

11.3 Gulgong Natural History Museum Location

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR COMMUNITY
TO 20 SEPTEMBER 2023 ORDINARY MEETING
GOV400103, FIN300410, P1114611

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. **receive the report by the Director Community on the Gulgong Natural History Museum Location;**
2. **note the additional possible locations suggested by the local community;**
3. **endorse the Red Hill precinct as the location for the Gulgong Natural History Museum; and**
4. **request that further information be provided to Council on the design of the Museum, the Museum collection and the future operation of the Museum as a visitor destination.**

Executive summary

At the August Council meeting, results of the community survey about the Gulgong Natural History Museum were presented to Council. While the survey indicated strong community support for the Museum, there was a proportion of the respondents who had concerns about the Museum being located at Red Hill. Council resolved to conduct further community consultation in response to this feedback and carry out further investigation into alternative sites. This report seeks to inform Council of the outcome of this further community consultation.

Disclosure of Interest

Nil

Detailed report

The Council resolution passed at the August meeting requested further community consultation into possible alternate sites where the Gulgong Natural History Museum could be located. An online survey was developed for this task and promoted through the Council website and social media. In asking for alternate sites, some criteria were provided to respondents stating that the site should be close to the CBD, should have a minimum size of 2,000m² and be Council owned or managed. This is also in line with the requirements of the funding body that the agreement is for a new building that is close enough to the CBD to allow for the economic benefit of the new destination to flow through to other businesses in Gulgong.

The survey was not an exercise in determining which site was the most popular and responders could offer as many suggestions as possible in the one survey or across multiple surveys. There were 277 responses to the online survey and 18 potential sites in Gulgong were named. While not officially counted as part of this process, it was notable that approximately 60% of respondents still named Red Hill as the preferred location or stated that they did not recommend any alternate sites to Red Hill.

An analysis of the sites has been summarised across the criteria in the following table:

Suggested site	Council owned or Managed	Close to CBD	More than 2000m2
Red Hill	Yes	Yes	Yes
Old Flour Mill	No	Yes	Yes
Block near the cemetery	Yes	No	Yes
Gulgong Memorial Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes
Apex Park	Yes	Yes	No
Old Fire Station	Yes	Yes	No
People's Park	Yes	No	Yes
Gulgong Railway Station	No	No	No
Near the Pool/Billy Dunn Oval	Yes	Yes	Yes
Car parking area across from the timber yard	Yes	Yes	No
Flirtation Hill	Yes	No	Yes
Grass area between Gulgong Bowling Club and Bulga Street	No	Yes	No
Gulgong Showground	No	No	Yes
JH Stahl Park	Yes	Yes	No
Block on Robinson Street	No	Yes	No
Old Gulgong Depot (between White Street and Collins Lane)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Land south of Hollingsworth estate	No	No	Yes
Anzac Park	Yes	Yes	Yes

Only five of the sites nominated met all three of the criteria – Gulgong Memorial Hall, Anzac Park; Billy Dunn Oval (between the Pool and the Grandstand facing Nandoura Street); the Old Gulgong Depot site at Red Hill (between White Street and Collins Lane); and the Red Hill precinct itself.

Given the funding agreements already in place, further time taken to negotiate the purchase of a site not owned or managed by Council would add significant time delays to the project that would not allow the requirements of the funding agreement to be met. The funding also does not provide for the purchase of a site. Therefore the following sites have not been considered:

- Old Flour Mill (privately owned)
- Gulgong Railway Station
- Grass area between Gulgong Bowling Club and Bulga Street (privately owned and road reserve)
- Gulgong Showground (Crown land not managed by Council)
- Residential block on Robinson Street (privately owned)
- Land south of Hollingsworth estate (privately owned except for a small area of land that is a drainage reserve owned by Council)

For those sites that met two of the three criteria, a short summary follows:

Block near the cemetery

This site has been allocated as a reserve for future cemetery expansion but also has some challenges as its current status is that it is vacant Crown land directly managed by Crown Lands (not Council). There is also an Aboriginal Land Claim over this site.

Apex Park

At 1644m², Apex Park is smaller than required to deliver what is needed in terms of indoor space, outdoor space and car parking availability. It is also an area that is regularly used by families for recreation with the playground and amenities block. This suggestion has some merit given its central location, however, any new building would need to be designed for a space surrounded by locally listed heritage buildings.

Old Fire Station

The Old Fire Station block is small (505m²) and Crown Lands have recently confirmed that any proposed extension to this building needs to be confined to this block and cannot incorporate the car park block next to it (the purpose of this crown land is restricted to parking). Given that the Museum must incorporate a new building, the Old Fire Station is not a viable option.

People's Park

As a potential site, People's Park has many benefits, especially given the amount of available space. However, it is a long way from the CBD and is in more of a residential area. Given the expectations of the funding body around the proximity to other local businesses, it is unlikely that approval would be given for a change in site to People's Park. It is also worth noting that People's Park was an option in the previous survey and was not a popular choice, particularly in comparison to Red Hill.

Car parking area across from the timber yard

While a reasonably central location, this 651m² block on the corner of White and Queen Streets is too small to be considered.

Flirtation Hill

While there is enough available space at Flirtation Hill, the site is too far from the CBD to meet requirements. It also houses significant amounts of water infrastructure which could potentially impact on the design of the building and the construction process.

JH Stahl Park

This is a small park situated between Nandoura and Belmore Streets and across the road from the Gulgong Public School. At 932m² it is too small for consideration. It is also arguable whether this would be seen as close to the CBD as it is more residential in nature. Any design on the site would face some challenges with parking requirements given the nearby location of the two schools.

The remaining sites met all of the criteria and a response on each of these is provided below:

Gulgong Memorial Hall

While technically possible on this site, it would require a demolition of the existing Memorial Hall to create the Museum space. The funding requirements are for a new building construction so even a re-purposing of the existing building may not get approval from the funding body. Added to this is the role that the Gulgong Memorial Hall plays in the social fabric of the community for events and programs. It is not expected that this would be a popular choice in the local Gulgong community.

Anzac Park

While technically possible on the site, there are a number of matters to be considered here, especially given the location of the iconic rotunda and the role that Anzac Park has played in commemorations for the nation's service personnel. The central location in the park of the rotunda would make any design difficult to achieve. Again, it is not expected that this would be a popular choice with the local community.

Billy Dunn Oval

There is a usable area of approximately 2000m² between the swimming pool and the grandstand facing Nandoura Street that could potentially be set aside for the construction of a museum.

However, it is arguable whether this is close enough to the CBD to have an economic benefit to other local businesses. Importantly, it is also not considered technically possible for a museum to be on this site as the core objectives for this crown land is categorised as a sportsground. If this site was explored further, it would likely take some time for negotiations with Crown Lands to take place and there would be a risk that the answer would still be that it is not possible for the Museum to be sited at this location.

Old Gulgong Depot

The site between White Crescent and Collins Lane does have some potential. While situated on Red Hill, it is a separate Crown Reserve to the Red Hill reserve and is not part of the Plan of Management that was originally developed for that site. Therefore, there is a chance that it may face less opposition from those in the community concerned about the Red Hill site. At 4,047m² the block is nominally large enough to accommodate the Museum, it is centrally located and has been disturbed through the use of the site as a Council depot for parts of the 20th Century. However, there are limitations and concerns with this site. The existing mine opening on the site is fenced off and takes up a good portion of the block. Recent action has been taken to increase the area that is fenced off due to some minor subsidence in the area of the mine entrance. Anecdotally, this block has suffered from incidents of subsidence over the years, and this would potentially cause some challenges for design and construction.

Red Hill

The Red Hill site is close to the CBD; is Council managed Crown Land; and has significant space to create a museum with adequate indoor and outdoor areas. The concept design for the site allowed for some construction on the lower slopes of Red Hill with the accompanying outdoor areas to be to the south on relatively flat land. Looked at from the perspective of which site presents the best opportunity for a successful Museum, no other suggested site has been able to demonstrate better suitability than Red Hill.

However, it is not only the location that makes Red Hill a good choice for the Gulgong Natural History Museum. Red Hill is certainly central to the story of Gulgong, a story that considers gold exploration at its heart. The Museum represents an opportunity to tie together the discovery of gold with an understanding of the natural history of the world and the region. Where other Museums in Gulgong have been successful in focusing on the social history of the region, the Natural History Museum would take a different approach in understanding the natural world, rather than the world of the 19th century. It is also an opportunity to develop more of an understanding of the world that existed in the region before colonisation and gold discovery. Just as Red Hill may be the birthplace for gold discovery and the development of the town, it is also the ideal place to tell the story of the world and of the Gulgong area before gold discovery with consideration of First Nations history.

It is clear that there will be differing opinions on this matter and that this will continue into the future. As stated in the previous Council report to the August meeting, the concerns over the use of Red Hill have been presented to Council through the Red Hill Committee and this information has been weighed up as part of this report and its recommendations. The issues are understood and will form part of considerations to mitigate impact on existing interpretation at the Red Hill site. The project will need to go through an independent process for Development Approval, most likely through a Regional Planning Panel, and heritage and conservation considerations will need to be carefully considered.

Further work is required to plan out the collection strategy for the Museum and to ensure that materials are displayed professionally and with scientific accuracy. This will occur over the coming months with the intention of delivering a visitor destination of which the whole community can be proud.

Despite a number of Gulgong residents raising concerns, there does appear to be a sizeable majority of local people who are supportive of the Museum and the intention to develop this

Museum at Red Hill. Red Hill incorporates a large area, and it is believed that the design process for the building and the area as a whole can accommodate the development of a new building and exhibition space as well as maintaining the integrity of the Gulgong history that has been interpreted on the site.

It is the belief of staff that the construction of the Gulgong Natural History Museum can be delivered in a way that sympathetically considers the impact on the Red Hill site and the Gulgong Conservation Zone. The Gulgong Conservation Zone covers a great deal of the township of Gulgong. There are four items that are listed on the State Heritage register. None of these four is close to Red Hill, the closest being the current site of the Gulgong Holtermann Museum. There are 171 locally listed heritage buildings and items in Gulgong. This includes Red Hill House and the old Red Hill school building. The Museum would be at least 30 metres from the cottage and over 120 metres from the school buildings. It would be at least 50 metres from the poppet head. Much of the space required for the Museum area would actually be located on the separate fenced lot to the south of the main Red Hill lot.

The Plan of Management for Red Hill calls for consideration to be given for existing relics and artifacts on the site. This construction of the Gulgong Natural History Museum on the lower sections of the Red Hill site can be achieved without impact on the locally listed heritage locations and without impact on the existing interpretations and items on the site such as the Red Hill cottage and the poppet head.

Concerns regarding the number of Museums in Gulgong or the impact on existing volunteers appear to be unfounded. While the newer Museums in Gulgong (the Gulgong Gold Experience and the Gulgong Holtermann Museum) have continued the exploration of the social history of Gulgong through the gold exploration days, the Natural History Museum will have a different focus on the natural world. It is also not expected that volunteers will be a part of the operational plan for the Museum.

Other concerns surrounding the Museum are not related to the location specifically and will need to be addressed in the coming months through information related to the Museum design, the Museum collection and the ongoing operation of the Museum.

Should Council wish to continue with the proposed Gulgong Natural History Museum, it is recommended that Council continue with the planning for this project at Red Hill and that the necessary levels of funding and professional staffing are provided to ensure the success of the Museum.

Community Plan implications

Theme	Looking After Our Community
Goal	Effective and efficient delivery of infrastructure
Strategy	Provide infrastructure and services to cater for the current and future needs of our community

Strategic implications

Council Strategies

Community Plan
Cultural Plan

Council Policies

Not Applicable

Legislation

Not Applicable

Financial implications

At this stage, Council has approved a budget of \$4 million for the Gulgong Natural History Museum project, with \$3 million coming from the NSW Government's Regional Tourism Activation Fund and \$1 million from Council. This report does not seek additional funds at this time. However, this is expected as further planning is undertaken on the project.

Associated Risks

A full business case is being developed for this project as per the required Capital Expenditure Review. As part of this process, risks would be considered as for any sizeable construction project.

It is likely that the concerns raised by some members of the community over the Red Hill site will continue and the project will face some opposition through the Development Application process.

SIMON JONES
DIRECTOR COMMUNITY

4 September 2023

Attachments: 1. Gulgong Natural History Museum sites.

APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION:

JULIAN GEDDES
ACTING GENERAL MANAGER







JH Stahl Park



Gulgong Memorial Hall



