

October 28, 2022

To: Tom Bower, Acting Coordinator Town & Public Spaces, Armidale Regional Council  
(via email)

Dear Tom, the ARC team, NSW Planning and Advisory and Hayden Williams (of Collins Williams),

**Feedback on ARC Community Reference Group meeting - October 14, 2022**

Thank you for your invitation to this meeting. Our committee appreciated the energy and commitment displayed by Council staff, consultants and other attendees.

We look forward to future interaction with Council, NSW Planning and Advisory personnel and Collins Williams. These iterative community consultation processes are consistent with the recommendations of the Creeklands Master Plan.

**Executive summary**

- Big Picture: The Plan needs a clear narrative which places Stage 1 within the approved Creeklands Master Plan and how it, in turn, fits within the Dumaresq Creeklands and the entire catchment of Dumaresq Creek.
- There is an opportunity for contingency moneys to create the above broader vision which is a necessary prerequisite for the city to realise its dreams with the creeklands
- Feedback from and engagement with First Nations perspectives is needed
- More emphasis is needed on the design of water features such as billabongs, pools and constructed wetlands
- Detailed comments are provided on the Albion Park plans and some proposed works in the Civic Park precinct
- Ongoing consultation is needed with community groups who have a passion for the creeklands and all those who recognise the beneficial flow-on effects of improving this vital artery of our city

Please see our Explanatory Notes below for more information.

Yours sincerely

Jim Scott (on behalf of the entire committee)

Email: [president@armidalecreeklands.org.au](mailto:president@armidalecreeklands.org.au)

Web: [www.armidalecreeklands.org.au](http://www.armidalecreeklands.org.au)

# Explanatory notes

## Big picture - the entire catchment

ARC has identified both **the Dumaresq Dam Recreation Redevelopment** and **Armidale Creeklands Master Plan** as their two major projects. It is important to point out to residents and ratepayers the **important link between the two Major Projects**. Not only was the hydrology of our creek interrupted in 1898 by creating Dumaresq Dam as the primary water storage for our city, but both the Dam and the city sit in the watershed of Duembandiyi (Mt Duval). This is a compelling narrative which should inspire local residents and visitors and open up opportunities for expanding our economy!

We dream not only of restoring **environmental flows of water through our city but also envisage bike, walking and running tracks between the city and Dumaresq Dam**. These would be of **great interest to many residents and visitors**, including mountain bike users. Of course, ARC already supports the annual Duval Dam Buster trail run which starts at Dumaresq Dam on December 4, this year!

Yes, these ideas are outside the remit of Stage 1 (from Markham to Dumaresq Streets), but **we suggest that it is vital that we all see the 'big picture' into which the currently approved Armidale Creeklands Master Plan fits**.

In our association's submission to the Draft Creeklands Master Plan in September 2020, we wrote "**the limited scope of the study to the area between Markham and Douglas Streets means that important factors have not been adequately addressed**". We continue to believe that a **further study of broader scope is warranted** to build onto the strengths of this draft Plan. Specifically, we would like to see exploration of sources of water to restore the natural rate of flow of Dumaresq Creek, through diverting other sources of water and/or through recycling, perhaps using solar powered pumps. This would help ensure stream health is maintained even in dry times.

Without sufficient consideration of links to and consequences for other precincts within the Master Plan and beyond, we could end up with an isolated pocket of development that is incongruous with a long-term cohesive vision.

Consultants might be tasked with situating the current plan into the creeklands as a whole (as least from Lake Zot at UNE to Cookes Rd) so that the Stage 1 development is well integrated into holistic city-wide plans. We recommend making it explicit how Stage 1 fits within the overall Creeklands Master Plan and demonstrate that considerations of issues across all parts of the creeklands have been considered.

## Contingency money

**Treatment of contaminated soil.** We understand that some of the contingency money will be earmarked for removal and treatment of contaminated soil. As explained at this meeting, the amount of soil that will require treatment is of limited extent, so it appears that some contingency funds may be available.

Following on from the above 'big picture' discussion, we suggest that some of the contingency money be spent on one or two additional expert consultancies:

1. **Catchment water measurements, modelling and predictions.** To provide Council with a summary of measured and modelled flow rates and flood risk frequencies

along the Dumaresq Creek from its source to at least the eastern extremity of Armidale Regional Council's region. This information, together with a detailed topographic map of the entire creek zone would greatly assist in siting future flood mitigation dams, finding sources of environmental water, creating opportunities for off-stream water storage and the location of 'stormwater bioretention systems' envisaged by the Master Plan. In view of the disastrous flood event in Toowoomba and Grantham (Qld) in 2011, it would be prudent risk management for ARC to conduct such a study. Recent flood events across eastern Australia highlight this point.

2. **Overall landscape design of entire creeklands.** If such a project was carried out, this could build on the excellent work done by McGregor Coxall on the Creeklands Master Plan for the limited zone of Markham to Douglas Sts and allow it to be placed in a city-wide context. This should include investigations of current and projected car, bicycle and pedestrian crossings of the creek.

### **Ideas are needed from First Nations peoples**

We are not aware if ideas from our First Nations peoples have informed the planning process. Our discussions with First Nations people on a [bus tour of the creeklands](#), and in informal discussions since, confirmed their interest in contributing appropriate designs, themes and interpretive information about the creeklands and the region.

### **More water features**

Another major issue for our members is the need for a greater emphasis on water views, pools, billabongs, wetlands, stream shape, etc. The artist's renditions don't show any significant change in the creek other than a slight widening of the creek profile and a reduced slope of the creek banks.

We recommend incorporating some of the ideas contained in the images of water features on page 55 of the Creeklands Master Plan. These types of improvements are of the highest priority to our members.

A point we made in response to the draft Master Plan was to point out the [highly relevant 1999 symposium on in-stream interventions in Dumaresq Creek](#) - with input from the late Prof. John Burton, a civil engineer and founding Professor of Natural Resources at UNE - which concluded: "**Constructed wetlands, ponds and paths and bridges were rated highest for improving the recreational value and constructed wetlands highest for improving the environmental value of Dumaresq Creek and its surrounds.**"

### ***Minimising flood potential***

We understand the importance of NOT exacerbating flooding along the creeklands by any changes made. We also see the linkage between altering the slope of the stream banks downstream, such as in Civic and Curtis Parks, when the 'drain' walls are removed, to create a greater cross-section and thereby increase flow rates. This should reduce the possibility of flood water accumulating in the Albion Park precinct.

We agree that all plantings and infrastructure need to be flood resistant.

## **Comments on presentation by Hayden Williams and others**

### ***Council works considerations***

We note that Stage 1 works could commence in July 2023 after some work on services is completed in Dumaresq St such as connecting a 250 mm water pipe and replacing some electrical cables (Essential Energy). Excavation and removal of the contaminated soil for treatment elsewhere may commence around the same date. It is at this stage that the creek bank on the western side of the Centro complex might be reconstructed. If it needs to be concreted, due to high levels of contamination, we suggest creating a wall incorporating large granite boulders such as those seen at the Blue Hole picnic area.

### ***Albion Park considerations***

#### *Bike paths, pedestrians, etc.*

We note the pedestrian refuge across Dumaresq St near the entrance to the skate park but question whether sufficient attention has been given to the connectivity and integration of walking and biking paths in this precinct and across the city. These proposals could be tested with bicycle users, pedestrians, runners and others to see if they approve.

A 3m wide shared path is proposed for both bikes and pedestrians with lighting along the stage 1 area and other somewhat narrower paths around the Monckton swimming pool complex.

#### *Transport and parking considerations*

The Master Plan mentions the need for shared paths to be created based on "... a bicycle network and active transportation study to address community concerns about safety and connectivity ...". We would add that the provision of adequate parking should be added to such a network study.

#### *Creek crossings*

The current supply of all-weather creek crossings for vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles is a significant issue for the entire city, especially during flood events.

We are unaware of plans for new bridges, where they will be located, including the almost 100-years old Stephens bridge. We have noted that the new Cookes Rd bridge has already been closed to traffic due to recent flooding. For background, in 2018, we spoke to Council's then engineer about the possibility of a more substantial bridge at that location which might be supplemented with some flood gate structures underneath to create a sizeable wetland just to the west of Cookes Rd. That engineer moved on and nothing resulted from our discussions.

We suggest that an overview of the city's existing and planned crossings would provide valuable advice to those making plans for the creeklands.

Some towns and cities have overpasses over roads and waterways that are reserved for bicycle and pedestrian traffic only. Again, testing ideas with the community - such as those interested in fun runs or cycling, etc. - would help greatly in planning.

### *Tree and shrub plantings*

We are confident that the plans handed out listing the native tree plantings along the banks of the creek will be carried out with appropriate species, guided no doubt by feedback from Angus Adair of the AURG and the Armidale Tree Group.

Plantings should not be so thick and close that they hide the creek, make access difficult or affect the safety of users of the precinct, including small children. We support the concept of mounded native plantings rather than flat areas.

We are supportive of the retention and/or planting of non-invasive exotic trees, particularly in areas where shade is required in summer and sunlight in winter. This would complement other street and open space plantings throughout the city. We believe it would be good for the planners to explain how the trees will be part of ARC's commitment to the Urban Forest initiative (R Single, pers. comm.).

### *Entrances to the Family Precinct*

We agree with the concept of an 'entrance' to the area near the skate park. It would be good to see this type of structure replicated at entrances to other sections of the creeklands, such as opposite the TAFE and on both sides of Dangar, Faulkner and Marsh Streets.

The use of stone slabs and plantings to make a visible entry point to the precinct from Dumaresq St seem appropriate.

### *Modifying existing weir*

Near the old weir, it is proposed to clean out the siltation and regenerate plants with a 'bush regeneration' style of planting.

Plans for modifying the existing weir in the pond region of Albion Park were not discussed at the meeting. There is an opportunity to trial several designs of weir modification to provide a means of holding water to create a billabong during low flow times and to release water during flood periods (various flood gate designs such as fish belly flaps and drum gates are described here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floodgate>). Perhaps local manufacturers could be invited to submit designs and costs for installation of several test flood gates adjacent to each other as an experiment. Testing various designs under realistic conditions could lead to the selection of a preferred design to create billabongs and constructed wetlands at many potential sites along the creeklands.

### *Erosion*

If there are areas where erosion is a problem, such as incised banks along the creek, we suggest using large granite boulders as a solution which will allow water to flow around them, creating a visually pleasing feature relevant to local geology and stream landscapes.

### *Structures and installations*

We agree that structures such as types of paths, lighting, seating benches and all other infrastructure should have a consistent 'look' along the entire Master Plan area. The Concept Plan's Furniture Palette shown to us was acceptable but perhaps could be improved if it were shown to more people for comment.

### *Safety*

We support the plans, wherever feasible, for sufficient 'sight lines' from the road into the creeklands area, without much low vegetation, to assist police in protecting users as well as minimising vandalism.

We suggest there is a need for appropriate emergency vehicle (SES, Police, Fire, etc.) access. Also, there may need to be provision made for CCTV installations - as became the situation soon after the installation of the new playground in Curtis Park.

### *Landscape design*

We are interested to meet with Hayden and his colleague Rebecca (based in Dorrigo) to discuss Landscape Design matters. Her skills in heritage landscapes, master planning, urban design and park design - as described on her website - (<https://www.myrtlestudiodesign.com/home>) seem quite relevant to improving the Concept Plan.

### *Pottery group*

Our association is supportive of the Pottery Club and their building. But, we are also of the view - as put to the Council Administrator in June 2017 - that there should be NO buildings constructed in the floodplain of the creeklands (e.g. we argued against the construction of the new motel). We understand the desire of the Pottery group to maintain their access to the building but it seems that vehicular access may be difficult and there may be issues about the quality of construction of the building. If this is the case, it seems to us that Council might work with the Club over time to find other more suitable premises above the floodplain.

### *Arch wall*

It was pointed out that the quality of construction of the arch wall on the south side of the swimming pool complex is poor and it may be necessary to rebuild it. We ask, why? What is it about this 'Spanish' design that is crucial for that precinct and Armidale? Perhaps there are important heritage reasons that we are not aware of.

An alternative would be to seek ideas from the community, including from First Nations peoples, for concepts to be put forward for some appropriate installations relevant to our landscape and region.

### *Use appropriate local stone and timber*

We would like to see the use of stone and timber reflect our local geology and timber resources. We like the idea of granite boulders - such as those used in the Arboretum - and even sawn granite used where appropriate. Also, the use of basalt would be appropriate and the re-use of basalt rocks currently lining the drains in Civic and Curtis Parks when they are removed (as recommended in the Master Plan).

### *Skatepark shade*

We agree that the shade over the skatepark is probably going to be just for respite from heat and not to shade the skaters because it is such an extensive area of concrete to cover.

### *Heritage considerations*

These include the old cable and wooden bridge, the pottery building, the archways and the historic trees planted as war memorials. We defer to the advice of our colleague, Graham Wilson on these matters.

### *Footbridges*

We endorse the focus on aesthetics that was mentioned by the consultants (and in the Master Plan) particularly in relation to bridge design. Ideally, we could have footbridges across the creek that are consistent all the way along the creeklands. We agree with the suggestion in the Creeklands Master Plan to replace the two footbridges in Civic and Curtis parks with aesthetically pleasing consistent designs. How these might relate to the historic cable and wooden bridge to the swimming pool complex, we are not sure.

### *Other design ideas*

- Consider boardwalks where appropriate rather than concrete walkways
- In Curtis Park, design a nature playground area which reflects local history as well as our natural heritage including our geology and ecology. (NB. In August 2021, we advised the GM and then Mayor that we had been contacted by [the designers](#) of the best nature play area we know of - the [Wild Play garden in Centennial Park](#) in Sydney. Perhaps it might be worth contacting them?).
- Indigenous history and art should be featured in design of features and interpretive signage.
- Sculptures and murals would be welcome additions as would labels for flora and signs describing local fauna.
- Facilities such as toilet and waste collection areas should be unobtrusive.
- There should be consistency in the design of pools, billabongs and constructed wetlands located within recreation areas.

### *TAFE involvement*

We support exploring opportunities for staff and students to provide feedback on these plans. It seems obvious to us that TAFE students might be able to carry out projects such as horticulture, bridge construction, welding, landscape design, etc. on the site to the benefit of all.

### *Other collaborators*

Backtrack boys and the Men's Shed might be useful collaborators in designing and/or constructing some structural items.

## **Civic Park considerations**

### *Duck pond*

We agree with the recommendation in the Creeklands Master Plan (p67) to remove the concrete bottomed duck pond. We do not support the decision by Council to retain it and build an underground drain at great expense.

We believe that any ponds like this should be constructed as off-stream features which are natural and alive. If a large, connected, off-stream body of water, such as a constructed wetland or billabong, were created closer to the creek downstream of Dangar Street, it would add to the concept of the 'Village Green' and give a focal point for that part of the creeklands by providing a large body of water right in the heart of the city, without increasing flood risk.

### *Labyrinth*

The survey of our members' thoughts about Stage 1 implementation plans found that we also do not agree with concreting the labyrinth with pavers. The Master Plan proposed using the basalt rocks - when they are removed from the creek channel (p67 of the Master Plan) - for this labyrinth. We also question the current location of the labyrinth - shouldn't it be in a quiet, contemplative part of the city?

### **Community consultation**

We feel it is important that there be an ongoing process of consultation across the community to develop sufficient 'ownership' before plans are finalised. If Council wished, our association would be willing to convene a workshop to canvas views from key community groups and individuals with interests in the creeklands and especially those who made submissions on the Creeklands Master Plan. We look forward to continuing the 'extensive community consultation' mentioned on ARC's Major Projects website.