



Queensland Greens
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Comments on the design features and design guidelines for the North Bank Proposal from the Queensland Greens

The Queensland Greens support revitalisation of the public spaces along the river from North Quay to the QUT Gardens Point area. The area needs to be upgraded for the safety and security of cyclists who use this area to commute. The region is also of immense built and natural heritage significance to the city of Brisbane and in fact to the whole state.

Unfortunately the existing government design features and guidelines contain intrinsic inconsistencies. These are outlined in comments on the design points below.

A. The role of North Bank

A1. Make North Bank the front door to the city centre, a hub for river-based tourism and a vibrant waterfront destination.

B. Flood management

B1. Prevent the location of buildings in the river upstream of the Neville Bonner building. Locate any buildings in the river downstream of the former DPI building on a platform no more than 50 metres wide and no more than 300 metres long.

A large structure 50m x 300m on open space in the inner city is unacceptable. The Brisbane River is a flood prone river and as a tidal river, its seasonal variability is likely to worsen with climate change.

Since the 1974 floods, no less than four new inner city river structures have been or are in the process of being built (rail bridge, Good Will Bridge, Tank St pedestrian bridge and the Hales St Link). This proposal is the fifth and largest of them all and undoubtedly has the greatest potential to cause significant destruction in times of flood.

The Australian Academy of Science uses the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to estimate a 50cm rise in sea levels by 2100. They explain that a 50cm rise translates into a 100 x 50cm retreat of the Australian coastline with attendant problems of storm surges and damaging impacts on intertidal zones and wetlands. They make particular mention of the likely problems in southern Queensland:

Floods already cause more damage in Australia than any other natural disaster, in terms of cost to the community. CSIRO researchers believe that damage costs associated with coastal flooding would more than double in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales if sea levels were to rise by 40 centimetres.¹

The state government must begin planning for these impacts by restricting development in vulnerable areas, not worsen the community impacts by promoting development on the city's most at risk feature.

B2. Relocate the North Quay City Cat terminal further downstream.

The existing terminal is convenient to Queen Street shopping while the Gardens Pt terminal, which certainly needs upgrading, is only a few 100 metres downstream. The Citycat service has become an important public transport arm. Merging of the two existing North Quay terminals could improve the Citycat travel times but the priority in developing a sustainable Brisbane has to be the security and convenience of the terminals to city and QUT public transport users.

B3. Determine the acceptable flooding impact of the project by assessing changes in real flood damage and the effect on the community.

This guideline implies that the government endorses development knowing that it will cause 'acceptable' flooding. As per comments on B1 above, it is not acceptable for the Queensland Government to promote development on a known flood site and to fail to plan for climate change. Even minor flooding can produce water flows of high force and both contribute to structural fatigue. Planning for 'acceptable flooding' requires re-vegetation of stream banks to minimise erosion and protect human infrastructure rather than development of it.

B4. Take into account the overall benefits and impacts of the project in determining the acceptability of any flooding impact.

B5. Apply a consistent process for assessing flood effects to all river projects.

The concern is that B5 is incompatible with B4 which implies that 'overall benefits' might offset flooding impacts for this project.

Otherwise the Greens applaud a consistent and precautionary approach to all riverside developments. What needs to be added here is the inclusion of the impact of climate change, including scientific uncertainty. The advice from the federal government is that costs from flooding are going to increase significantly above 1990s level:

¹ 'Getting into hot water – global warming and rising sea levels', Nova [published by the Australian Academy of Science] available online <http://www.science.org.au/nova/082/082key.htm> accessed 19 September 2008.

The Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics estimates that for the past three decades, the total cost of floods has ranged between \$2.5 billion and \$4 billion per decade. It has been estimated that more than 80% of the buildings at risk from flooding are located within Queensland and New South Wales. In Queensland, the Gold Coast City Council area has the greatest number of buildings at risk from a 100-year return period flood. Increases in population in risk-prone areas, combined with increases in storm intensities and rising sea levels, mean that the cost of flood damage to the built environment will increase.

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C. Extent of the site

C1. Consider possible extensions of the site.

This represents another inconsistent guideline. The site has limited land area and is dominated by the Riverside Expressway. The only means for extension is skyward or into the river both of which represent significant degradation of public space, environmental harm and compromise Brisbane heritage vistas, as discussed below.

Why has there been no requirement in the guidelines for protection of existing vegetation which is essential to improve river health and bank stabilisation?

D. Land uses and activities

D1. Provide a vibrant and safe activity node.

The Greens would like to see the security of the area upgraded as an urgent priority. At the moment the shared pedestrian and cycle way is dangerous for both walkers and bike users and the area is poorly lit and without security at night.

D2. Provide a new pedestrian plaza, potentially incorporating a new visitor information centre.

D3. Locate new buildings on sites between Queens Wharf Road and the Riverside Expressway, either side of the Elizabeth Street expressway ramps.

D4. Consider locating a signature building in an elevated form over the Elizabeth Street expressway ramps.

The Greens do not accept the inclusion of any high rise buildings or 'elevated forms' on the site. The views of the river and Mt Coot-tha from different parts of the inner city make the city of Brisbane distinctive. Although the Kangaroo Point cliffs are a product of European settlement they are also a natural feature that residents have come to appreciate for the beauty of their rock faces. Any highrise development in this region will further wall the inner city area and restrict these quintessential views of natural Brisbane icons. The notion of the Queensland capital as a relaxed, open and easy-going city is eroded with each new highrise approved beyond the existing inner city

² CSIRO, *Climate change and Australian coastal communities*, 2002. Accessed online at <http://www.cmar.csiro.au/e-print/open/CoastalBroch2002.pdf> 19 September 2008.

skyline. It is important to preserve the line of vision to the Taylor Range and maximise outlooks to Kangaroo Point and the river as part of Brisbane's natural heritage.

D5. Provide active retail uses along Queens Wharf Road.

The Greens would like to see 'light' retail along Queens Wharf Road. The concern is that any major structures could overwhelm the Commissariat Stores.

D6. Provide active uses on the ground floor of existing heritage buildings and the Neville Bonner building.

D7. Consider locating tourist and sporting activities under the expressway.

D8. Consider providing a CBD playground and public space next to the river.

Public space and rehabilitation of the vegetation of the intertidal zone would greatly enhance the area. The City Botanic Gardens stretch of the river has a mangrove boardwalk that explains the importance of mangroves to river-life. Mangrove forests filter and purify run-off, stabilise sediments and are essential habitat for a variety of crustaceans, sponges and fish as well as an essential part of the food chain for three-quarters of all marine life. A river vegetation corridor with boardwalk to connect with the Botanic Gardens reach has the potential to enhance the biodiversity of the inner city and provide a habitat for birds, reptiles and small mammals. Such an easily-accessible natural area would be a tourist drawcard in its own right. It would also mitigate the most destructive aspects of minor floods on the area.

D9. Consider locating a new aquarium in North Bank.

An aquarium devoted to the unique biota of the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay, including endangered species such as the lung fish, would be a community and tourist asset, however, the Greens are concerned that this could represent over-development of the site. Lowrise retail, tourist and sporting activities, widening of cycle ways and separate walkways, playgrounds and public space are probably the limit of uses given the amount of land available and the need to restore riparian vegetation to make the space appealing as well as ecologically beneficial.

[E. Heritage treatment](#)

E1. Create a heritage precinct as a setting for the historic buildings.

E2. Assess and protect Indigenous and post-settlement heritage.

The Queensland Greens fully support guidelines E1 & E2. The existing quarter was degraded in the 1970s and 1980s by the riverside expressway, destruction of the Bellevue, construction of the

parliamentary annexe and other state government offices and unsympathetic architecture in the QUT precinct. The inclusion of Brisbane Indigenous heritage would enhance the area's historic assets. The worst outcome would be further overdevelopment that would overshadow and dwarf the remaining Georgian buildings.

F. Built form

F1. Buildings located on the platform in the river should range in height from 16 to 30 storeys.

This directive is totally unacceptable. This guideline is inconsistent with the flooding and heritage guidelines.

This instruction amounts to the privatisation of public space. It is not acceptable for government policy to advocate urban consolidation including higher residential development in the inner city and adjoining suburbs and remove open, public space at the same time. The neighbouring West End area which is undergoing significant population growth has been losing open space and parkland for the last five years. The most recent is the bifurcation of Dutton Park for a busway and in 2003 Brisbane City Council sold the Highgate Hill gully, a flood-prone remnant bushland, to a private developer. South Bank has also been under repeated threat of redevelopment with plans by the corporation to sell existing open space and also build over the river for private use. South Bank residents and users have always opposed such over-development and the resuscitation of the idea of over-building the river in this way defies community opinion.

F2. Ensure any building located upstream of Elizabeth Street does not significantly obscure views toward the Treasury Casino building and any buildings downstream of Elizabeth Street are no greater than the height of the Treasury Casino building.

This guideline needs to include the Commissariat Stores in its provisions. A building constructed on the lower Queens Wharf Road to the height of the Treasury Casino could overwhelm the Commissariat Stores and the outlook from Queens Park. It is not just the view of the Treasury and other heritage government buildings but also the views out to the river, Kangaroo Point cliffs and Mt Coot-tha that need to be preserved.

F3. Determine the height of any signature building located over the Elizabeth Street expressway ramps on the basis of a study of how to complement the nearby heritage buildings.

A building above the Elizabeth St off ramp will block views to the river from Queens Park and views to Mt Coot-tha from William St. This guideline is incompatible with F6 below.

F4. Ensure buildings are well articulated in their massing and form and exemplify subtropical design.

F5. Ensure each building in North Bank has a distinctive appearance.

F6. Consider expressing the alignment of Elizabeth Street and Margaret or Alice Streets through the site.

Yes, this is part of the heritage landscape of the city likely to be destroyed by building over the Elizabeth St off-ramp.

G. Public realm

G1. Ensure the public realm is characterised by coherence in design and high quality materials and finishes.

G2. Provide high quality public spaces that are easy to move through and attractive to use.

G3. Refurbish Miller Park.

G4. Improve pedestrian accessibility and public safety to and within the site.

The Queensland Greens support this guideline but submit that separation of walkways and bikeways needs to be explicitly stated. The provision of cycling infrastructure for city workers is an essential part of sustainable planning for Brisbane. Tourism should not hinder work-day commuting for cyclists and forcing pedestrian and cyclists into the one space is dangerous for all concerned.

H. Vehicular traffic management

H1. Provide safe, convenient and efficient access for all modes of transport and movement through the main vehicular access to the site.

The site is currently dominated by cars and carparks. Any new development should reduce carparking and encourage ferry, foot and bike access.

H2. Formulate a consolidated position in relation to traffic and transport matters.

H3. Consider providing a new laneway to access the site.

I. Pedestrian and cyclist connectivity

I1. Provide the riverfront promenade on the river side of the expressway.

I2. Provide a pedestrian link between the new City Centre City Cat terminal and the Queen Street Mall.

This should also include a separate cycle link.

I3. Widen Queens Wharf Road footpaths.

I4. Widen cycle and pedestrian paths at busy nodes.

I5. Consider providing a new pedestrian laneway next to the Neville Bonner building.

J. Water based activities

J1. Consider providing finger wharfs under the expressway.

J2. Locate possible water-based tourist activities next to the new City Cat terminal or on the finger wharfs.

K. Riverside Expressway treatment

K1. Observe the requirements of the Department of Main Roads for maintenance clearances around the Riverside Expressway.

K2. Consider removal of expressway in the long term.

In terms of *long term* planning, the best re-development of the site would be to retain the riverside expressway and turn it into a cycleway with excess lanes handed over to street stalls, cafes and greenery.

K3. Improve the appearance of the Riverside Expressway.

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