



Gorman Arts Centre – Centenary Upgrade Project

Preliminary Sketch Plan (Final Draft) presentation to Gorman Arts Centre resident artists and arts organisations

Thursday 23 February 2023 (9:30am)

- Thanked all for meeting with Lachlan (Arts Capital) and Toni (artsACT) in the second half of 2022. The meetings were critical in informing the revised designs (2023).
- The original design (2022) has been amended significantly.
- As a direct result of the one-on-one meetings with studio residents and organisations with offices, the Studio village is no longer just studios – it's a mix of studios and offices. Reasoning being that orgs can be in close proximity to their workshop and rehearsal spaces, studio residents were divided into two broad groups 'quiet' and 'noisy'; and it provides flexibility and enables strategic use of existing infrastructure like exhaust fans and not waste funding replicating these features unnecessarily.
- Instead of a gallery space for an organisation to occupy and manage - there will instead be a display space for resident artists in Block H: feedback noted the increasing demand amongst resident organisations and regular community hirers for a greater number of workshop and development spaces; the Kingston Arts Precinct's focus will be visual art, and will include numerous exhibiting opportunities for visual artists, and art galleries are problematic to manage in this location as evidenced in recent years.
- The Theatre and Performing Arts Hub (Block C and northern end of Block B) has been enthusiastically endorsed – it will cater for a range of disciplines of performing arts that have different inherent technical needs and space requirements to dance practitioners.
- Batman Street Reception and showcase space - Block H - feedback gathered indicated a desire for visitors to the arts centre to be introduced to work by resident artists and gain a better understanding of the activities of the arts centre, as a result there will be a reception and wayfinding point staffed by 2 - 3 Arts Capital personnel with a permanent showcase space for resident artists.
- Café concept unchanged – as a key component of the design intent to bring the entire precinct to life and provide space to host visitors, have affordable lunches and coffee on site and servicing the functions of Gorman.

- After floating the concept of the educational style Workshop space with residents in meetings it was unanimously agreed that this concept was going to be logistically complex and the space was better utilised for artform workshop/rehearsals. In response, Block D has reverted to being part of the Dance Hub
- Dance Space at the northern end of Block E (Ralph Wilson) remains a dedicated dance space with sprung floor and permanent Tarkett.
- Similar to the Artist village concept the plan to house all Offices together in a village was abandoned to allow greater flexibility and resident orgs to be located closer to their respective workshop/rehearsal spaces.
- Residents raised concerns about the limitations of a traditional theatre venue to cater towards more experimental performances and Block F provides this with flexible multipurpose flat floor.
- It was also noted there was the need for a larger rehearsal space, where performances could be rehearsed for the new theatre. It was identified as a priority of government, Arts Capital and residents that multiple disciplines have access to this flexible space (Block F).
- Creating a Hybrid Theatre was not possible within the preliminary budget review. A more equitable and affordable use of F Block is proposed as a Multipurpose Space
- Block G Gorman Admin office/resident services will remain unchanged.
- There was consensus amongst the residents that the best use of the Main Hall was as a central foyer and bar as it is logical to be located in the centre of the site and it increases the usable space of the performance venues which won't need a foyer/bar space.
- A priority of the Theatre design is accessibility – as a result it will be the only theatre that is entirely accessible by wheelchair in Canberra including ensuring the director of a performance to direct from multiple vantage points regardless of mobility needs.
- Finally, Toilets that are dedicated for residents use and not publicly accessible are being provided.
- The project team are all very excited about this design and are confident it has been tested against functionality as an arts centre, accessibility, sustainability and security. Thank you again for making time to meet and provide the valuable feedback and information that fed directly into these designs

#### Presenter 2 – Karin – project lead architect Philip Leeson Architects

- Wayfinding is a challenge due to the site design symmetry

- Block A theatre will have acoustic treatment. However, F Block will not have full acoustic treatment - some noise will be able to be made but not the loudest bands
- A mix of black boxes and light spaces being provided across the site.
- Courtyard fences will be removed to encourage the flow into the site and clear sightlines will improve safety. More activity and the associated increase in surveillance will also improve site safety.
- Accessible paths of travel to be provided around the site and to one or two entry points at each building. No lifts will be provided to the upper levels in B and E Blocks.

#### A Block – new theatre

- Block A – will be a black box performance space with wheelchair access to stage, BOH, changerooms, greenroom and toilets. Stage will have a sprung floor and a heavy duty Tarkett is being investigated.
- Question about whether there would be a cross over at the back of stage – yes, there will be, not shown on the drawing.
- Question about where the bio box is located – it is located at the top of stairs on a table setup (there's no dedicated room/structure). Will the wheelchairs conflict with biobox in that location?  
no

#### F Block – Multipurpose space

- Accessible toilets are located in F Block – it will be possible to access just the toilets and not remainder of the F Block for security
- The current plan is to reinstate windows to F Block with double glazing, and an acoustic curtain depending on budget available - to enable a greater range of performances
- Question about the Multipurpose spaces labelled one and two - will they be separated. No, it is one venue
- Decent lighting rig – however not as high-end as Block A theatre but very serviceable.
- The purpose of this stage of the project is making sure all the functions are in the right spot and then will work out detail on equipment during design development
- Comment that acoustics need to be made top priority in F Block – for eg. it will need an acoustic curtain. Loud echoey space problematic for people with sensory sensitivities, acoustic treatment in this space would be a deal breaker.

#### Blocks G and H

- Separation of buildings explained by architect - to return to original building footprint prior to 1970s add-on linking Blocks G and H.
- Comment that the costume storage has disappeared from this block and the costume storage is crucial to dance. PLA confirmed a dedicated costume store is not currently allowed for in the design
- Question about whether a dedicated space for a sound studio has been allowed for (one being lost from Block G). Noted that Blocks B and/or E will house tenants that are sound critical grouped together. Not sure how this is going to be done in terms of sound proofing - have to understand the requirements and what's possible with the funding available. Also Ainslie is intended to accommodate music/sound related activity.
- Arts Capital offices are staying in the current location in Block H as resident services and 2 – 3 staff will be located in Block G at the Batman Street Reception and showcase space.

#### Performing arts zone – Blocks B and C

- Noted that vulnerable people need safe spaces and design allows for controlled spaces that are safe spaces
- Very hard to alter walls in Blocks B and E due to heritage constraints - some wall openings may be permitted by Heritage Council but have to retain wall alignments
- Block B - two accessible entry points will be provided
- Block C – will include shower and toilets for people with a disability. Block C includes the main toilets for the site - for the public and dedicated toilets for users of Block C (internally securely accessed)

#### Dance Zone – Blocks D and E

- New accessible entry to a dedicated foyer space to the dance admin offices in Block E and to the rehearsal space (former Ralph Wilson Theatre)
- The Ralph Wilson Theatre is a new dance space with permanent tarket
- Shower and toilets within this zone only for use by dancers

#### Block B - southern end

- Only studio artists and Arts Capital staff to access - toilets not shared with the public
- ACT Heritage is extremely reluctant to change the layout in this section because the rooms from the original hostel are intact
- Questions asked about how studio holders let in visitors to their premises and where do visitors safely wait – answer: visitors can be collected from the café or site reception in Block G.

- Can you buzz someone in from a remote room? Depends how the locking system is programmed - depends how the swipe card access will work. Suggestion of a waiting room that's secure that's close to the studio - could have one studio as a waiting room? Functional requirements will be defined in more detail, need to consider visitor interface.

#### Block E - Safe

- Shared wet areas and proposed chemical storage to maximise use of space, as well as being safer and more secure
- How will the upstairs part of Block E work for access for visitors? - Via internal or external stairs
- No artist accommodation now on site - all the regulations that sleeping on site triggers is very costly to address, and it was considered not enough of a priority

#### POP QUIZ (10.55am)

#### Do you see any issues with Accessibility in these plans?

- Noting that all toilets are gendered, what are the options for non-gendered toilets? - The law (building codes) requires male and female toilets. Inclusive signage was noted as preference.
- Question asked will entries have ramps – yes, in accordance with the codes, minimum one to each block. Block D will stay as it is, as not renovating substantially, would address access in future. Comment that Block D ramped access currently not planned - but could it be included within the scope? tbc post costings.
- Accessible toilets - three and two for dedicated arts groups (Block A theatre and Block F)
- Comments about usability of fixtures - in general doors need to be lighter with better locks so if people are injured can use them – noted, they will be implemented to code
- Comment that not having lifts to upper floors is unfortunate. Note that the principle has been applied that whatever is located on the top floor is also available on lower floor and therefore accessible.
- Question about which legislation trumps which - access or heritage? - PLA has spoken to Heritage and they are strongly of the view that Blocks B and E need to be kept untouched as the original floor layout still exists.
- Question about the front entry drive on Ainslie Avenue; can it be made more accessible and safer? - The driveway condition is being addressed under another package of works currently. Works will improve the surfacing and separately Arts Capital are pruning the hedges.

#### Can you identify any security issues in these plans?

- Surveillance will improve socially undesirable behaviour at the site
- Questions about locking systems and security – however, haven't got that far in the design phase
- Comment that the worst security issues have been caused by human error of accidentally leaving the door open and someone getting in
- Comment that more people on site won't necessarily help security
- Cameras and lighting plan to be improved
- Resident noted that there has been a noticeable decrease in crime over the last five years
- Noted that it's good that GAC doesn't have a big fence around it like most schools
- Noted that the lattice will be removed which will open sightlines
- Suggestion made to have an artwork that's also a light sensor to highlight intruders!

#### Unnecessary works

- Acknowledgement that identifying unnecessary works will be better understood in later phases once we know what is being prioritised and what can be afforded.
- Question: what does the project team see as Gorman's function in relation to the renovations?  
Answer: Balance of needs of now and into the future and balance with what's going on in the rest of Canberra. Gorman supports more performance and less visual arts because there are other facilities and support for this.
- Question: is the site for artists or for the public? Response: both. Artists develop their practice, orgs developing their craft including rehearsal and performance.
- Further – the scale of the facility is significant - as not trying to be CTC or The Street. Strong support for the site being championed as accessible.
- Question: how does the arts centre serve the broader community? how does Gorman fit into the broader ecosystem? Answer: It's a multi artform facility and a development hub. Important to provide opportunities to show work to audiences to feed into development.
- Comment that not many opportunities exist in Canberra for affordable studios, for long-term making, that are centrally located and therefore the studios should be prioritised and protected. What Gorman offers is amazing in terms of studios as there's a range of sizes. Response: Agreed
- Blocks B and E - Heritage reluctant to consider larger spaces by removing walls - there's a mechanism to ask for those changes from Heritage but there's no guarantee of approval.
- We will need to gather information in the future such as detail from artists (Data room sheets) to understand what's required in their individual spaces for more detailed design.

Can you identify any negative outcomes of the upgrades?

- Comment that what Gorman is known for more broadly is dance – this is significant from the outside, dance legacy is of national significance in this building.
- CYT has been a resident at GAC for 42 years, as has dance.
- Comment that cultural life will be elevated by the proposed upgrades.
- Response that dance only uses Gorman, no other spaces around Canberra – there are a huge amount of people coming and going to the site. Dance is being asked to move to a smaller space with no exclusive-use theatre – they are being asked to adapt more than anyone else on the site.
- CYT uses storage in Fyshwick – freeing up potential studio space.
- Observation that the arts is siloed, it benefits from collaborating across art forms
- Comment that feedback from QL2 about the theatre - hasn't been incorporated into the designs. QL2 won't be able to use the new theatre as the Tarkett has to be rolled out - where will it be stored and who covers the cost? Response that it could be booked for that use and the room prepared for the hire.
- Comment that two dedicated dance spaces with Tarkett are being provided and dance will also have access to F Block and to the Theatre - that is more than what is available now to dance practitioners (granted that it will be a different configuration).
- Cafe size and layout - what's the business case for the cafe - seems big, who bears the cost?
- Answer: A hospitality consultant suggested a service provider model - more say for Arts Capital over hours of operation and what they do. If close at 3pm that would be a problem but remaining open until 7 or 11pm would be ideal. It can serve the broader community – the demand will be there from adjoining residential high rise and parents who currently wait in their cars for their children.
- Question will there be an indoor area for the café – yes, meeting rooms and café space.
- Comment that there is no sound studio on the plan. Response that Ainslie Arts is the focus for music but have noted the comment.
- When is the next costing? Answer: at 60% FSP
- A lack of a visual art gallery is a problem as people coming to the site need something to visit. Response: running a gallery is difficult (for both a commercial gallery and even when rent is subsidised - Tributary Gallery). Could part of the cafe space be an exhibition space - display in communal spaces - more pop spaces that showcase the work of the artists in the centre?  
Answer: yes

- Can work be presented in Block C and Block E (former Ralph Wilson) or Block D? Rebus does lots of shows for only family and friends which Ralph Wilson Theatre is good for currently. Answer: it will be possible to show work in Block E and Block D.

Can you identify any positive aspects of the design?

- It is great to open up the site as it belongs to the community, belongs to all of us
- The café is a plus - encouraging people to stay and engage
- Smaller exhibition space is positive – it is more manageable for an individual artist
- Excited about having a theatre being a theatre and workshop space being a workshop space
- Designated zones are positive and will be more legible from the outside
- The upgrades are an expression of hope, can take the elements and create something really special – the constraints driving the particular practices at the centre mean we are forced to remind ourselves of the cultural uses of this space.
- Arts Capital intends to activate the oral histories of the site and capture these at an interpretive level including audio material about the site.
- Comment that they are very impressed with how many of the ideas from the original consultation have been brought into the design.

Performing Arts break out group

- Block C wall opening in the wrong location - want to come in the courtyard end entry (existing entry), want to be able to have reception directly in front of the door. Karin will see if Heritage will approve the opening up of that reception.
- Door widths an issue - PLA will push this with Heritage however, unlikely to be supported (the layout of the rooms is part of significance in the heritage citation). Also about staff, want to be able to hire someone in a chair
- PLA needs to understand where they come in, where is the waiting space in Block B?
- Block B kitchen staying as a safe space. Kitchen space is where participants wait, use wifi - kitchen acts as a foyer
- Block C size of workshop space - need to know minimum floor space for Block C. Foyer vs workshop space, don't want the workshop to be so small it's not usable. Currently 145 sqm including area for seating space.

#### Arts Capital staff break out group:

- The team works closely and scattering everyone across the site doesn't work in terms of operations/functionality and communication between staff running the centre. Centralisation is much better.
- There is frustration that there is not sufficient money to do the complete upgrade – especially when other centres are receiving large sums of money eg BAC
- Spaces should only be used for their designated activity. When spaces such as the rehearsal spaces have multiple functions it leads to difficulty in transitioning the spaces from one function to another and compromises have to be made. Spaces that are designed to be flexible then end up being less flexible in reality and don't accommodate anybody particularly well.
- Mixed feelings around the heritage restrictions. Some people want to do away with the heritage and just leave the shell of the building, while others want as much preserved as possible. The usual polarisation.
- Block F will be fantastic as a hybrid space, however acoustics are very poor and definitely needs to be addressed. Track Lighting would also be great to enable exhibitions if desired.
- Studio functionality of single artist tenants also needs to be considered.
- The café needs track lighting for arts exhibits and also hanging tracks for artworks to be hung on the wall.
- Overall they were very positive about the design!

#### Artist Studio breakout group

- Mental health, business interruption and cost impacts are important to consider
- Some studio holders have larger equipment that can't fit into smaller spaces
- Some artists have added plaster arrestors and dark rooms, shelving and extractions that need to be considered
- Many studio holders rely on the Photography Studio
- Once we finalise PSP and costs we will be having further conversations with the tenants about minimising risks and costs.
- Tenants are stressed about the dates and the impact of the construction period. They are a community that rely on each other
- No construction is likely this year due to developing documentation to FSP, submit for a DA and then go through the public consultation process.
- Will the roof be addressed as part of the project? This may be funded through an alternate budget. It is a possibility that it could become part of this project.

- Artist wants to know if they can remain in place during the majority of the works.
- Artists want stability and support. There is a risk that they may not return if circumstances are too hard.
- A lot of tenants are sole practitioners. They have requested a common waiting room so that their customers can arrive and be in a safe place while waiting for their appointment. How do they guide them into the entry points?
- It was asked if the situation was being made worse by the development or if it is an improvement? Currently customers wait at various places on site.
- The waiting room response was taken on notice

#### Dance Breakout group:

##### Theatre:

- Will the new theatre have rigging points for aerial performance?
- There needs to be some kind of sound barrier between the bio box and the audience
- Steepness of the rake and eyeline to feet not ideal for dance – it was mentioned the theatre specialist consultation that recommended the rake was adequate.
- ADP: will the sound from toilets at the sides of the stage be audible to the audience?
- The stage size in the new theatre is too small for QL2 to use
- Request for measurements of stage that doesn't include wings – is it possible to investigate minimising the wings?
- Can't see how a roll-out Tarkett will work with the new theatre when considering storage of the Tarkett, cleaning of the Tarkett, hiring the Main Hall to use as foyer/bar may be prohibitive.
- Comment that Block F will provide an alternative space to present works with flat floor – larger/different configuration of space

#### NEXT STEPS

- Time of construction late this year or early 2024
- Currently in PSP (preliminary sketch plan) phase and next is developing the FSP (final sketch plan) which will include more detail
- How the works are staged to minimise disruption but still be a cost-effective build - more stages cost more - the slower the build the more it costs. Need to find the balance between costs and delivery
- Can attendees be sent the slides from today with Toni's email address to send back comments?  
Yes, will send email address for comments.

- When will we have more of an idea of when we will know construction timeline? The project team will give as much notice as possible - very aware of this – will advise as soon as known.
- Costings will indicate what's possible as soon as we know we will let you know, will be in contact - will be talking to you about how we can minimise disruptions once the project manager is engaged
- Once costings are completed then it's a decision of government – will advise the Minister of the pros and cons and then the Minister has to approve the project to proceed to construction.
- Approximately May 2023 is the current proposed deadline for Heritage submission to enable construction to start later in the year or early next year
- Question will residents see the FSP - yes, and then after the value management process however, this will be for information and not input at that stage
- Blocks B + E need HVAC – this is a big priority was that included? Can double glazing be included? Response that it depends on site priorities and how far the funding goes.
- Where individuals raise questions from here in writing, the project team will feed these back to everyone – so everyone knows all of the responses. There will be a regular email update to all.
- Could the team create an FAQ? Yes, will provide responses to FAQs. Further to this if we don't have the answer we can indicate that this is when we will have the answer.

Meeting closed 12.45pm