INTRODUCTION

When urban open space is perceived as ‘green infrastructure’ essential to the natural functioning of a city’s ecological, sociocultural and economic systems, its contributions can be measured and are valued. Value comes in many forms with recognition that large scale parklands are measured in different ‘currencies’ by different constituencies. These values and some example measures include: the parklands’ economic land value (calculated by the amount of money the land is worth if sold on the market), social value (usage levels, community capacity to protect the open space from potential development, social inclusion), cultural worth (diverse historical and current assets, social cohesion metrics), educational; health and developmental value (personal health metrics, recreation and play opportunities, relationship to nature) environmental value (natural respite area, aesthetic greening of urban areas, stewardship), ecological worth (air, water, flora and fauna contribution to the biosphere) and emotional or spiritual value (measured by advocacy, public support and sense of ownership, usage, mental well-being, shared public consciousness and meaning of the place).

Traditionally, planners, landscape architects and other design professionals use their disciplinary knowledge and expertise to value, design and manage public open space. Decision-makers however, often opt for ‘the highest and best use paradigm’ when valuing open space, that is, indicating its worth as being equivalent to its potential developable land value. In contrast, citizens value parks more broadly and translate their value into socially constructed meanings based on their experience with them, and their connection to that place and to nature. This paper presents a theoretical understanding of value and attachment to urban open space and further unpacks this understanding based on a contemporary Australian context using recent practical research completed in western Sydney.

People and Parks: the Real Value of Open Space in Western Sydney, an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant with the Land Management Branch of the NSW Department of Planning, was undertaken by the authors between 2006 and 2010. The research reveals the collective community values of open space as expressed by the people who live, play and work near the Western Sydney Parklands (WSP) in the Sydney metropolitan basin. The research also reveals the level of awareness and the degree to which people feel attached or connected with the Parklands and identifies several issues that park designers, planners and managers will have to face in order to ensure the Parklands is valued in perpetuity by its stakeholders given their different value sets and measures as noted above. The research included triangulated qualitative methods of data collection alongside a quantitative survey with 1106 face-to-face questionnaires with the general public in and near the Western Sydney Parklands. This paper analyses that survey data and helps build an understanding of the awareness of, attitudes, value sets and sense of attachment of parks users to regional-scale parklands. It also documents the preferences for certain facilities, activities and management of these places.

In the context of metropolitan strategic planning, urban park managers are realising they need more than the usual user metrics to effectively design and administer parklands. They need a deeper understanding of the attitudes and motivations of parks users in order to understand what value people place on open space and how their attachment to it will manifest. The findings from this research remind us about the multiple ways to conceptualise urban open space and the real value of green infrastructure in a metropolitan area.

CASE STUDY OF THE WESTERN SYDNEY PARKLANDS

The Western Sydney Parklands is the largest urban parklands in the southern hemisphere being an open space corridor extending 27 km north to south and encompassing approximately 5,280 contiguous hectares of land which has been assembled by the NSW State Government over the past 30 years. Figure 1 highlights the size and placement of the WSP in its metropolitan context. Two major growth centres are planned at the north and south ends of the Parklands which will contribute further to the population of western Sydney and position the Western Sydney Parklands as the “Central Park” of the west.
The survey process, as mentioned, collected 1106 responses to a face-to-face questionnaire and was conducted at ten locations within the WSP (and as seen in Figure 2) and four locations nearby. The survey team consisted of 20 University of New South Wales Planning and Landscape Architecture students. They had intensive training sessions to prepare them for interviewing in the field and to ensure that the survey was administered rigorously, ethically and consistently. All responses were coded and entered into a statistical package for social science research (SPSS). All percentages in this paper have been rounded to the nearest whole number. This paper analyses the findings using whole count tables, comparative frequencies and cross-tabulations. [The People and Parks research was approved by the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee.]

The quantitative survey results presented herein are complemented with qualitative ‘quotable quotes’ gathered through a series of focused discussion groups held with WSP stakeholders. These quotes are identified throughout the paper in italics.
VALUE OF URBAN OPEN SPACE

Over the previous 160 year time period, the urban park/open space has gone several transformations, directly in response to parallel social and economic changes and milieu of the cities in which they are located. Urban park planning and design paralleled the rise of urban planning, which introduced classification and valuation of open space as a required, quantifiable category of land use that was mandated for provision within modern city planning doctrines. The urban park of the 21st century has evolved from a 19th century model that imagined these shared open spaces in cities providing a needed antidote to what had become generally unhealthy and degraded city environments as a result of the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of the 18th century.

Landscape historian, Galen Cranz (1982), originally identified four specific periods of park development in the US since the mid-1800s through to today which reflect how and why parks were valued over time. These time periods generally coincide with the park development patterns in Australia, and they include:

- **The Pleasure Ground era (1850-1900)** saw new city spaces being designed to invite in a broad cross-section of society, and to create a more egalitarian social environment, in contrast to the private hunting and reserves that were the exclusive domain for recreation of royalty and their invited guests. This urban park is typified by New York’s Central and Prospect Parks, London’s Hyde and Kensington Parks, and Sydney’s own Centennial Park. Many people view these as pastoral, and picturesque models of what an urban park should be. These areas were often set aside on sites that were considered to be undesirable for development. Ironically, once developed, these parklands spurred phenomenal increases in real estate values, as was the case with Central Park in New York City.

- **The Reform Park period (1900-1930)** was largely instigated by the social work activists of the day and introduced structured playgrounds, sandpits, wading pools, etc. into community-based centres. Programmed activities catered for the children of people who worked in the factories. Children and families were the main users of these parks.

- **During the Recreation Facilities period (1930-1965)** there was increasing residential development in the suburbs development and newly introduced planning standards mandated the provision of public parks that catered for “recreation” rather than “play”. Many of the older city parks, now more integrated into the fabric of the city as a result of urban expansion, were transformed to include leisure-based buildings and facilities to support organized sport and recreation activities.

- **The Open Space System era (1965-1985)** saw city planning departments begin to think about a spectrum of types of parks offering a range of passive and active recreation opportunities throughout a city. New residential development on the fringes of urban areas reserved identified open space that was set aside and designed to cater for more informal leisure pastimes. Playing fields and associated infrastructure were integrated into these parks but were less of a feature than during the previous era.

Since the 1990s or so, the approach to new parkland development still engages local government planners but has begun to rely more on public/private partnerships in delivering the level of provision, programming, maintenance and service expected by city residents. Many new urban parks have emerged from post-industrial sites and/or brownfield sites that have required massive remediation prior to redevelopment. The Sydney Olympic Parklands is a major Australian example of this contemporary approach to urban parkland design and delivery. Being larger and more costly to develop means these parklands must embody a wide range of values and opportunities to attract park users as they become major destinations for family and individual recreation and leisure activities.

For another 10-15 years, urban parks had either a sustainability focus with an emphasis on ecological design (Cranz 2008) or what others identified as the “corporatization” or “privatization” emphasis in the management of urban open space (Madden, 2010; Sorkin 1992; Low 2006). Contemporary park planning and management has continued to focus on design for sustainability but now also values the connection between environmental and human health. Open space planning and design increasingly features the need for parks to stimulate and support environments for more active lifestyles, for physical and psychological restoration, for food production and increased biodiversity. Park theorists and researchers, Ward-Thompson (2008), Worpole (2005), the Trust for Public Land in the United States and the now defunct CABESpace emphasise social and cultural values as well as the green infrastructure values inherent in urban open space provision. These land holdings continually face the political and economic challenges of land availability and funding for future urban growth as well as the need for environmentally sustainable urban centres. More recently, urban open space is being considered for its potential to assist cities in boosting their resilience and capacity to adapt to new weather conditions in the face of climate change.
It is within this changing and complex values framework that open space planning, design and management operates. As history has shown, how we reside, work, transit through, and play together will be greatly enhanced by the quality of the open space that is provided throughout the city. In response to this, the findings from the People and Parks research identifies how different urban dwellers engage with and value public open space and how large scale open spaces could respond to what the varying constituencies value in the parklands. Analysis of some of the relevant survey questions are presented in the following sections.

RESEARCH RESULTS: VALUE OF PARKS GENERALLY

How valued are parks in general?

Generally, parks are highly valued with 95% of respondents describing parks as ‘very important’ (74%) or ‘important’ (21%). Only 5% said parks were somewhat or not important to them. Though parks are valued equally by men and women, there are some interesting relationships able to be drawn between demographics and park appreciation:

The age group found to value parks most was 55–74 years, followed by those aged 35–54 years. The age group valuing parks the least were people aged 75+ years. Those living with children typically feel parks are more important and have higher visitation rates than those with no children under the age of 18 living in the household. However, despite this trend, the more people living in a household, the less they value parks. Those who had lived in their postcode area for more than 10 years valued parks and open spaces the most, with 97% of these respondents ranking parks as very important. Ninety-two percent (92%) of people who had lived in their postcode area for less than a year described parks as very important, still a significant majority.

Are different types of parks valued more than others?

According to the survey data, most types of parks (local parks, nature reserves and state/national parks) are valued relatively equally, with over 90% of respondents ranking them as being very important or important. Sports fields were not valued quite as highly, with 87% of respondents ranking them ‘very important’ or ‘important’.

How often do people visit parks?

Park management authorities—local government departments, state or national agencies—generally calibrate the level of the community’s valuing of open space by measuring its use, typically ascertained by the occasional recreation use surveys along with the physical evidence of well-worn areas of parks that require recurring maintenance and hence, budget allocations. Level of use is one good indicator of the value of an open space. When looking at park visitation rates generally, about 50% of respondents (N= 1106) use a park frequently or very frequently (at least once per week) while the other 50% do not use parks much at all (less than 2 times per month or never). There is a link between age and how frequently an individual visits a park. Younger people (18-24 years) visit parks at less frequently than all other age groups. Respondents aged 75+ years are either very frequent park users (25%) or use parks very infrequently (less than once a month) or never (75%). See Figure 3 below.

![Figure 3: Visitation Rates/Level of Use.](image-url)
When visitation rates are considered against household sizes, it is evident that the more people there are living in a house, the more frequently they visit parks. That is, smaller households tend to use parks less frequently.

It was found that people with children under the age of 18 years in their households typically value parks more than those without children. A similar trend can be found between the number of children in a household and frequency of park visitation. As can be seen in Figure 4 below, the more children there are living in a household, the more frequently parks are visited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children in household</th>
<th>Percentage of households that visit parks more than once per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4: Use of parks by number of children in a household.*

**What built features do people value in a park?**

Respondents valued most built features and facilities to some degree, though it was stressed that they must not jeopardise the ability of visitors to enjoy the natural environment. People especially value parking in parklands, with over 65% ranking it ‘very important’. This statistic is consistent with the finding that most park visitors travel to and from the destination by car. One of the most common reasons respondents visited parks was to partake in a social event, and hence it is understandable that picnic facilities are a highly valued feature of parks. Eighty-five percent (85%) of respondents felt that picnic facilities such as barbecues and shaded areas were important or very important. According to those surveyed, less important features are camping sites, cafes and interpretive/educational facilities. The least important feature was off-leash dog areas. The ‘other’ highly valued built features included security measures, specialist sporting facilities, and amenities such as toilets and shade structures.

*Figure 5: Value of built features in a park.*

**What do people value in parks’ management?**

In order to determine what roles people expect parks to fulfil, respondents were asked to describe the importance of certain park planning and management activities.

Reflecting a growing public awareness of environmental issues, there was an almost unanimous response in favour of preserving open space to protect wildlife and vegetation. In total, 95% of respondents described environmental protection as ‘very important’ or important. With global warming and climate change on the
political and social agenda, it is unsurprising that people highly value and want to ensure the ongoing protection of flora and fauna. Cities are witnessing rapid urban sprawl whereby large parcels of open land tracts are being reclaimed and used for development. Urban living is without a doubt fast-paced, hectic and stressful. Parklands offers people respite from the negative aspects of urban environments.

People value parks for social reasons and the survey respondents support this position by indicating the importance of free-of-charge activities. Free events enable the opportunity to engage in activities within the parklands and foster social interaction with the entire community. This was particularly supported by larger households. “How can we charge people to use the park – they’ve already paid for it through their taxes”. The alternative view, seen to be less important, sees some people supporting activities that generate money for the park, such as markets, cafes or accommodation “This is like a business – it’s got to be able to stand on its own two feet”. People also thought it was important to provide programmed activities for park users such as school groups, holiday programs and nature groups.

People also value parks for their cultural significance and contribution to urban life. Sydney is a culturally diverse city and so it is unsurprising that the promotion of culture is high valued by the survey respondents. A significant proportion of them (71%) felt it was important that parks promote cultural events such as festivals and theatre performances. Approximately three-quarters of survey respondents aged 18-74 also suggested that protecting and interpreting Aboriginal culture in the landscape as a significant feature of Australia's heritage is ‘important’ or ‘very important’. It is interesting to note, on the contrary, only 56% of 75+ year old respondents indicated the same level of importance for protecting Indigenous culture in parks.

![Figure 6: The value of parks planning and management activities](image)

**Does living near a park increase property prices?**

Residential housing patterns and development are often influenced by park placement and development. Survey respondents were asked to what extent they thought living near a park increased the value of a property. Over three-quarters of the respondents (N=1099) indicated that property values increase or greatly increase – by living near a park. This suggests that some people place value on the proximity of housing to quality open space. It may have also been an influencing factor in the purchase of their homes. The amenities that would be appealing to people who live within close proximity to a parklands include the ecological benefits such as improved air and water quality, closeness to (passive and active) recreational activities, the views for those adjacent to the parklands, the presence of nature, low density living and access to the range of venues and facilities located within the Parklands. The percentage of respondents who believed property values do not increase the closer they are located to parks was only 11% - they raised the issue of easy access to adjacent property and associated crime as reasons for their perspective.
What are people’s positive park experiences?

The most commonly described positive experience people had in a park was a social event (33%), a finding supported by the large percentage of respondents who visit parks with family and friends. It is noted that 20% of respondents attributed their most positive experience in a park to simply being immersed in nature. Other positive experiences in order of mention included ‘well-being’, ‘a physical activity’ and ‘participating in a sporting activity’. Figure 8 illustrates these findings.

What makes parks have any special meaning for people?

Some 500 park users indicated that their most frequented location in the WSP held some special meaning for them. The graph below in Figure 9 indicates some of the key qualities that make parks special for people. One quarter of respondents identified that participating in an activity in a park makes it special for them. This supports existing research that indicates parks and open space support health and well-being by being a destination whereby people can engage in active recreation or leisurely activities. Very few people felt that parks were special because they could be alone or as a place from which they could escape urban life.

People aged 35-54 and those older than 75 years thought that parks were special firstly because they were places to socialise (and placed less emphasis on participating in an activity in parks). This suggests that parks are an avenue for community capacity building and where social interaction can occur – hence addressing issues of social isolation which is an issue amongst some populations – especially the elderly. As one research participant noted: “social value is the number one value for a park...they are people places and that’s what they are for”.

Figure 7: The economic property value of living near a park

Figure 8: Positive experiences in parks.

Figure 9: What makes parks special for people?
Interestingly there were some gender differences expressed in how people perceive the “specialness” of parks. A higher percentage of women than men identified ‘memories’ as the characteristic that makes a park special. Men think that ‘participating in an activity’ at a park gives specific locations special meaning.

![Figure 9: Special meaning associated with WSP.](image)

**What are people’s negative park experiences?**

People value the time they spend in parks and do not want to have their experience negatively influenced by others. The most common negative experience in a park, mentioned by 22% of respondents, was undesirable behaviour by other park users. This included experiencing aggressive or antisocial behaviour, feeling unsafe or overcrowding. The maintenance of parks was also a commonly listed negative experience with 20% of respondents commenting on rubbish and another 17% on unusable or broken park amenities (e.g. benches, toilets, BBQs, walking paths) as factors which contributed to a negative park experience.

![Figure 10: Negative experiences in parks.](image)
RESEARCH RESULTS: PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES FOR THE WESTERN SYDNEY PARKLANDS

The vision of a great parklands in Sydney’s west has been a component of metropolitan master plans for many decades. Much of the land now assembled in the WSP was identified in the ‘green girdle’ of the Cumberland County Plan of 1949, to be gradually acquired and land banked in anticipation of Sydney's growth into the western areas (Evans and Freestone 2009). Subsequently, the WSP has been identified in other relevant legislation, policy documents and regulations including The Sydney Region Outline Plan of 1968; the 2004 The Western Parklands Management Vision document; the Western Sydney Parklands Act enacted in 2008 (which legally established the Western Sydney Parklands and the Western Sydney Parklands Trust which manages a majority of the Parklands); the 2009 State Environmental Planning Policy (Western Sydney Parklands; and the 2010 Western Sydney Parklands Plan of Management 2020 (which sets out the strategic directions for the Parklands for the next 10 years). The history of the Western Sydney Parklands demonstrates many extrinsic and intrinsic values as initially articulated in the visioning planning documents that preceded its gazettal (URS 2004) and the management plan that was issued more recently (WSP Trust 2010).

The previous section of this paper identified how the general public values parks and open space. This perspective (i.e. that of the general public) will need to be regularly consulted to ensure that relevant local governments; governing bodies (e.g. National Parks and Wildlife, adjacent local Councils NSW Treasury); politicians; current and future WSP venue operators; and, importantly, the recently established WSP Trust, are informed about the attitudes, aspirations, motivations of all stakeholders and what value they place on this open space corridor.

Value Sets

It is fair to say that the Western Sydney Parklands is and will be valued for different reasons by different people. The value of parks (in theory) and the views of the People and Parks survey respondents (in reality) pose numerous planning and management challenges for the WSP into the future. Tension and potential conflict arise from competing interests, and differing attitudes of various constituencies about the value of the Parklands. For example, local councils versus state government; organised sporting groups versus environmental groups; adjacent residents versus market gardeners, etc. Values being debated include economic; environmental; ecological; social; health and personal development; cultural; educational; and emotional or spiritual values—all inherent in aspects of the landholdings that now comprise the WSP.

Economically, the NSW State Government has spent over $400 million in the past 30 years to incrementally acquire the lands that were eventually consolidated into the WSP. However, its current land and asset value extends far beyond the sum total of these acquisitions. An actual land valuation is possible for its property value alone. As well as the land values of the corridor, there are commercial ventures and arrangements within the site that contribute to the economic viability of the WSP as a parkland that, as noted in its 2010 Plan of Management, will need to be self-supporting into the future.

The ecological value that people place on the WSP is in part attributed to the remnant vegetation of the Cumberland Plain Woodland, Sydney Coastal River Flat Forest, Western Sydney Dry Rainforest and the Cooks River/Castleleagh Ironbark Forest located within the boundaries of the Parklands. The conservation of remnant bushland “provides a way to maintain the landscape (and)…gives a feel for what the Cumberland Plains might have been like”. We’re noticing more interest with all the talk of global warming and climate change”.

Environmental values, evident in the existing natural and ecological systems throughout the corridor, are enhanced by the value of the environmental services provided by this significant ‘green infrastructure’. The environmental value of the WSP includes the greening of a high growth centre in the Sydney metropolitan basin. “Western Sydney Parklands – [it’s] the city’s backyard”. There is value in people having a connection with nature. “Hopefully, we can still be greening in 25 years”. The remediation of post-industrial sites and active environmental education centres such as the one at the Eastern Creek landfill site are other examples of how environmental values are apparent in various operations throughout the Parklands.

As local groups lobby for support to develop initiatives such community gardens or bush regeneration programs, it is then that the value of parks to support social cohesion and/or social capital becomes apparent. These are expressions of a ‘sense of ownership’ or ‘stewardship’ for the open space and may help educate future generations about nature and fostering a connection with it, having health and developmental value for young people. “Kids don’t even know what a chook farm is – they think chooks come from Woolworths”.


The social and cultural value of the WSP should not be under estimated. Opportunities for recreation and social interaction, valuable in and of themselves, also support cultural diversity and contribute to social cohesion. The Parklands may play an increasing role in building and nourishing Western Sydney’s cultural (Indigenous and European) fabric and in turn may help foster a sense of belonging and connectedness to the larger community. “The history of an area cannot be erased by a park – it should be incorporated”.

Additionally, there are many spiritual values in the Parklands corridor emanating from its Indigenous cultural significance of the ridgeline paths and creekside meeting places and to its historic associations with early European settlement. Research participants also just liked ‘knowing it was there’. It has inherent emotional ties and connection to the Australian landscape for some park users. As one participant noted: “A park offers an affordable escape from the house, the city, the world”.

Awareness is the First Step in Community Ownership

Figure 2 above indicated the current major destinations of interest within the Parklands. Over half the people surveyed (54%) had not heard of the Western Sydney Parklands. Respondents were asked to identify any locations they knew were a part of the WSP – not one site was known to be in the Western Sydney Parklands by more than 25% of respondents. It is interesting to note that despite many people not knowing that locations were part of the WSP, visitation rates to these were relatively high. For example, 48% of all respondents (528 people) had visited Fairfield City Farm, but only 23% were aware that it was part of the WSP. A likely explanation for this unusual finding is that, while many of the locations within the Parklands have been around for many years, the concept of the WSP is relatively new. The WSP Trust and relevant governing bodies will need to “get the Parklands into people’s mental maps” and “make it a people’s park.” There is a realisation that open space such as this is often a battleground for competing interests and is something that can be too easily sold off for short term economic gain.

Competing Interests

Accommodating the diversity of interests and attempting to meet the need and preferences of all parties with a vested interest, including the cultural and social groups, in the future development will prove to be one of the biggest challenges facing the Western Sydney Parklands. Managing them will require financial resources and negotiation. Political pressures and lobby power from specialist groups may have an impact on governance. Power relations within the community may shift between a series of different interest groups. Some of these groups will be process-oriented (how government is operating) and others worried about community outcomes (what government produces).

A balancing of the traditional ideas of a parklands and new, less conventional conceptions of what the WSP may become given the different value sets of its stakeholders. This includes the provision of formal and informal leisure and recreational spaces, ensuring conservation values whilst allowing access to the Parklands.

Development and Funding Pressures

One of the greatest challenges for the WSP Trust will be to manage the Parklands so that it can remain intact, in perpetuity. This includes ensuring that small sections of the WSP are not sold off for profitable urban development (its highest and best use) and financial windfall. A strong sense of community will and community capacity can create a sense of ownership of the park and thus protect it from “a death by 1000 cuts”.

An economic plan to sustain the Parklands in perpetuity is required. Local councils will not individually be able to maintain the WSP and hence, costs will restrict all activity in the future. The interest and commitment of the NSW government and NSW Treasury in this infrastructure is crucial. To develop something the size of the WSP considerable political will balanced with commercial interests and identification of a potential income stream to fund capital works and recurrent costs is required. This presents the ‘opportunity’ and requirement for park business activities or more public-private partnerships to be pursued.

As the WSP corridor faces the challenge of being self-funding, the political will to protect and preserve this corridor of Parklands will rely on an informed and engaged electorate, in proximity to the WSP, who cares about its continued existence. They will necessarily have to persuade and bring pressure to bear upon state and local politicians in the decision-making that will surround the WSP.

Whilst different commercial venues help financially sustain a park such as this, exploring ideas of business opportunities in the WSP, open space values must be balanced between environmentalism and
commercialism. In addition to this ideological perspective, different land uses in adjacent sections of the WSP have the potential for broader community conflict; sharing the corridor with new access and uses may prove to be a challenge as they may be incompatible with existing infrastructure (such as the AGL gas pipelines, electricity powerlines, Prospect Reservoir). Additionally, the management of public versus private spaces along the borders may also be a challenge. These are issues raised in the current Plan of Management and will continue to be a challenge.

Consultation and Collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration between the state government, local governments and the public will be integral to the planning, governance and ultimate success of the Parklands. As part of this collaboration, public involvement and stakeholder consultation at all levels of government is seen as an absolute necessity for co-governance of a parklands of this scale. Community consultation is paramount; collaboration is critical.

Bureaucracy and Governance

Participants in the People and Parks discussion groups were concerned that economic reductionism, by governments and park authorities, may become a preoccupation which often leads to the stifling of ideas and a shut-down by decision-makers who should be open to new approaches and solutions. Multidisciplinary knowledge and holistic policy approaches to planning and a convergence of imaginations must be prioritised in order to shape the future of the Parklands. As one participant suggested, “large-scale urban projects have in the past had problems with the juggernaut of bureaucracy”.

The overall management of the WSP is a major concern of many public and private stakeholders. The relationship between the Trust, the State government and local councils will need to be carefully thought out and managed. Additionally, local council administrations may focus on local matters of concern rather than the big issues spanning the three local government areas through which the park runs. A fragmented view of the WSP will make the management of the area difficult – due in part to the sheer scale of the site. If the WSP is treated as a series of separate entities there may not be a strong unified goal to protect the park. Marketing the Parklands as a ‘whole’ to a variety of stakeholders remains a challenge.

Future Uncertainty

A major concern for most research participants is the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Parklands. As one research participant noted: “a worry to us is the unknown”. The big concern is the structure, aims and management of the Trust and by default, the WSP’s planning process, funding, development and staging, management, and operations. The value of parks in general has a history from which planners and designers can learn. Competing values and pressures on this Parklands is here to stay but still, the future is uncertain. “Big questions need big answers” and “the future value of the Park[lands] is unknown yet”.

CONCLUSION

Its scale and its prominence in the region of Sydney that is slated for major population growth over the next 20 to 30 years, means the WSP will continue to grow in importance as an open space resource for Western Sydney. The success of its ongoing management and evolution of development will rely on metropolitan planning frameworks that recognise the multiple values of metropolitan open space in contemporary urban life, something which is not being done in recent metropolitan planning documents. Importantly, the perspectives of residents in Western Sydney must continue to be regularly elicited and their views factored into decision making so that the Parklands can evolve to become a highly valued open space resource.

REFERENCES


