessments to identify potential impacts and measures needed to mitigate any impacts, as well as required heritage approvals.

Low-impact and low-intensity use, such as amenities, are included in the master plan. Temporary activation within the buildings and across the site will continue in line with relevant NPWS policies and approvals and be permissible and consistent with the park plan of management.

NPWS recognises the need to balance building improvements within the park setting and the need for sensitive design so as not to detract from the surrounding landscape. Sustainability initiatives with the adaptive reuse of a building will be investigated and be subject to heritage approvals.

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NPWS will continue to investigate the adaptive reuse of buildings to generate revenue and uses that are financially sustainable to help in ensuring that the buildings are maintained and celebrated in line with their heritage significance.

Parking, transport and access to the park

Survey participants were asked for their feedback on the proposed improvements to transport and access to the site, namely the inclusion of off-street parking near Steele Point Road and a small number of parking spaces at the Stables building within Strickland Estate. Mixed feedback was received, with 48% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 45% of participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (Figure 11).

Many participants on the ideas wall, and particularly locals spoken to at the community drop-in session, welcomed added parking to ease congestion and parking issues on local roads. Some participants were concerned about the prospect of allowing cars to drive into the national park to access new facilities and parking due to the negative impact it could have on the natural environment.

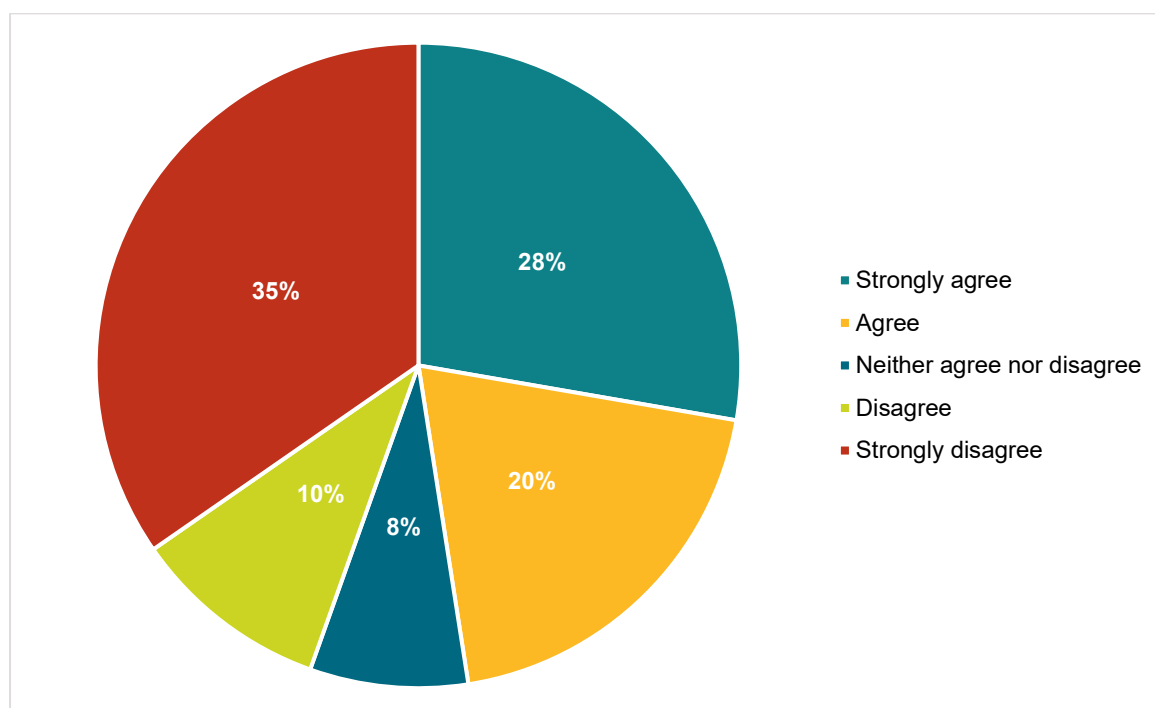


Figure 11 Response to survey question regarding the inclusion of off-street parking in Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park

Survey question: There is currently no onsite parking for visitors to Strickland Estate or Nielsen Park. During busy periods such as the summer holidays this places pressure on neighbouring streets. The draft master plan proposes [3 proposals are listed]. Thinking about transport and access to the site do you agree with the inclusion of off-street park in the nominated areas? (n = 40)

Example comments

'Yes – cars do not belong in national parks. Please don't put a car park on Steele Point Road. All green space is valuable. Car parks are heat islands, source of pollution and an eyesore.' (Survey comment)

'Additional parking is needed in summer and new parking should be kept away from heritage buildings.' (Community drop-in session comment)

NPWS response

NPWS will continue to work with Woollahra Municipal Council and adjacent land managers to seek effective solutions to parking and traffic management that work to ease congestion, support the way our visitors access and engage with the site, service visitor demand and consider reducing impacts to residents. The final master plan includes provision for onsite parking to help mitigate parking and traffic impacts.

Vehicle access through the park will continue to be for park management purposes and approved access only. Park visitors and pedestrian access will be prioritised at arrival points into the park.

Other issues and considerations

The following issues relating to the Strickland Estate precinct were identified for consideration when finalising the master plan. These comments are sourced from across all engagement methods.

- **Milk Beach jetty interpretation:** Several participants were opposed to the Milk Beach stone jetty interpretation. Some participants expressed concern that the development of the jetty will damage the marine environment (through drilling) and cause negative impacts to swimming and snorkelling. Participants were also opposed to the move as they feared it would attract unsocial behaviour, such as party boats and noise.
- **Park entries:** There were a number of critical comments on the ideas wall regarding the new entrances. While some participants wanted to see upgrades to Steele Point Road entrance, many noted concerns about the addition of too much concrete, the removal of mature trees and the increased heat it could create. There was a general desire to keep the area green with limited cars, but many respondents were open to creating a small waiting/drop-off area to improve access and safety. Incorporating more bike and dog 'parking' was also suggested.
- **Sustainability as a priority:** While the adaptive reuse of key buildings within the precincts excited many participants, the community emphasised the need for sustainable management and business practices to minimise negative environmental impacts. Numerous participants suggested limiting takeaway from food and beverage operators to reduce litter (especially coffee cups) in the park.
- **Additional facilities and amenities:** Similar to feedback in Phase 1, participants flagged the need for more public facilities within the Strickland Estate precinct, such as toilets and change rooms with heated showers near Milk Beach. Other amenities that were suggested were picnic tables with shade and opportunities to rent out beach equipment for the day.

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NPWS response

The final master plan includes a section on the importance of the marine environment and heritage significance and history across the park. The Milk Beach jetty was formerly a structure within Strickland Estate, with remnants remaining which the master plan identifies for interpretation.

NPWS recognises the need to balance infrastructure improvements and manufactured interference (hard structures and surfaces) across the park with conservation and keeping the park's natural setting. The final master plan includes a redesign of the proposed park entries, reducing the scale of hard surfaces, in response to community feedback and to balance competing aims.

Amenities to support park use have been included in the final master plan. Visitor amenity and sustainability initiatives will be further considered with delivery of infrastructure and park activation.

Nielsen Park precinct

Although many of the key improvements proposed for the Nielsen Park precinct were supported by survey participants (Figure 12), overall the draft master plan for Nielsen Park attracted the most contentious comments on the ideas wall and at the community drop-in session.

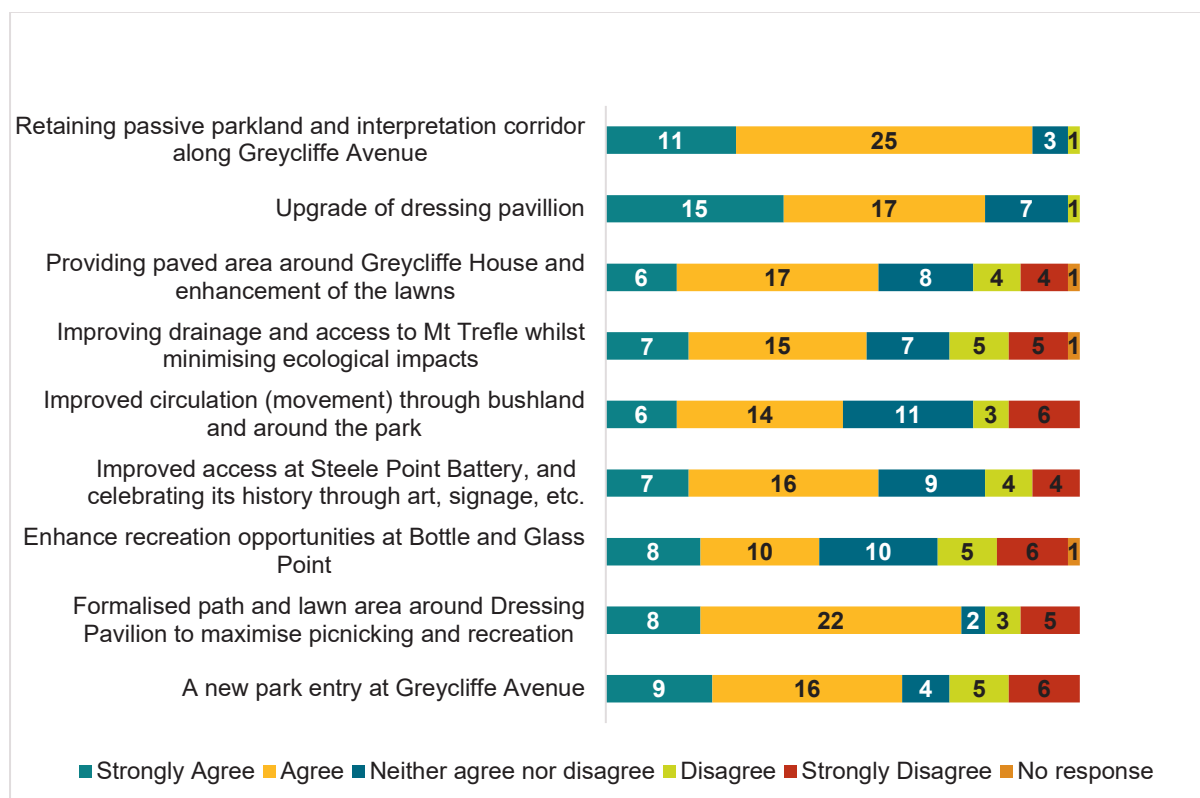


Figure 12 Feedback on Nielsen Park precinct proposed improvements

Survey question: Thinking about the Nielsen Park precinct, do you agree with the following improvements? (n = 40)

Shark Beach seawall upgrades

Many of the concerns expressed by participants pointed to the Shark Beach seawall upgrades, the delayed reopening of the beach and the overall management of the project. This residual frustration was often projected onto the overall draft master plan, with some people stating they had little faith in the project's delivery. Numerous participants at the community drop-in session asked how the proposed interventions would impact or close areas of the park, and for how long, fearing they would lose access.

The top improvement to Nielsen Park that participants agreed with was keeping passive parkland and interpretation corridor along Greycliffe Avenue, with 36 votes agreeing or strongly agreeing with this move.

Participants wanted to see the existing pathways improved, however, they wanted to keep the natural landscape with low-impact interventions. This was a recurring theme across the feedback given on the draft Nielsen Park master plan, that is, participants wanted to keep development to a minimum.

Example comment

'Natural bushland should remain bushland. The fragile foreshore areas should remain untouched. The construction of pathways and picnic areas will threaten and destroy wildlife, bushland, and the stunning natural landscape.' (Ideas wall comment)

Participants were also keen to see upgrades made to the Dressing Pavilion, with 32 votes agreeing or strongly agreeing with this move. Participants noted that the current state of the facilities is inadequate and looked forward to improvements, especially to the showers. Survey participants also agreed with the inclusion of a formalised path and lawn area around the Dressing Pavilion to maximise picnicking and recreation, with 30 votes agreeing or strongly agreeing with this move (Figure 12).

Example comment

'Hope the upgrade of the Dressing Pavilion includes decent size toilet cubicles for women. The current ones barely have room to open the door and slide past.' (Ideas wall comment)

NPWS response

The master plan is a long-term vision and represents a significant opportunity for NPWS to engage with the immediate and broader community to create a shared vision in planning for Strickland Estate, Nielsen Park and the Hermitage Foreshore as interconnected precincts. NPWS will engage with community in the delivery of initiatives outlined in the master plan and mitigate any potential impacts.

Non-commuter wharf

The opportunity to reinstate a non-commuter ferry wharf at Shark Beach to improve site access was the most polarising topic of the entire master plan, with 61% of survey participants disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the proposal (Figure 13), and 13 votes against it on the ideas wall.

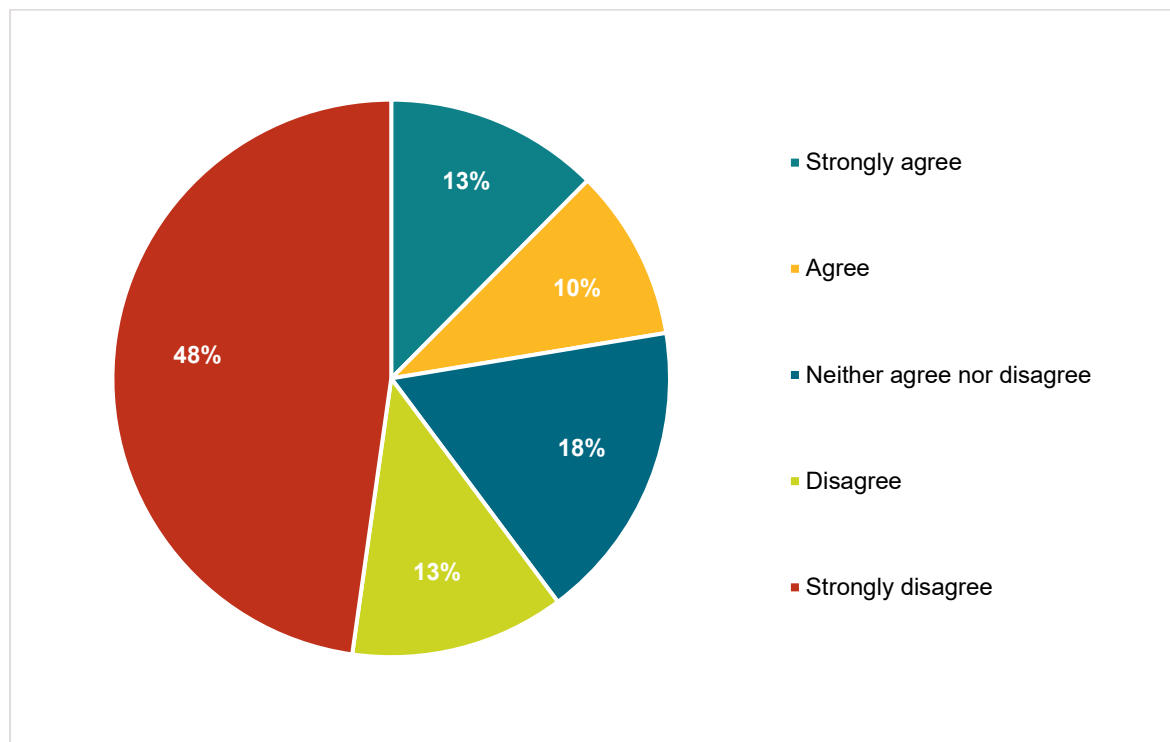


Figure 13 Response to survey question regarding the reintroduction of a non-commuter wharf at Shark Beach

Survey question: The reintroduction of a restricted, non-commuter wharf has been proposed at Shark Beach to provide visitors with non-vehicle based access to the park. Thinking about transport and access to the site do you agree with the reintroduction of a non-commuter wharf? (n = 40)

Concerns were 2-fold. Firstly, survey participants were concerned with the installation and damage to the harbour and marine life. Secondly, survey participants were concerned with the types of visitors it could encourage, such as large groups of 'day-trippers' and 'party boats' descending on the beach and causing anti-social behaviour. Some people were also concerned that just allowing private boats to use the wharf was 'elitist' and noted this added no 'wider community benefit'. More than anything, these types of comments underscored the need to provide more detail around the term 'non-commuter' wharf, who would use the wharf and what services would be provided, for example: Is it for private boat owners only? Could private commercial tourist boats use it? How and when would a ferry service run?

Other community members saw the value in adding a new access point to the park to ease congestion on the roads and were supportive of an NPWS-operated ferry service that was heavily monitored for misuse.

Example comments

'Nielsen Park is unique and loved for its historic atmosphere. Please do not destroy it with overdevelopment.' (Ideas wall comment)

'A commuter wharf would actually make sense and provide a useful service. A non-commuter wharf is for... party boats, charter boats, private yachts...? Crowds of drunk people. This is a place people come to enjoy nature and peace. There are full boat facilities at Rose Bay, just nearby, for commercial and private vessels.' (Ideas wall comment)

NPWS response

The non-commuter wharf was proposed to replace a historical wharf structure that provided access to Nielsen Park prior to it being damaged and removed in 1974. Its inclusion in the draft plan was proposed as a way of alleviating parking and traffic congestion on surrounding streets by providing alternative visitor access to the park. It was also identified for investigation in the amendment to the *Sydney Harbour Nation Park plan of management* (NPWS 2022). Its inclusion in the draft plan, like all aspects in the draft plan, enabled NPWS to ascertain community and stakeholder feedback on the proposal.

The non-commuter wharf has been removed from the final master plan in line with community sentiment.

Adaptive reuse of buildings

Similar to the building reuse suggestions made for Strickland Estate, participants are keen to see buildings brought to life and want similar cultural uses for the buildings within the Nielsen Park precinct. The top uses suggested were galleries and museums, artist workshops, and cultural and Aboriginal heritage facilities.

NPWS response

The master plan will retain all the current suggested uses to show the scope of potential options for the adaptive reuse of building across the park. The proposed options outlined in the master plan are consistent with permitted uses under the National Parks and Wildlife Act. Many buildings across the park require significant upgrades, conservation and restoration works. NPWS will undertake heritage assessments to identify potential impacts and measures needed to mitigate any impacts, as well as required heritage approvals.

Other issues and considerations

The following issues relating to the Nielsen Park precinct were identified for consideration when finalising the master plan. These comments are sourced from across all engagement methods.

- **Overdevelopment:** The majority of comments relating to Nielsen Park across all engagement methods were strongly against development. Participants deeply value the 'undisturbed' bushland within the precinct and want to see the opportunities for exploration instead of the formalised pathways (seen by many as 'unnecessary concrete'), lookouts and facilities proposed. The following comments were also made on the ideas wall:

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- **Bottle and Glass Point and Mt Trefle summit walk:** Participants agreed that the bushland needs to be preserved, but emphasised that the walk is cherished by the community for the 'wilderness' along the track. Participants want to keep the path as undeveloped as possible – without boardwalks, signage, formalised lookouts and concrete.
- **Steele Point walk and lookout:** Participants do not want to see formalised pathways for the space, and instead want focused fencing improvements and the removal of weeds and invasive species to maintain the walk.
- **Greycliffe House terraced gardens and accessible ramp:** Participants want to see the existing paths and stairs fixed and maintained, rather than a revamped space.
- **Nielsen Park active zone:** Some participants were concerned that formalised seating areas would increase both pedestrian and car traffic as a result.
- **Swimming enclosure net:** While some participants were supportive of the retention of the net for year-round swimming, a few comments were opposed to the net being permanent, noting it can be dangerous for marine life and also needs to be regularly removed to allow for annual maintenance and avoid storm impacts.

NPWS response

NPWS recognises the need to balance infrastructure improvements, visitor access and needs and manufactured interference (hard structures and surfaces) across the park with conservation and keeping the park's natural setting.

Paths, walking tracks and improvements will be respectful of natural and heritage values and be subject to environmental, cultural and heritage assessments as required prior to works. Upgrades to tracks and paths will be in line with applicable standards, ensuring safe access and use.

NPWS will continue to investigate the inclusion of a year-round swimming enclosure at Shark Beach, Nielsen Park, and consider marine impacts, maintenance and NPWS operations, as well as environmental and heritage assessments and approvals.

Hermitage Foreshore precinct

The Hermitage Foreshore precinct received general support with no major opposition to the key moves outlined for this precinct. Survey participants largely agreed with all the proposed improvements in the draft master plan (Figure 14).

Throughout the consultation, participants welcomed the plans to improve the pathways, trails, signage and wayfinding throughout the park, but emphasised a desire to keep interventions minimal and prioritise natural materials over concrete where possible.

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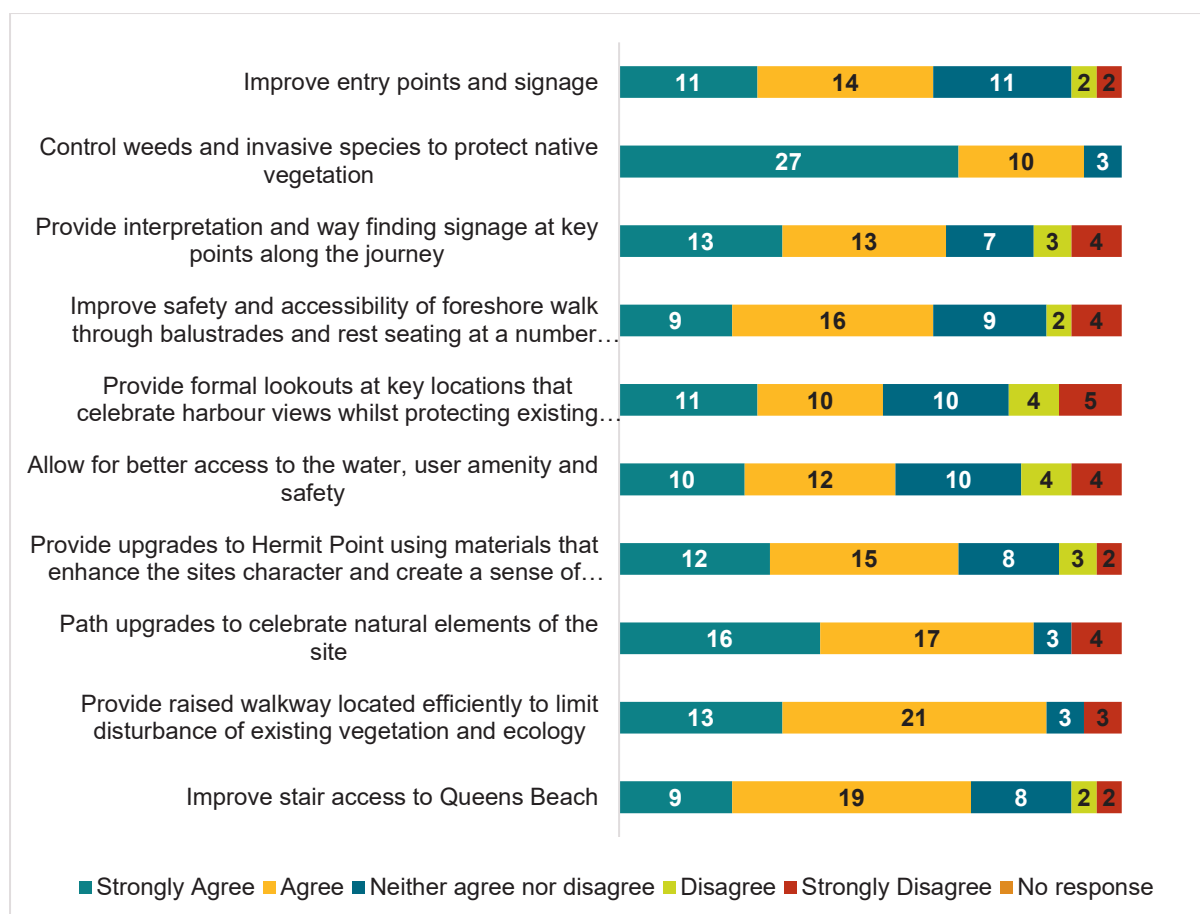


Figure 14 Feedback on Hermitage Foreshore track proposed improvements

Survey question: Thinking about Hermitage Foreshore track, do you agree with the following improvements? (n = 40)

Like the feedback from Nielsen Park, many comments expressed a desire to keep the natural feel of the park and focus on maintenance rather than development.

Example comments

'The path could be enhanced by stonework, retaining walls, etc., to protect the natural coastline and vegetation. Subtle, natural-seeming pauses in the path to take in viewpoints (as in parts of the Hermitage walk now) could be good – but big platforms, fencing and signage (as in the illustration) would definitely be a negative.' (Ideas wall comment)

'The whole track is a lookout; we don't need lookouts.' (Community drop-in session comment)

Hermitage Foreshore track

The most popular suggested improvement in the draft master plan for the Hermitage Foreshore track was to control weeds and invasive species to protect native vegetation, with 37 votes agreeing or strongly agreeing with the move. Participants saw that this priority would be the best way to showcase not only the natural beauty of the park but also celebrate and respect Country instead of excessive signage along the walk.

Example comments

'Utterly excellent to consult, and traditional names would be fantastic. But don't impose all this concrete on such a beautiful area. Just focus on restoring the bushland and respecting this lovely slice of country.' (Ideas wall comment)

'It is already perfect, no need for intervention except where safety improvements are absolutely necessary. Interpretation should be limited to digital experiences, no more signage.' (Survey comment)

'The key here is the restoration of native vegetation and removal of invasive species - truly caring for Country. Interpretive centres can be in already built areas.' (Ideas wall comment)

NPWS response

NPWS recognises the need to balance infrastructure improvements and manufactured interference (hard structures and surfaces) across the park with conservation and keeping the park's natural setting. NPWS recognises the importance of the Hermitage Foreshore track as a more natural track along Sydney Harbour. Improvements within this precinct will be kept to a minimum while ensuring safe access to key features and environmental protection. Required environmental and cultural assessments will be conducted prior to works.

Other issues and considerations

The following issues relating to the Heritage Foreshore precinct were identified for consideration when finalising the master plan. These comments are sourced from across all engagement methods.

- **Natural pathways:** Several participants wanted to ensure that the majority of paths should remain natural, both for aesthetic as well as conservation concerns. Minimal concrete and boardwalks, and no formalised lookouts were noted as a preference by some participants, as well as signage that did not distract from the natural environment.
- **Signage and wayfinding:** Community members expressed a desire for improved signage and wayfinding in and around the park as well as maps at park entries. Better signage for the Bondi to Manly Walk was flagged as a need by some walkers.
- **Opportunities for cultural experiences:** Rather than obtrusive signage, some participants suggested using technology to create an experience. This would be done online, or through a phone application that tells local stories spoken by local Aboriginal people in their own language and translated into English. A hashtag to document local adventures along the walk was also a suggestion made.
- **Protecting the environment:** While most participants wanted minimal development along the walk, participants also recognised that some damage prevention was necessary to protect the land from bushwalkers. Participants reiterated that a balance between conservation and manufactured interference was crucial.

NPWS response

NPWS acknowledges the importance of signage, wayfinding and interpretation to provide safe and meaningful experiences across national parks. Any new signage across the park will be in line with relevant park policies and guidelines. This includes signage to link to off-park walking experiences such as the Bondi to Manly Walk.

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Interpretation will be guided by NPWS policy and guidelines and may include, for example, content on Aboriginal, European and built heritage, and fauna and flora that are significant to the site and Sydney Harbour National Park. NPWS will investigate physical interpretation such as signage, sculpture, landscape elements as well as digital storytelling through apps and onsite installation.

Contribution to the master plan

Feedback and queries from the community and stakeholders has been considered and has informed the directions of the final master plan.

NPWS would like to say a special thank you to those who participated and helped shape the master plan by providing their input into the preliminary workshops, taking part in the surveys, providing thoughtful and well-considered written responses, and to the representatives on our Stakeholder Reference Group.

We are pleased to see the high-level of participation received from the community on the exhibition of the draft master plan and look forward to implementing the final master plan over the coming years.

Next steps

The master plan is a long-term vision, and initiatives identified in the master plan will be delivered as funding becomes available. Ongoing conversations with Aboriginal community and key stakeholders will help realise the range of environmental, social and economic benefits of the project. NPWS will continue to engage with the local community about the project's progress.

References

NPWS (2011) '[Sydney Harbour National Park plan of management 2012](#)', Office of Environment and Heritage, Sydney.

NPWS (2022) '[Sydney Harbour National Park plan of management amendment: sustainable visitor use](#)', Department of Planning and Environment, Parramatta.

NPWS (2024) '[Strickland Estate and Nielsen Park master plan, Sydney Harbour National Park](#)', Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Parramatta.