

Community Consultation
Victoria Park Central Gardens Design
GPO Box 2252
Adelaide SA 5001

13th November 2012

Dear Sir or Madam,

The South East City Residents Association (SECRA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Victoria Park Central Gardens Design*. Since its inception, SECRA has been a passionate advocate for the Adelaide Park Lands, with a particular interest in those parks which adjoin our neighbourhood.

At a recent workshop on the Victoria Park Central Gardens Design, consultant James Hayter confirmed what residents and other regular park users have known for years; that Victoria Park is the most “used” park in the Park Lands for individual informal recreation. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Close proximity to residential areas to the south, east, and west
- Victoria Park was for most of its history a horse race track, and as such lent itself to the idea of walking or running a circuit on the grass track. People are now using the new fitness circuit but others use other longer circuits (up to 3.5 km)
- The sense of open space (it has not, until recently, been bisected by bitumen roads)
- The feeling of safety – you can see who is coming
- The connection with nature through the presence of mature eucalypts which attract birds, the native grasses and lilies, the creek.
- The views to the hills and the city skyline
- Its flexibility and informality. Many activities can be accommodated without needing elaborate infrastructure.
- Its permeability: you can enter the park from most directions.

Any landscaping should take into account these qualities and enhance them.

At the recent workshop representatives of the bicycle clubs now using Victoria Park described the area to be landscaped as a “thoroughfare”, confirming what SECRA has always argued: that the recent construction of two straight bitumen roads/paths across the park has degraded the amenity of the Park by creating a division where none previously existed (the previous bicycle path was “low key”). It has made the Park seem smaller. **Any landscaping between the paths must “knit” the Park back into one entity and return the feeling of boundless space.**

For this reason (and for the reasons listed above) we make the following suggestions:

- The landscaping and design elements must mitigate the effect of the new bitumen paths. It must “soften” the effect of straight lines by using curves both in plantings (mature native trees with low shrubs); comfortable benches (with backs); interactive art (like the Rundle Mall pigs. Nothing to do with sport); perhaps, a fountain (the curves of flowing water); low grassy contoured mounds (that people can lie against and look at the hills); curving “soft” paths (only where necessary – there are enough paths in Victoria Park). The landscaping must be open and informal.
- It must connect with – and spill over into - the two “halves” of the Park. This reinforces the idea that Victoria Park is one entity to be shared by all. It is not a series of fiefdoms to be fought over (and fenced off). This landscaping is not a “bone” to be thrown to those who use the Park for sitting and resting and enjoying the views and the peace and quiet of a large green space in an increasingly built-up built landscape. The rest of the Park should take on elements of the landscaping. There should be other places in the Park to sit and rest and enjoy the views.
- The landscaping should have the effect of slowing down cyclists who traverse the Park. Research has shown that people coming and going slows down traffic. The landscaping should not turn its back on the cycle and pedestrian paths. With increased numbers of pedestrians there will be a need to have signage advising that it is a shared path and cyclists should slow down and watch out for pedestrians. Shared paths do not suit the hard-of-hearing and the frail aged.
- It should also not be yet another “event” space. It should be given over to individual informal recreation (reading, chatting to friends, watching children play, enjoying a coffee (bought , perhaps, from a quiet (no noisy generator) café de wheels), taking in the view; a resting place also for those who have been using the Park for more “active” informal recreation.
- To reinforce the sense of contemplation and rest we believe that the design shouldn’t include: barbecues (which encourage large groups partying); petanque and table tennis, (for the same reason); picnic tables; activities that require storage sheds; toilets. There could be temporary pop-up art installations but they shouldn’t interfere with the space’s primary purpose which is to “get away” from the noise and bustle (dare we say “vibrancy”?) of the city. They shouldn’t involve the use of a public address system which, like bitumen, is a creeping menace to the Park Lands.
- We see this as a daylight space so it doesn’t need extra lighting. Victoria Park is one of the few places in the city where you can see the stars. The existing lighting on the southern path should be sufficient.

- Fixed shelters should not be provided as they could reduce safety for both those using the landscaped area and those cycling past it. It should remain a very open area. Mature trees should be planted to provide shade in lieu of shelters.
- Many residents would prefer native plantings (which could connect with remnant vegetation and butterfly habitat already present in the Park) but it is essential that any exotic plants should not be able to colonise other areas of the Park, and in particular the fenced-off area of remnant vegetation area to the south. It might be nice to have a sensory garden with scented plants.
- If there is a need for public toilets because of increased use of the Park these should be located at the Fullarton Road boundary of the Park and not within the Park.

We expect the Adelaide City Council to provide enough money and supervision to do the job properly. The failure to create playing fields (after a year of fences, trucks and dust) has frustrated Park users.

We suggest that Council provide regular information via its website on progress at the Park (including an explanation of why fences are being put up and how long they will stay).

We believe that Council should also provide the opportunity for Victoria Park users to meet to discuss how best we can share the Park.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Nimmo
Hon. Secretary
SECRA