

Ballarat Botanical Gardens Fernery

Brief for Landscape Design

Background

The fernery within the Ballarat Botanical Gardens has been the subject of several reports to previous Councils over the last 20 years, as it requires a major refurbishment. The timber-slatted, steel-framed structure is at least the third fernery that has been constructed on the site. As previous timber-framed structures have been replaced following the deterioration of their supporting frames.

Council in 2005 funded the investigation of a design concept for the refurbishment of the existing fernery with the intent of creating a more secure site for the plant collections within the fernery and for the 12 marble statues donated by Thomas Stoddart in the 1880s. Following repeated vandalism of the statues, these were removed for temporary display in the Robert Clark Conservatory. A design concept was produced by Council officers that utilized the existing steel frame and proposed the replacement of slatted timber with metal, elevated walkways and an enlarged footprint to accommodate the 12 statues. Before proceeding to schematic design and application for planning approval, the concept was reviewed to explore whether a new footprint and structure could achieve better outcomes for the level of capital investment required. Particularly attention needs to be given to the disruption to circulation that the current structure provides and the feedback from statue conservators that the artworks ideally would be repositioned outside.

In 2006 a new concept design was prepared by consultants Land Design (employing Jackson Clements Burrows Architects) who had master-planned the award winning Geelong Botanical Gardens' 21st Century Garden. The design was a landscape-driven design attempting to address the lack of visual connection between the central gardens area, the Adam Lindsay Gordon Cottage area and the North Gardens. It proposed an alternative site to the traditional east/west structures that have provided a northern edge to the central gardens area.

In 2008/2009 Council allocated funds for the advancement of design and planning ahead of future funding in the Capital Works Program. At that stage, Council's forward capital program identified a project with a \$300,000 contribution from rates, contingent on raising additional funding through grants and contributions. The design concept advanced to schematics and the quantity surveyor's estimates indicated the project would require a budget exceeding \$1.2 million.

At the same time, Council's statue conservator provided advice that the 19th Century marble statues would be best maintained in their original outdoor locations on pedestals and Council resolved to with the support of the Friends of the Botanical Gardens to reinstate the statues prior to the 2010 Begonia Festival.

More recently, the matter was reconsidered by the Lakes and Gardens Advisory Committee. The following four options were explored from a horticultural, heritage, visitor amenity and financial investment perspective:

- a) Refurbishment of the fernery replacing like with like (i.e. replace timber bearers and slats, repaint steel frame and re-asphalt paths);

- b) Modification of the fernery in its current footprint with metal bearers, slats architectural features and functional enhancements;
- c) Demolish the current fernery and reconstruct a new structure in an alternative location with modified landscape circulation as per the Jackson Clements Burrows Concept; and
- d) Construct a new structure on the original alignment that provides modern interpretation of the former gothic cathedral form and mass.

The Committee resolved to pursue Option 4 to 'Construct a new structure on the original alignment that provides modern interpretation of the former gothic cathedral form and mass'.

The current status of the fernery is that the eastern side has been closed for public safety since late June and will need to remain closed until the area can be made safe or the fernery rebuilt. A risk management assessment is going to be conducted to determine the extent of disrepair that has occurred and provide advice on options for short term actions to improve safety for the public and staff.

Project Objectives

The key functions for the refurbished fernery will be to:

- Significantly add value to the garden's visitor experience;
- Provide an environment for the culture and display of ferns, species of begonias, mosses, liverworts;
- Provide interpretation of the site including the former camellia house and ferneries;
- Provide water features;
- Provide shelter for visitors from climatic extremes; and
- Draw visitors from the Conservatory, Statue Pavilion and Wendouree Parade to the Craft Cottage and North Gardens.

Functional Brief

The Landscape Designer will be required to:

1. Within the constraints of the proposed staged construction of the fernery develop concept plans and supporting rationale that provides:
 - a. Functional pathway connections between the adjacent attractions of the gardens
 - b. Strategically placed viewing locations to observe major interpretative and interactive features.
 - c. Elements of surprise.
 - d. Opportunities to interpret plant collections, history of the preceding structures, forest ecology and the relationship or water and light on plant morphology.
 - e. Opportunities to have paths walkways and viewing platforms at varied levels within the structure to contrast with the flat, predictable terrain of the balance of the Gardens.
2. Upon approval of the initial concept plan, develop design details and estimates for key features.
3. Provide indicative species lists for the proposed plantings.