



FRIENDS OF CALLAN PARK
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President's report 2024

A number of issues impinging on the public's enjoyment of Callan Park as a rare historic parkland and heritage site have pre-occupied the Friends over the past 12 months.

The first is the push for the installation of plastic-grass surfaces on the Waterfront Drive and Balmain Road ovals. The Friends have opposed such a move on environmental and heritage grounds. While we can understand the desire in the sporting community for more durable and weather-proof playing fields, the environmental pollution, maritime, terrestrial and human health impact and climate-change dangers of these fields are too high. In addition, these playing fields would exclude other sports such as cricket which now share these fields, and community users such as dog walkers.

Instead of plastic grass, the Inner West Council, which leases these fields, needs to invest more in research, design and maintenance of natural turf fields in Callan Park and across the municipality. This would benefit all sports and all users - the entire community. The Friends have now affiliated with the Natural Turf Alliance which opposes these polluting synthetic surfaces and promotes the natural turf alternative. <https://naturalturfalliance.org>

The Friends continue to be concerned about the future of Kirkbride, the suite of heritage sandstone buildings which housed the original asylum. The state government rejected the bid by a consortium of charity and non-government organisations to lease Kirkbride as a social services hub. Instead, the government has favoured short-term leases for film production offices and occasional film shoots. Sadly, in some cases these tenants have tended to leave Kirkbride the worse for wear. Even more concerning is the fact that the public is now shut out of any access to what is arguably the finest set of sandstone buildings erected by the settler colony of NSW in the 19th century.

Our third issue of concern is the many traffic and parking problems in Callan Park. The park managers have promised a traffic and parking plan to accompany the Plan of Management for Callan Park which will go on public exhibition in March next year. It will not have any practical effect, however, without financial backing. There is in fact already an approved plan for expanded parking at the end of Wharf Road. This will allow for the abolition of the parking on the foreshore on the Bay Run and hopefully stop the random and destructive parking on grass areas which are not parking areas but open green space for the whole community to enjoy. But this new parking area remains on the drawing board because it is unfunded (approximately \$3.5 mil).

A situation where some \$40 million can be found for Leichhardt Oval upgrades but comparatively nothing for Callan Park is warped, given the comparative value to the community of Callan Park.

Inner West Council is proposing that an estimated \$6 million be spent on a tidal pool in Iron Cove off a jetty off Callan Point. It is however subject to considerable problems such as interference with the rowing courses in Iron Cove, absence of change facilities, access and safety concerns.

PTO

The final issue that remains unresolved is the return of mental health services to Callan Park. Scarcely a week goes by when the crisis in mental health doesn't get reported in the media. At present a veterans mental health service and a mental health consumers organisation are lobbying to occupy available buildings, but as yet to no avail.

The delays in leasing buildings in good condition is a continuing problem, although it was heartening to see that the Men's Shed is now operating in Callan Park.

The pluses

The major advance at Callan Park this year has been the completion of the new Veterans' Green – as Friends of Callan Park have advocated for it to be named since 2010 – on the foreshore of Iron Cove west of Waterfront Drive oval.

Friends continued to run tours this year. Thanks to Roslyn Burge, we mounted an outdoor historic exhibition – **Callan Park's Veterans : a century of connections** – which focuses on the two Callan Park War Memorials and considers the role of the Repatriation Department and the care of veterans at Callan Park. We were honoured when the Minister for Veterans, the Hon David Harris, came to view the exhibition in Callan Park, with the NSW State President of the RSL. This exhibition has since transferred to Leichhardt Library for the month of November. And at our AGM on Monday 2 December, a book of the exhibition will be launched. No one has done more to rescue the history of Callan Park and celebrate its heritage than Roslyn.

Our monthly meetings continue to be well attended – in fact attendance has risen in the wake of the Council elections. The executive continues to work diligently, meeting between monthly general meetings to focus on correspondence, lobbying and submissions. We continue to be supported by scores of Friends who volunteer to letter-box leaflets from time to time, attend Council meetings and make submissions.

Our relations with other community groups connected to Callan Park, such as the Bushcare group and the dog-walkers, continue to be excellent. Relations with the park managers – the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust via the Centennial & Moore Park Trust – continue to be cordial and constructive, more so than with any prior park managers.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that the Draft Biodiversity Strategy recently exhibited by the Inner West Council proposed making Callan Park a priority biodiversity area. In their submission to the strategy, the Friends strongly endorsed this. Hopefully it is not too late. In 1989 some 56 species of birds were recorded in Callan Park. More recently, in 2017, the number was just 12.

Hall Greenland
23 November 2024



The Minister for Veterans, the Hon David Harris (second left) visited Callan Park on 13 June 2024 with the NSW State President of the RSL, Mick Bainbridge, (middle), Kobi Shetty, Member of Parliament for Balmain (second from right), and David Anderson, CEO, RSL LifeCare (far right)

FRIENDS OF CALLAN PARK 1998 – 2024

26TH YEAR OF COMMUNITY ACTIVISM • ADVOCACY • ACHIEVEMENT

CALLAN PARK & BROUGHTON HALL: *LANDSCAPES @ RISK*, AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY