Desktop Cultural Heritage Assessment for Gold Coast Cultural Precinct

Figure 1 1967 Aerial Photo of the future location of GCCC Evandale Site on the bank of the Nerang River

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1. GCCC Project Description and Location

GCCC proposes to redevelop the Evandale site as the Gold Coast Cultural Precinct (see Figure 2).

The decision reaffirms Council’s commitment to arts and culture in the modern global city of the Gold Coast and to enhance the city’s cultural life, economy and cultural identity. The precinct will include significant civic space and a green bridge linking Chevron Island, a new arts museum, a living arts centre and stunning outdoor gardens for arts and cultural events, performances and community activities. Evandale has been identified as the preferred location due to its attractive waterfront and green areas. It is also near to public transport and other city connections.

Figure 2 Gold Coast Cultural Precinct Project Area
2. Cultural Heritage Significance and Historical Context

There is a significant amount of written evidence that catalogues the indigenous cultural heritage significance and historical context of the Evandale Site.

Hall described the area of the Moreton Region from Noosa to the Tweed River when Europeans first arrived some 175 years ago. He states that the region supported a “complex of Aboriginal societies which thrived on the rich food resources” of the area and there is plentiful supply throughout the whole year. Aboriginal people living in the coastal lowlands would have engaged in three daily tasks: fishing (by men) and shellfish and fern-root gathering (by women). Their diet would have been “supplemented by terrestrial mammals, reptiles, birds, marine turtles, dugong, honey, grubs and a diversity of plant foods”. Different Aboriginal groups within the region “maintained close links with one another…through a complex web of social relations”.

Ceremonial activities and social exchange often brought different groups together.

Hanlon notes that the local Aboriginal community “were fairly numerous in the early days, and were, uniformly, a well-nourished lot, conspicuously healthy, and well disposed toward the whiteman”. Chase identifies the southeast corner of Queensland as having “contained fairly heavy concentrations of Aboriginal inhabitants prior to European settlement. It is estimated that

the watershed areas alone of the Logan, Albert, Coomera and Nerang rivers contained

1,500 to 2000, and while such estimates must be treated with caution, it is obvious from

the number of “tribes” mentioned in the various reports, that settlement was fairly dense

in terms of Aboriginal populations. This would be consistent with the rich fishing

grounds and the variety of game and plant life which is a feature of this area.

2.1. Continual Occupation

There are three (3) significant archaeological sites in the vicinity of the Gold Coast Cultural Precinct that provide “concrete evidence of continual tribal occupation of the one area, following the same funeral practices, from the ninth to the late nineteenth centuries”. Laila Haglund reached this conclusion through archaeological studies of burial sites at Broadbeach and Bundall and a shell midden at Cascade Gardens (Broadbeach). The burial sites were originally discovered in 1963 and 1968 respectively and the excavation at both sites identified \textit{in situ} stone artefact scatters.

Many of the contemporary traditional owners of the Gold Coast area are descendants of Jenny Graham\textsuperscript{1}. Jenny was born in 1860 and is remembered as a strong woman who carried the ceremonial marks of her initiation and raised eleven children with her husband, Andrew\textsuperscript{2}. In the late 1800s Jenny worked with Andrew as a river pilot, lighting the navigation beacons on the


\footnotesize{2} Best, Y., \textit{An Uneasy Coexistence: An Aboriginal Perspective of 'Contact History' in Southeast Queensland} (1994) Aboriginal History 18:2, p 92
Nerang River. The Evandale Sculpture Walk includes a sculpture to commemorate Jenny Graham (see Figure 3). Created by sculptor Chris Booth in consultation with traditional owner, Ysola Best, the structure “stands like flames frozen in stone at the end of the point defined by the Nerang River”. The sculpture is entitled “Wiyung Tchellungnai-Najil” which translates to “Keeper of the Flame” to commemorate Jenny Graham’s role as a river pilot and family icon\(^3\).

\(^3\) http://www.chrisbooth.co.nz/view-works/wiyung-tchellungnai-najil-keeper-of-the-flame/
2.2. Local Aboriginal Identities

W.E. Hanlon came to Queensland with his parents in 1863 and wrote of his early days living in the vicinity of Nerang Heads and Southport. The Hanlons were well acquainted with members of the Aboriginal community and were always glad to see them, for they brought us fish, kangaroo tails, crabs, or honey, to barter for our flour, sugar tea, or ‘tumbacca’.

One couple known as Mr and Mrs Wilson (Bahrumbin and Titto) lived on a block adjoining their property at Southport. The couple built a “humpy style” residence on the property and lived there for 20 years while under the employ of Mr Hanlon Snr. A reference is made to Mr Wilson being absent for a short time to attend a corroboree in Nerang (c1870). According to Hanlon the couple were buried in an unspecified grave at Meyer’s Ferry (now known as Surfers Paradise).

Hanlon also introduces local Aboriginal legend, Keendahn (Billy Galeen), and describes his part in a “sport” of the day called “bandicoot coursing”. It appears that Keendahn’s part was to capture the bandicoots from the bush and present them to the sporting community where they would release the bandicoots in what appears to be a local version of a fox hunt. Keendahn is also remembered in the early days of early settlement in the region as a “superb horseman…and an incomparable companion in the bush or swamps”. His traditional homeland was the terrain south of the Coomera “almost as far as the Tweed River”. When he reached the age of maturity (15-20) he was captured and taken to Brisbane in a cutter and placed in police custody. He was then shipped to Rockhampton as a “recruit” in the Native Police force. Under the command of a notorious sub-inspector called Wheeler, he witnessed the shooting of one of the trackers who had “earned the displeasure of his boss”. Thinking that it could be him who was shot next time, Keendahn escaped from the camp and undertook an epic overland journey back to his traditional homeland. To elude being recaptured he hid by day and travelled by night.

2.3. Ceremonial Activities

The historical record reveals a continuing connection to cultural practices following contact with European settlers. In 1879 a corroboree was held at Bundall after the death of Wangawalla. It was estimated that more than 250 Aboriginal people attended coming from as far away as Brisbane, Gatton and the Clarence River. A corroboree was held at the Tamborine Kipper-Ring (also known as a bora ring) at the time of Wangawalla’s funeral. Corroborees were also held on the beachfront at Burleigh Head c1879. In the early 1900s a corroboree was recorded in the vicinity of Bauer Street, Southport (see Figure 4).

Hayes’ account of the Southport District states that Bundall had been a meeting place for Aboriginal communities as far as Northern New South Wales for “untold ages”.

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2.4. Fire Stick Farming

Aboriginal people conducted regular burning of the land for thousands of years. Burning off on a regular basis reduced the fuel load in the undergrowth and minimised the impact on the established ecosystem of plants and animals. After the fire, kangaroos and wallabies returned to the site to feed on the fresh regrowth of native grasses. Gresty made specific reference to the burning process applied by Aboriginal people of the Nerang River.

The Aborigines preserved areas of open woodland as such by carefully controlled burning. Only a small fire was lit so that it would not get out of control and burn neighbours out. Marsupials would, of course be attracted by new shoot of grass after a burn, and if the area were restricted the game could be easily more taken. Old pioneers confirm that in the early days there was not the extent of fire-swept country carrying stunted and scorched trees which is so common to-day. The country was generally either open wood-land or heavy forest.

2.5. Fishing Practices

Aboriginal people of the Nerang River used small hand held fishing nets called “towrows”. Lentz observed a group of 15 men using these nets in a shallow section of the river.

They lined up right across with a net in their right hand, the end of the net touching the next man, all the way across, which made a barrier for fish. Another mob jumped in at the top end with long sticks and bushes, belted and splashed in line across to drive the fish, mainly mullet, into the nets.

2.6. Myths and Legends

There are a number of legends in the mythology specific to the Gold Coast area. Hanlon and Gresty recorded stories of the Rainbow and the Moon, Origin of Burleigh Heads, the Kangaroo and the Dugong and the Legend of Gowonda.

2.7. Language

Hanlon and Gresty made a significant contribution to the understanding of indigenous language within the area. Hanlon’s presentation to the Historical Society of Queensland in 1934 included a discussion of the local indigenous language in the Logan and Albert Districts.
3. Recorded Sites

Searches of the Department of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs (DATSIMA) Indigenous Cultural Heritage Database and Jabree Limited databases were conducted. Figure 4 lists places in the broad vicinity of the project area. The sites registered reflect a mix of artefact scatters, burial sites, shell middens and a hearth (fireplace). Also included on the map is the approximate location of a corroboree site at Bauer Street as noted in section 1.2.3 – Ceremonial Activities.

The most significant Aboriginal cultural heritage sites within the area as detailed in section 1.2.1 – Continual Occupation are shown on the map as:

- a. LB:A01      Bundall Burial Ground
- b. LA:A01/2    Cascade Gardens Shell Middens
- c. LA:A49      Broadbeach Burial Ground
Figure 4 Places of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Significance
4. Conclusion

The historical and archaeological record clearly proves the existence of a thriving Aboriginal community in the vicinity of the Evandale site from pre-European contact to the present day. As noted above there are many stories to be told of people, places and a way of life that is unique to this corner of Queensland. These stories, told through appropriate media, will provide the Gold Coast Cultural Precinct with a linguistic, historical, geographical and overall cultural integrity.

On the basis of the findings of this assessment it is clear that there is a wealth of historical and archaeological information for the area around the Evandale site. The historical record provides an understanding of the population of the local Aboriginal community prior to the arrival of Europeans. It also paints a picture of the way of life in a hunter-gatherer society, ceremonial activities conducted, language of the local people and the myths and legends unique to the area. The archaeological record provides “concrete evidence of continual tribal occupation of the one area, following the same funeral practices, from the ninth to the late nineteenth centuries” (see Longhurst and Haglund). The traditional owner community of today provide a link to their ancestors through family icon, Jenny Graham. The site of the proposed Gold Coast Cultural Precinct is within an area of High Indigenous cultural heritage significance to the Aboriginal community.

Section 23 of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003 (Qld) places all persons in Queensland under a duty of care to take all reasonable and practicable measures to ensure they do not harm Aboriginal cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) whenever they undertake an activity. Section 5 of this Act outlines the principles underlying the main purpose for the legislation as follows:

5(a) the recognition, protection and conservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage should be based on respect for Aboriginal knowledge, culture and traditional practices
5(b) Aboriginal people should be recognised as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage;
5(c) it is important to respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of Aboriginal communities and to promote understanding of Aboriginal cultural heritage;
5(d) activities involved in recognition, protection and conservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage are important because they allow Aboriginal people to reaffirm their obligations to ‘law and country’

This assessment is the first step in a process of achieving compliance with the Act. The information contained herein, shared under conditions and in a collaborative manner, will assist the GCCC in its Design Competition documentation. As the project progresses through the concept and design phases, compliance with the Act can be achieved through a field assessment of the project site and the inclusion of a story telling component that aligns itself directly with the tenets of section 5 of the Act as detailed above. The story telling could be undertaken with media such as include photos, oral histories (written or filmed), a website and artwork.
5. References

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http://www.chrisbooth.co.nz/view-works/wiyung-tchellungnai-najil-keeper-of-the-flame/

Limitations and Exceptions of Report

The findings of this report are based on the scope of work as per the project scope of work. No warranties, expressed or implied, are made.

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