President’s Report 2016

**What is the Baird government up to?** Friends of Callan Park (FOCP) continues to lobby the government to: establish a Trust to manage the entire site (Callan Park and Broughton Hall); and to reinstate mental health services to the site.

Unfortunately rumours persist that the Baird state government is intending to amend – or even repeal – the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002 in order to commercialise parts of Callan Park.

In September well-sourced rumours that such changes had already gone to Cabinet prompted FOCP to seek an urgent meeting with the Minister for the Environment, Mark Speakman. We were accorded a prompt meeting with advisors from the Minister’s office and the Office of Environment & Heritage, which manages Callan Park. The officials assured us that no changes were before Cabinet and that we (and the public) would be consulted about any proposed changes.

Nevertheless the rumours persist that the changes are being canvassed within government departments. In the absence of any serious moves to establish a government-funded Trust to manage Callan Park, we need to remain vigilant.

**The attempt to close Sydney College of the Arts – SCA** The University of Sydney claims that the Kirkbride campus is too expensive and is clinging to its plans to discontinue some Arts courses, to shrink numbers of SCA staff and students and move SCA to the main campus by 2018.

The occupation of Kirkbride by SCA has meant that this heritage complex has been protected. The federal and state governments extended grants totalling almost $20 million to the university to renovate Kirkbride 20 years ago and also handed over the title deeds to the Law School building in Phillip Street. That site was sold in 2012 for $45 million. It is disappointing that these funds were not directed to SCA at Kirkbride.

FOCP called an onsite public meeting in September in support for the student-staff campaign to keep SCA at Callan Park and continue to be supportive of that campaign. Despite the moral and educational case for the SCA to stay, the university appears intent on moving. It is another danger signal for the future of Callan Park.

**Postcards** In order to keep the pressure on the state government we have printed 2000 postcards addressed to the Premier highlighting the continued neglect and the need for a Trust – and not forgetting the scope for humane and much needed mental health services.

**Labor and the Trust** In better news, a fortnight ago Luke Foley, Labor leader of the Opposition in NSW Parliament, announced its continued support for the Callan Park Act and that if Labor won the next election Labor would uphold the establishment of a Trust to manage Callan Park. This is reassuring even if the devil will be in the detail. For FOCP two essential requirements of such a Trust are adequate government funding and the presence on the Trust board of genuine representatives from the local community.

**The mega-skate complex** You will recall that the Master Plan of 2011 provided for a skate park on Balmain Road. FOCP accepted this but when the Council plans went on public exhibition earlier this year we were concerned by the escalating cost to ratepayers, the size and the changed concept integrating entertainment and exhibition spaces. The Heritage Council objected that the proposed complex was too large and inappropriately located. The proposed development of a regional skate park in this location on the site would materially affect the heritage significance of Callan Park Conservation Area and Buildings and harm its picturesque landscape character.
Tours, tours, tours and Information stalls There appears to be an insatiable public interest in Callan Park and its history judging by the record number and variety of 19 tours we have guided in 2016 – participants from overseas, inter/intrastate and across Sydney, including historical societies, senior school students, Rotary, Probus, uni students, staff who worked on site, authors writing about patients.

We also welcomed the visits and tours by the Minister for Environment, Mark Speakman, and the Labor Shadow Minister for Heritage, Penny Sharpe. There can be no doubt that state MPs are aware of Callan Park and its value!

FOCP stalls were set up at Orange Grove markets, Leichhardt Long Lunch, Orange Grove Plaza, Seven Bridges Walk, Balmain Watch House, and Rozelle Festival.

History Week – best yet? This year’s event at NSW Writers’ Centre featured presentations by Sarah Luke and Dr Richard White on Frederick Norton Manning (the man responsible for establishing the Callan Park asylum) and some of the early patients. It was attended by over 100 people and followed by FOCP’s alfresco afternoon tea amid the trees then tours of Kirkbride. The talks were a revelation and set the bar higher for future events.

FOCP book: “Callan Park – Compassion and Conflict in the Asylum” The second print run of this inspiring book has now almost sold out. It has proved invaluable in bringing people (including politicians) up to speed on the history and value of Callan Park. Pages in the book originated from large exhibitions panels which have been displayed at FOCP tours/events and recently at Balmain Watch House where they will be exhibited again in December and January 2017.

Refugee Centre Leichhardt Council inaugurated a refugee welcome centre in building 504 (northern end of Wharf Road): it functions as a part-time advice/social centre; and storage for sporting equipment.

Waterfront Oval Inner West Council has set aside $2.4 million for upgrading Waterfront Oval and pavilion, including fast-track upgrade of lighting.

Laneway Festival – 12,500 people, Saturday 4 February 2017 FOCP will once again have an information booth at the event. Laneway management work cooperatively with FOCP to minimize the site impact and monitor DA conditions including notifications to nearby residents. Laneway wants to continue this successful event and FOCP has strongly suggested to both Council and Laneway that when the new DA for 2018 is renegotiated in mid 2017 that for the first time Laneway pays a commercial fee for use of this extraordinary heritage landscape.

Traffic and Parking in Callan Park FOCP continues to have input into discussions about traffic problems on site, and concerns about Council’s proposed traffic and parking plan (which includes more parking for Waterfront Oval crossing the Bay Run).

University of Tasmania (UTas) DA for refurbishment of the building is in progress. 500 students plus weekend training programs and summer schools are held at the site. Council endorsed UTas DA despite no specific parking (additional to the modest hospital carpark – now inadequate). UTas recognises the impact of parking by student/staff on streets / Callan Park, convened a community meeting and is now in discussion with Council.

Bi-monthly meetings with Council FOCP welcomes regular meetings with the Administrator and Council. At the October meeting FOCP expressed concerns that Callan Park is the default/free parking space for increasing activities on the LPAC/Lilyfield peninsula where no major facility or traffic flow plan exists.

Miscellany Monthly meetings for general FOCP members continue to be held in the NSW Writers’ Centre. The executive continues to meet with Inner West Council, Office of Environment and Heritage, and Members of Parliament to discuss a range of DAs and other matters to do with the site.

May I express my thanks to the volunteers, the executive, and all who attend monthly meetings and so generously help us out with tasks such as leafletting and letterboxing.

DONATIONS ALWAYS WELCOME TO ASSIST OUR EFFORTS:

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