

A 21ST CENTURY LEARNING HUB: A CASE STUDY OF A 'JOINT USE' SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LEARNING FACILITY

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A 21ST CENTURY LEARNING HUB: A CASE STUDY OF A 'JOINT USE' SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LEARNING FACILITY

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Abstract

This case study demonstrates a successful merging of previously separate community, school, cultural, health, wellbeing, and tertiary facilities within a new hub in the regional centre of Young, New south Wales (NSW). It describes the collaboration between state and local government, architects, educators and community representatives. It details the conception of the facility from within the community, the multiple stakeholders and policies involved and the architectural response to a complex brief, a fortuitous multilayered historical site, and a diverse cultural context. Australia wide, Governments are searching for more effective and efficient use of public infrastructure. Shared use of schools, whereby they are encouraged to make their facilities available for community use, is relatively common in the State of NSW. It is only recently that 'joint use' projects which involve significant investments by multiple parties have been promoted in that State. Joint use projects have the potential to open myriad learning opportunities for a community. For example, there are few places of public infrastructure that represent the learning culture and pulse of a school, or community, like a library. For communities, the information they contain, the events hosted, and the spaces for hire are intrinsically tied to the culture of the local community. In secondary schools, libraries remain at the heart of learning. They are places that students inevitably gravitate to as a space for collaborative project work, social interaction, meetings, and events. In regional towns, the roles of both are magnified. These library aspirations both complement and compete, while opening up opportunities for use of a wide variety of school learning facilities by the community and re-integrating school with the broader community.

Keywords: joint use, shared use, library, community hub, community learning facility, school and community partnerships, regional school hub

A 21st Century Learning Hub:

A Case Study of a 'Joint Use' School and Community Learning Facility

Hayball Architects collaborated with School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW), Young High School (YHS), Hilltops Council, State Libraries NSW, community service groups and community members of Hilltops Local Government Area to design a joint use Library and Community Learning Facility. The project demonstrates a successful merging of previously separate facilities to create a new community learning hub in the regional centre of Young, NSW.

Defining Terms

The terms 'community hub', 'shared use', and 'joint use' conjure up a variety of meanings for different people. For the term 'community hub', Clandfield (2010) proposes a 'five point continuum extending from the community use of schools to the fully integrated school-community relationship' to describe various types of community use of school facilities.

NSW Department of Education encourages schools to engage in 'shared use', or 'community use of school facilities ... , [whereby] schools are encouraged to make their facilities available for use by the community' (NSW Department of Education, 2020). Shared use is where a school controls a facility on its grounds but allows related community use during out-of-school hours, or when a local Council controls a facility such as a park or swimming pool but allows schools to book the use of the facility. Shared use of school and community sports facilities and halls is relatively common in NSW and leads to more effective use of infrastructure.

In its School Assets Strategic Plan, School Infrastructure NSW (SINSW) (2017) states its intention to develop stronger partnerships and increased joint and shared use of school facilities. Joint use involves a school sharing and funding facilities with a community partner, such as managing a sports ground with a local council. SINSW defines 'joint use' as:

... where the **department and other parties make significant investments (land and/or capital)** in new facilities, upgrading facilities or maintaining facilities. The asset is typically shared between the school and the other parties over an extended period of time, or the lifetime of the asset. These projects are voluntary and **intended to be of mutual benefit to all parties** (NSW Department of Education, Policy Library, 2020) [emphases added].

In line with its intention to develop stronger partnerships, SINSW (2018) has also promoted the notion of Schools as Community Hubs and identified four fundamental principles underpinning Schools as Community Hubs:

- Developing more socially cohesive societies.
- Re-connecting learning with life and enabling learning anywhere, anytime with anyone.
- The sensible, collaborative use of assets through joint use developments and partnerships.

- Increasing socio-economic benefit/value-add (SINSW, 2018).

Joint use facilities and community hubs as proposed by SINSW create the opportunity for NSW State Schools to develop as true two-way community hubs, with a fully integrated school-community relationship as per Clandfield's (2010) continuum. In the case of an existing school, such as YHS, this opportunity will necessarily be constrained by the need for refurbishment and the needs of the community.

In rural and regional areas there is a strongly held belief that schools are 'central to being a community' (Halsey, 2018). This belief is rarely imagined as a fully integrated school-community relationship. However, the belief does provide fertile ground to develop a true two-way community hub as will be seen in the case of YHS and the Hilltops community.

Vision and Guiding Parameters

Establishing alignment between all parties with regard to both the vision and the operational requirements is the greatest challenge in developing and implementing a joint use project. Without alignment to a shared vision a joint use project will not be sustainable. Fundamental steps in this project were establishing the shared vision and commitment to this vision, deriving the guiding design principles and understanding and integrating the various sets of policies, regulations and requirements of different government departments.

Opportunities, Synergies and Vision

The vision for the project, 'Supporting Whole of Life Learning for Hilltops' grew out of synergy between a number of YHS initiatives and needs identified by Hilltops Council and community members. Young Shire Council's Cultural Infrastructure Masterplan (Young Shire Council, 2014) identified the following needs:

- A new community library
- A cultural precinct
- Facilities for the Arts–Community / Arts space(s).

In addition, the newly formed Hilltops Council wished to augment existing education provision and provide new opportunities and networked spaces for learning, including a Country Universities Centre (CUC). With the announcement of a new Library for YHS, the school saw the opportunity to support a number of key initiatives and infrastructure needs by integrating a number of learning facilities with the new library facility:

- Youth Health and Wellbeing Hub
- Wiradjuri Learning and Cultural Centre
- Multimedia and project-based learning spaces (Hayball, Consultation notes YHS, 2018).

From the outset, Young High School and Hilltops Council Community Library was born out of these shared community needs and conceived by all as a joint use facility for mutual benefit. In determining

mutual benefits, the team considered what would be a 'win-win' for all community groups i.e., what are the things that this community does not have, that the school might provide, and what are the things that this school does not have, that the community might provide.

Design Guidelines and Principles

The design was guided by a synthesis of principles from:

- SINSW Education Facilities Standards Guidelines (EFSG), General Education Principles (NSW Department of Education, Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines, 2020)
- People Places (State Library NSW, 2020)
- Universal Design Principles (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2020)
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020).

Project-specific Design Principles were developed with SINSW, Young High School, Hilltops Council and the Project Reference Group and addressed whole-of-life learning, building community, celebrating the arts and the community's multicultural nature, providing contemporary learning environments, respecting heritage, ensuring Economically Sustainable Development and embedding principles of Universal Design.

Realising the vision

Synergies between SINSW's four fundamental principles underpinning community hubs and the Business Case for the project, which was commissioned by Hilltops Council, demonstrated a positive benefit to cost ratio (BCR) for the development of a joint use library and community learning facility. How the key principles were given effect is described below.

Seamless access to a range of resources and learning spaces

As a result of stakeholder engagement and the scrutiny of the Project Reference Group, a schema for the joint use of library and learning spaces was developed (see Figure 1).

Maximising mutual benefit while minimising required area and budget—achieving more for less

By sharing areas, establishing a joint collection and developing a system of bookable-use of a variety of integrated facilities, the area schedule for the joint use facility demonstrated the efficiencies gained by joint use with the total area being reduced from the area required for separate facilities.

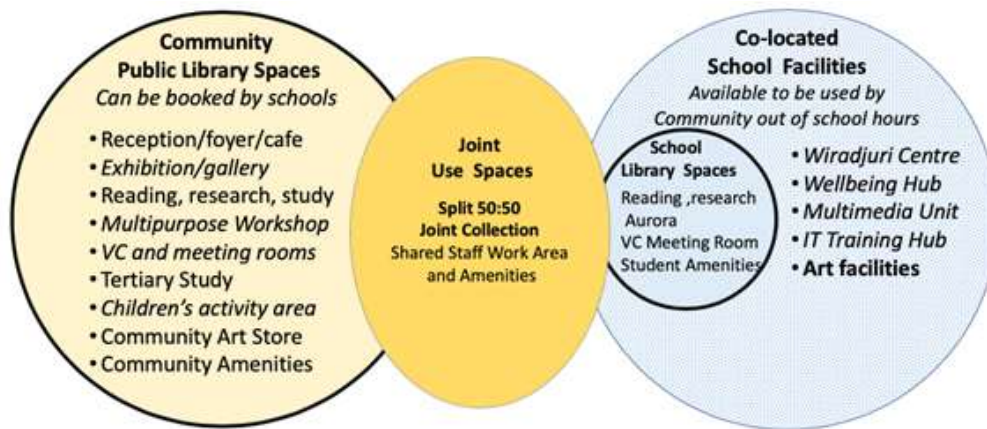
Connection to the Land, the Place and the People

Understanding the rich cultural history of the land on which the facility is located has been a key pillar in creating a joint use facility that gives effect to the guiding design principles. The facility will be located in Wiradjuri country (Figure 2).

In the 1860s the site and surrounds were the locations for the Lambing flat riots (Figure 3). False rumours that Chinese workers were planning to take local goldfields for themselves led to a series of riots on the site including the burning down of the original courthouse.

Figure 1

Integration of functional spaces including a joint collection and shared staff work area. Source: Hayball



Source: Hayball

Figure 2

Site Location Plan



Source: Hayball

Figure 3

Harvest of Endurance Scroll: A History of Chinese in Australia 1877-1988 illustrating the Lambing Flat Riots

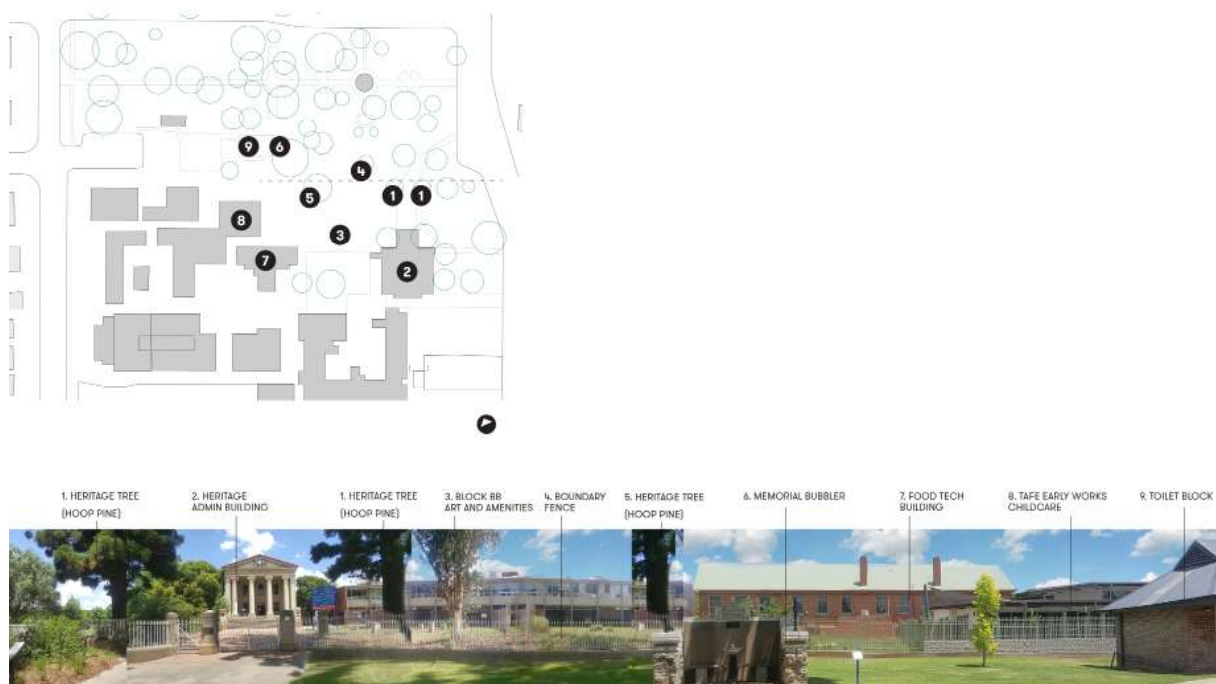


Source: <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/harvest-of-endurance>

A new gaol was built (1876) on land adjacent to the current YHS site and a Grand Courthouse on the site of the current school (1884). Immediately to the north of the current site is an open civic area called Carrington Park. This used to be separated from the school site by Currawong Street, however this street was removed. The removal of Currawong Street resulted in the Grand Courthouse and the old gaol having an unusual direct frontage to Carrington Park (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Significant Existing Site Features



Source: Hayball

The preferred development site was selected based on its capacity to provide direct community access to and from the adjoining park and the fact that it would help reinstate visual and physical connection to the Grand Courthouse. The existing arts and amenities block, constructed in 1963 and located on part of the preferred development site, was considered intrusive from a heritage perspective. Synergistically, redevelopment of the school visual arts facilities within the new Library and Community Learning Facility added significant benefit to the community Arts groups who were seeking facilities and enabled the integration of sorely needed school multi-media facilities into the complex.

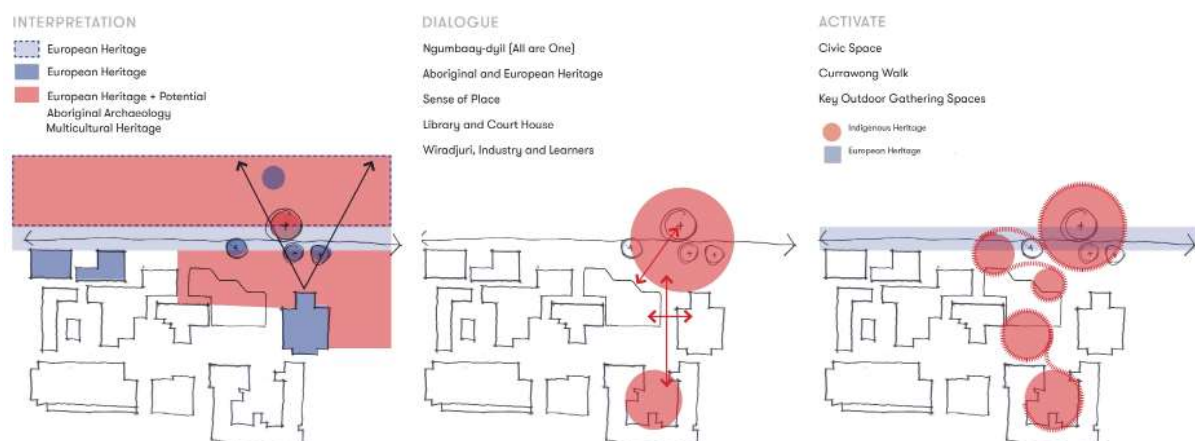
Building Community and Identity

To build community and identity and create a culture that reflects and respects diversity within the Hilltops' community, an extensive series of stakeholder workshops were conducted. Further, Architect Michael Mossman was engaged to assist the team to develop a design that responded to the cultural values and narratives of place. This process, involving consultations with local elders and visits to other cultural centres, led to a series of themes that resonate through the design. Heritage consultants (GML Heritage) were engaged to better understand how the heritage significance of the site could contribute to the development proposal.

Two complimentary narratives were developed to respond to the cultural aspiration of stakeholders and the historical context of the site. Historical mappings were overlaid with cultural considerations to create a response to both European and Aboriginal heritage which was based on interpretation, dialogue and activation. This approach is summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Combined European and First Nations Heritage Response



Source: Hayball

Wiradjuri architectural narrative and response

Design responses to consultation with the Wiradjuri community included:

- *Yindyamarra* – a Wiradjuri word - respect for everything, expressed by giving honour, going slowly, and taking responsibility.
- *Ngumbaay-dyil* (all are one) – reconciliation and inclusion.
- *Songline narrative* – spaces for gathering, movement, connectivity and storytelling that meanders and interconnects the spaces.
- *Exchange* between the Wiradjuri and European (symbolised in Figure 6).
- *Language* – wayfinding and building naming in Wiradjuri language.
- *Cultural artefacts* referenced through façade material and detailing.
- *Fire* – spaces for coming together, storytelling and colours and materials to symbolise the significance of fire.

Consultation with stakeholders identified that places of significance within Aboriginal culture are not defined by linear elements, rather they are defined by and between a collection of nonlinear forms such as streams, mountains, rocks, vegetation, fire, the land and the sky. Stakeholders identified that the traditional approach to these places and circulation within them was also non-linear.

The *Songline* narrative shown meandering through the facility (see Figure 7) was developed in consultation with stakeholders to emphasise and celebrate the layers of Wiradjuri history and culture connected to this site. The forms of the facility and surrounding landscape elements are intentionally nonlinear and define a series of indoor and outdoor interstitial spaces for exchange, reconciliation and gathering. These interstitial spaces are places to emphasise *Ngumbaay-dyil* (meaning 'all are one' and 'all together are one') as a symbol of hope for the future. The *Songline* links these interstitial spaces enabling continuing dialogue between Wiradjuri and European Cultural Heritage. The path of the Songline welcomes a visitor at the entrance to Carrington Park and leads through multiple stops to tell a story of past and present from the Reconciliation Tree, past the Wiradjuri Centre, the Grand Court House, leading ultimately to new spaces in the school courtyard and Indigenous Garden.

Figure 6

Exchange - gift presented to Coborn Jackey 'Chief of the Burrowmunditory'



Source: Hayball

Figure 7

The Songline Narrative



Source: Hayball

Archaeological findings uncovered on the site will be located along the Songline, providing opportunities for interpretation and learning. Findings to date, shown in Figure 8, include:

- Chinese coin from 20th Century
- 19th Century Ceramics
- 12th Regiment Foot button (from uniform of officers stationing during Lambing Flat Riots)
- NSW Police button (from specific uniform worn during Court attendance)
- Aboriginal artefacts.

European architectural narrative and response

The massing, forms and detailing of the facility were determined through consultation with stakeholder groups and derived as a result of:

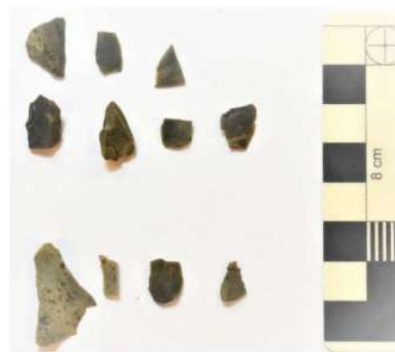
- The bulk and scale of the courthouse
- The historic setbacks and subdivision patterns of the site
- Sightlines to the Courthouse
- The height of Courthouse facade elements.

Figure 8

Archaeological Findings



July 2019 works on-site



Aboriginal artefacts



12th Regiment of Foot Button



Chinese Coin from 20th Century



NSW Police Button



Handmade Nails



Sandstock and dry-pressed brick fragment from mixed historic topsoil

Source: Hayball

Key outcomes from the heritage investigation that were adopted in the design response were:

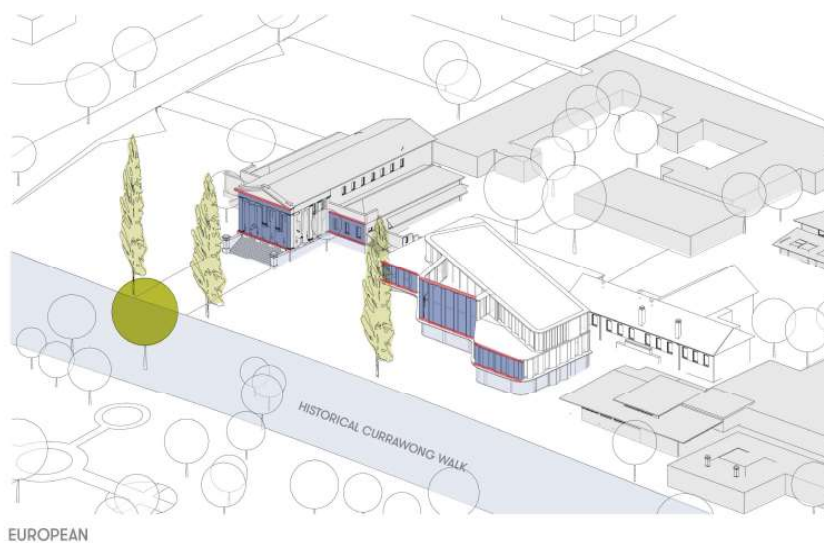
- Currawong Walk (historically Currawong Street) is re-established as a means of community access to the facility via Carrington Park.
- Layered historic and cultural landscape of the site, with consideration to character, scale, proportion, form, materials and colour were interpreted throughout the design of the facility.
- Heights of the various stepping forms of the facility were derived from the horizontal and vertical datums and forms of the former Courthouse (administration building) particularly when viewed from in front of the former gaol.
- Existing courthouse facade was also studied to understand the stepping and rhythm of the façade.
- Viewed from the north-west in front of the former gaol the facility can be seen to respond to

the scale, form and vertical proportion of the Courthouse (Figure 9).

- Viewed from the north-east the facility appears more horizontal and sinuous, responding to the cultural spaces and heritage elements within the landscape and referencing a more organic stratification of land formation. Sinuous forms of the building footprint also create protection zones for heritage elements with the landscape (Figure 10).
- Views from the gaol within the park towards the former courthouse are enhanced by the new curtilage (Figure 11).

Figure 9

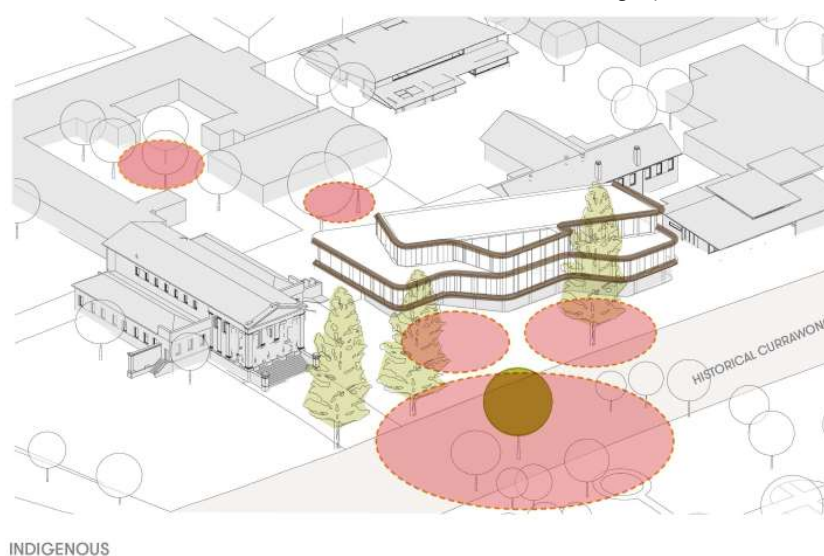
View from North West. Response to European Curtilage.



Source: Hayball

Figure 10

View from North East. Sinuous Forms Create Gathering Spaces and Protection Zones.



Source: Hayball

Figure 11

Photomontage View from the North West Looking Towards the Facility



Source: Hayball

Functional organisation

There were significant challenges to be met in designing an integrated facility that simultaneously meets the needs of the school and the community, especially in terms of:

- access
- security
- duty of care, and
- seamless flow between related functional areas.

After much consultation, the floor plan emerged. Access is provided for community use of the joint use facilities out of school hours while maintaining the school's duty of care requirements through the careful zoning of community spaces, joint use spaces, school spaces, stairs and lifts along with the strategic placement of operable walls. The design enables the various community groups concurrent use of the facility, providing maximum school and community benefit. The lower ground floor (Figure 12) provides community access from Carrington Park and the reinstated Currawong Walk to the north.

The upper ground floor (Figure 13) is accessed within from a community stair or lift to the west, a shared staircase (north) or directly from the main school quadrangle to the south ensuring the library assumes prominence as being central to the school's learning spaces. This floor houses the joint use staff space, tertiary study space and a combination of school spaces for wellbeing, meetings, virtual learning and general school library spaces. Level 1 can be accessed either via the community stair, or lift, to the west or the school stair to the east (Figure 14).

Figure 12

Lower ground floor with separate community and school access and egress, carefully zoned areas and operable doors and walls to delineate community and school use during school hours.



Source: Hayball

Figure 13

Upper Ground Floor Plan



Source: Hayball

Figure 14

Level 1 Floor Plan



Source: Hayball

Level 1 accommodates school art and computer facilities, with the inclusion of a community art storage space to support community use of the art facilities.

All floors contain a range of bespoke social, gathering, professional, cultural and learning settings that respond to the various stakeholder needs and support whole of life learning. The zoning of the facility works in combination with a clear definition of vertical circulation paths and a series of movable walls. These adaptable modes ensure that the facility can be used throughout the day for maximum school and community benefit whilst still meeting duty of care obligations. Internally the facility allows for lines of demarcation between the school and community to be adapted throughout the day. Figure 15 illustrates how this is achieved.

The orange 'shared' zone includes the main collection (see Figure 16), staff, administration and shared circulation. The yellow zone is designated 'Community' use and enables activities such as reading, gathering, workshopping, exhibition and storage. School users also use these community zones with supervision. The blue zone is designated school use during school hours. Community members can use these zones outside school hours by bookable arrangement.

Each zone is provided with separate vertical circulation. School users can pass independently through the floors within the blue school zone, and community users can access each floor after hours without needing to circulate through the school or shared zone. All users have access to additional vertical circulation paths within the shared zone. A series of sliding and operable walls (indicated in red and blue in

Figure 15

Zoning of Spaces to Achieve Shared and Concurrent Use



Source: Hayball

Figure 16

Photomontage of the Community Entry through to the Joint Collection



Source: Hayball

Figure 15) allow further division of the space if required. 'Soft system' elements, policies and protocols are being developed collaboratively by the stakeholder groups to complement the carefully considered design of the 'hard spaces'.

Situating this case study within the NSW context at the time

The SINSW School Assets Strategic Plan (NSW Dept of Education, 2017) formalised NSW's intention to develop schools as community hubs. Although there were several existing examples of 'joint use' school libraries in NSW, these projects had been conceived at a local or regional level prior to the development of Department-wide policy on joint use. Two of the three existing joint use library projects were successful in achieving their aims while the third had not been successful and was to be disbanded. With the lack of a Department policy to guide the individual projects, their success was dependent on whether there was a collective vision that maintained currency and whether appropriate governance and operational systems were in place to ensure the sustainability and practicality of the vision. A report by the Audit Office (2017) noted:

The Department is planning to focus on joint use agreements with local councils. Several agreements are currently being piloted and will be evaluated to provide an evidence-based foundation for this new approach.

To develop or refurbish school facilities for joint use, councils, the Department and other key stakeholders must work more closely together and prioritise joint use from the earliest stages of any project. A collaborative, multi-agency approach is needed ...

At the time of the initiation of YHS-Hilltops project, mid-2018, the joint use policy and procedures were still very much in the pilot stage.

Funding and ongoing operations and other challenges

It is one thing to conceptualise and design a true community hub, it is another to develop the governance and funding models that will make it sustainable and the policies and protocols that will ensure its safe and secure operation.

Breaking new ground, wherever and whenever it happens, brings its challenges beyond the challenges posed in the complex brief and heritage overlay for the YHS-Hilltops Council project. As a pilot project, it was required to develop systems for capital expenditure and operating expenditure and to develop, collaboratively, policies and protocols. Without a clear pronouncement of the intention of new approaches, staff hold on to old models and it is difficult to develop a win-win mentality in siloed departments. The old proverb, 'where there is a will there is a way' is a fitting statement regarding the importance of a collective shared vision. Despite many obstacles, the project is at last 'shovel ready' with the construction of the new facility to begin at any time.

Conclusion

Understanding the place and the community who will use the facility has been a key pillar in the success of the project thus far. A strong shared vision and clear identification of needs together with the fortuitous existence and inclusion of historical buildings, have led to the development of a highly integrated, adaptable facility that responds to school and community needs. The completed facility will support whole of life learning and community building while celebrating the rich multicultural history of the land and the people of Hilltops.

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