

Trust Action: North Eveleigh

by Graham Quint

In early 2009, NSW Planning Minister Kristina Keneally approved the North Eveleigh Concept Plan.

North Eveleigh is part of the former Eveleigh Railway Workshops at Redfern on the Sydney University (northern) side of the main railway lines near Redfern Railway Station. Whereas South Eveleigh was dedicated to foundries, metal forging and locomotive manufacture and servicing, North Eveleigh was focused on carriage construction and maintenance involving predominantly carpentry, upholstery, painting and more simple metal work.

The original Carriage Workshops at North Eveleigh have been very successfully developed into 'Carriageworks', a new home for contemporary arts in Sydney.

Remaining traditional trades are now confined to the Blacksmith's shop and the Large Erecting Shop at South Eveleigh. However, a number of very significant and historic buildings and railway infrastructure have survived to date at North Eveleigh. The Trust is concerned to ensure that these are conserved, featured and re-used at North Eveleigh.

There have been some improvements to the Concept Plan since its public exhibition, in terms of creation of parks, lowering of some building heights and retention of heritage listed buildings.

However, the proposed siting of a row of high rise commercial buildings across the connecting railway lines (fan of tracks) at the Redfern Railway Station end of the site prevents any possible true railway heritage use of the site.

The various heritage buildings will be adapted for other uses and the fan of railway tracks will be interpreted only. The Concept Plan misses opportunities to mix and match commercial, residential and historic uses. From a heritage viewpoint the plan is limited to keeping only building shells and erecting interpretative signage etc and a site inspection by the Trust has confirmed that the Concept Plan is only 'two-dimensional', not really responding to the sites terrain, opportunities and constraints. The main entrance is proposed to remain at the far western end of the site, requiring all traffic to turn in either direction into Lawson Street (the main bicycle access route into the city of Sydney).

This very busy entrance will then also be the only entrance to the park that has been created for local residents' use. An alternative entrance opposite Golden Grove Road connecting across Lawson Street with traffic lights, could feed traffic to and from the site without impacting on the Lawson Street cycleway. The new development could be designed to incorporate an entrance at the street level to the second storey of new development.

The Concept Plan proposes six closely-spaced 8-storey office buildings facing one another and resembling a row of dominoes.

A curtain of joined buildings in an east-west line following the railway tracks would have given interesting views across the railway land to south and to the conservation areas of Darlington



The only remaining in-situ 'traverse' at Eveleigh, used to transport carriages between tracks.
Photo - Graham Quint

to the north. But with the current Concept Plan, each building will simply have views across to the next building and take little advantage of this wonderful site.

Perhaps with a little design ingenuity the buildings could be raised to allow pedestrian access below and the retention of the train tracks embedded safely in the new surface.

The existing historic buildings sit on turpentine timber piers going down deep into the sands to form a stable foundation. There is to be parking for eight hundred cars and this raises questions in terms of digging into contaminated sand.

The National Trust also has concerns on the status of the various historic underground railway tunnels on the site, (at least one still in active use). Could these be utilised to allow for rail access to the site to reduce the pressures for car parking and the impacts of massively upgrading historic Redfern Railway Station?

Concept Plans and designs for North Eveleigh need to address all the heritage impacts and whether the new development sympathetically fits in with, and takes advantage of, the site's extraordinary history, existing facilities and landform.

'Carriageworks', and its architects Tonkin Zulaikha Greer received both the Architecture Award for Public Buildings as well as the top Greenway Award for Heritage at the Australian Institute of Architects' NSW Architecture Awards. The jury's comments on these awards could also be developed into positive guidelines for development on the remaining North Eveleigh site:

"The Eveleigh Carriage Workshops are of national cultural significance as part of the largest intact, high quality workshop site from the steam era in Australia. It has now been opened to the public in a creative new way. This landmark site has been given new life without forsaking the old - its 1888 industrial heritage clearly evident through the retention of nearly all the significant fabric and equipment extant at the time of adaptation. The carriages have gone, but not the cranes, the rails and the ability to read its form and former function. Existing elements retain their patina of age..."

To view the concept plan visit www.planning.nsw.gov.au/asp/pdf/08_0015_nth_eveleigh_ppr_plan_land_use.pdf