

Green Grid Key to Sydney's Future

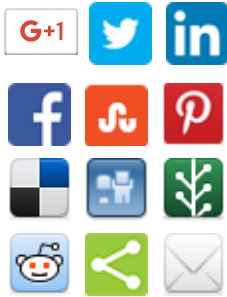


By Daniel Bennett

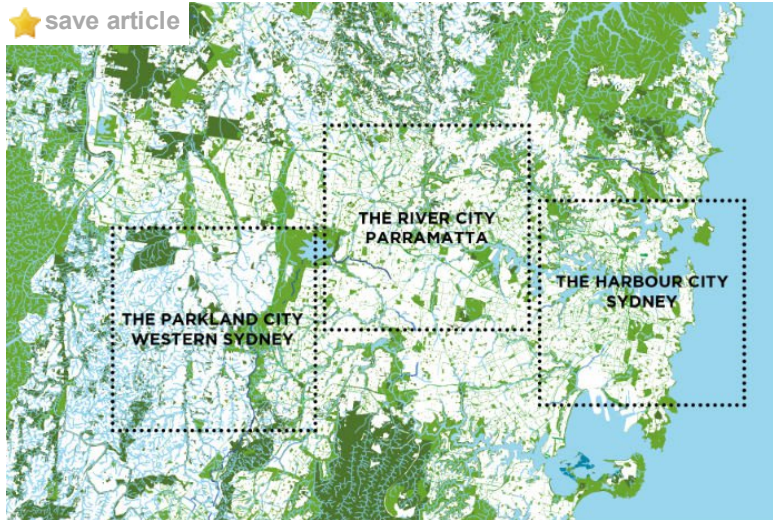
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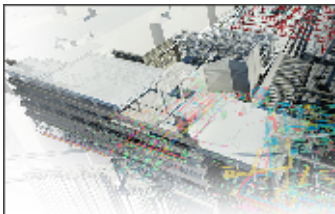
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Sydney's population is forecast to increase by 80 per cent by 2054, with an additional three million people living and working in the metropolitan area.

As population density increases, our challenge is to shape the built environment so as to ensure that Sydney remains one of the world's most distinctive and liveable cities.

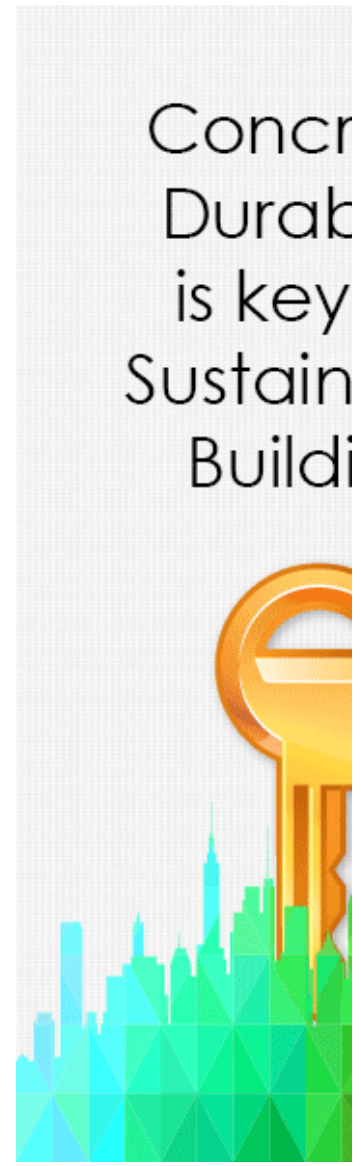
In acknowledging that green space is a key hallmark of liveability, the Office of the Government Architect (OGA) proposed the creation and consolidation of a network of high-quality green areas that connect town centres, public transport networks and major residential areas. Now known as the Sydney Green Grid and regarded as an integral part of the Metro Strategy and most recent District Plans for Sydney, this network aims to anchor sustainable development while maximising quality of life and well-being.



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Although Sydney has many green and water enriched spaces, what is missing – and this is the aim of this project – is an overarching schema that approaches them in a connected way. Success in doing so will ensure that their contribution to our quality of life, the environment and the economy are maximised, rendering a working-whole that is far greater than the sum of its parts.


Some places are already well served, and here the task is making sure it remains of high quality and is managed effectively. Other places suffer from a lack of green space, and here we need to extend the current network and create new open space where it is lacking.

Green infrastructure

The Green Grid is a green infrastructure, design-led strategy that includes the full range of open spaces from national, regional and local parks through the harbour, ocean beaches, wetlands, rivers and creeks, to playgrounds, playing fields, golf courses and cemeteries.

Interconnected linkages are fostered within the wider public realm through enhancing creek corridors, transport routes, suburban streets, footpaths and cycleways. The Green Grid is therefore an open-space interconnecting network that will keep the city cool, encourage healthy lifestyles, enhance biodiversity and ensure ecological resilience.

When we see green infrastructure as an asset, as integral to Sydney's metabolism as its roads, rail lines and storm water pipes, and valued for the whole range of social, health, environmental, economic and educational benefits it brings to Sydney, the importance



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of an integrated approach to management, enhancement and extension becomes paramount. It's an infrastructure asset that requires the same kind of protection, investment and innovation we afford more familiar types of built infrastructure.

Green infrastructure has an increasingly important role to play as we face the challenges of population and urban growth on the one hand and climate change on the other. Well-designed and planned green infrastructure will help absorb flood water, cool the urban environment, clean the air, provide space for local food production and ensure the survival of Sydney's fauna and flora as well as providing space for recreation, sport and leisure.

The Sydney Green Grid underscores the value of green and open space as pivotal to the choices we make when promoting economic growth, health and well-being. As a network, it will provide links and connections between places, encourage walking and cycling, highlight landscape and heritage, and support local economies. By providing informal places for people to visit and interact, social capital is both created and enhanced. Future investment in parks and recreation will play a vital role in Sydney's ability to attract business and create jobs.

How was the Green Grid initiated?

Inspired by the All London Green Grid, the OGA undertook a pilot project in Parramatta to assess the provision of open space at regional, district and local levels. The OGA interrogated open space deficiencies and determined where additional open space was required in order to ensure equity of access. In so doing, the office proposed an

flood management as well as for walking and cycling. Furthermore, the office examined the street networks and potential infrastructure corridors such as light rail, and suggested how the unique heritage components of the city could be integrated into the living experience of Parramatta.

The office then demonstrated the value of applying this thinking at the subregional and metropolitan scale. Close collaboration with the NSW Department of Planning & Environment and the Greater Sydney Commission helped to create an evidence-based, open-space audit across Metropolitan Sydney as a baseline for exploring opportunities to create an interconnected Metropolitan network that will support the projected population, housing and employment targets.

The Green Grid posits an economic case for investment in green infrastructure beyond the provision of open space for recreation alone. Consequently, it is now understood by many arms of urban planning and design in both the public and private realm as a value proposition, where benefit outweighs cost by raising the overall quality of investment in both the open space and investment alike.

As similar initiatives are happening around the globe, the OGA benchmarked its ideas against thinking from around the world, where the benefits for example from reduced flood risk, improved health outcomes and increased ecological resilience are being

significantly reduced air pollution. Chicago estimates that this investment could result in avoided health costs of \$29 million to \$111 million annually.

In 2011, Philadelphia created the Green City Clean Waters program – a 25-year, \$2.5 billion plan to protect and enhance the city's catchments by managing storm water with innovative green infrastructure. The city estimates that using green infrastructure in lieu of traditional approaches could save \$8 billion over the life of the program.

Based on Sydney's unique character, the OGA aims to articulate a clear and compelling economic rationale for future investment in green infrastructure. The research uncovered a number of cost/benefit analyses, but as they are limited in scope and although well intended, the implementation is fragmented.

Sydney's current parks and open spaces and other green features such as street trees are managed by over 42 different public authorities and agencies. This results in an approach to planning and management of a suite of assets that does not fully realise the potential that could be harnessed by a more integrated approach. To successfully create green infrastructure at the landscape scale, we must transcend conventional 'silo' modes of thinking within government and pursue an approach to planning, design and implementation where key agencies work together to support a common goal.

The Greater Sydney Commission is actively promoting and advocating the Green Grid

The delivery of the Sydney Green Grid vision will be a complex and challenging task. It is a long-term, evolutionary process that will require bipartisan support at all levels of government – national, regional and local. It is important that the strategic Green Grid projects identified in the District Plans can be delivered through the planning and development process, beginning with appropriate policies by local government in their Local Environment Plans.

The Green Grid envisions green infrastructure as a three-dimensional envelope that surrounds, connects and infuses buildings, streets and utilities. The concept of landscape as green infrastructure provides a potent framework for integrating the work of designers, planners, developers, policy makers and others, and leveraging this collaboration to achieve larger metropolitan goals.

The awareness of landscape as both a vital resource needing protection and a countervailing force that can be used to positively shape city and subregional development patterns has seen this initiative included as a key policy directive in the most recent Metropolitan Plan A Plan for Growing Sydney and District Plans wherein implementing the Sydney Green Grid is designated a primary action.

Investing in a comprehensive and well-managed green grid will provide the living thread that binds sustainable communities



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