A review of the Town Green Master Plan

Port Macquarie, New South Wales

Prepared by Tract Consultants
For Port Macquarie- Hastings Council

in association with Lighting Art & Science Pty Ltd
5.1 Overview

The character and sense of place of a town is greatly influenced by its public spaces, including streetscapes and open spaces. These spaces provide opportunities for people to meet, greet and relax.

The Town Green is the key public open space within Port Macquarie, and as a north-facing public foreshore with direct frontage from the core of the business and town centre district - it is the ‘jewel’ in the fabric of the town. In fact, the Town Green is the only publicly accessible passive open space within the Town Centre. Located along the northern edge of the town centre boundary, it offers scenic views towards Hastings River, as well as Pelican Island and North Shore. A number of key views from within the Town Centre (along Horton Street and Sunset Street and to a lesser extent Short Street) also terminate at the Town Green.

The Town Green currently provides a focus for many formal and informal community activities, social interaction and passive recreational activities. It is a place where individuals and groups can come and relax and escape the hustle and bustle of the commercial and retail areas, and provides a location for large community gatherings and events, such as the ‘Tastings on Hastings’ (held every year in October) and events such as the Fig Café and adjoining playground.

While the space operates satisfactorily on some levels, there are significant opportunities to enhance this space to ensure it fulfils its role as the premier open space within Port Macquarie. It currently presents a tired and somewhat neglected ‘front door’ for the town, and is in need of both detailed improvements, and a more strategic view of the role the Town Green plays in the activation and vibrancy of Port Macquarie.

It is also critical to acknowledge that the Town Green is in fact Crown Land, and as such is subject to a different set of planning, design and construction controls than the majority of the rest of the Town Centre. To this end, it is important that the proposed objectives and design outcomes for the Town Green are communicated and translated to the Crown Land controls in order to achieve coherent and consistent public realm spaces through this precinct.

For the purposes of the Master Plan, and this analysis, the Town Green is defined as running from the edge of the Tourist Park to the east, through to the eastern side of the Seaplane Boat Ramp (Short Street) in the west.

5.2 Town Green

5.2.1 Key Opportunities and Issues

- The Town Green does not fulfil its potential as the premier public space in the Port Macquarie Town Centre.
- The central path does not reflect pedestrian desire lines as evidenced in time-lapse video analysis undertaken. The video captured people walking close to the buildings (shortest route and activity) and many walking along the water’s edge (maximises the water experience).
- There are significant opportunities for businesses and properties to engage with the Town Green. This is currently prevented by the Town Green Policy and the absence of hard spaces adjacent to properties.
- The Fig café and adjoining playground is a focus for activity in the Town Green. This provides a good example of the benefits of allowing commercial uses to engage with the Town Green.
- There is limited shade throughout, particularly between in the spaces between the caravan park and Horton Street. The existing palm trees in this area provide little shade, and do not enable people to pause, sit and enjoy the views and activity on offer.
- The waterfront at the termination of Clarence Street could be a key node that bookends the Town Green. The evolving restaurant / bar scene at this end of Clarence Street allows activity to spill out into the street and water’s edge - and well considered public realm design can take advantage of these activities.
- There is similarly an opportunity for a node at the waterfront at the end of Hay Street. This could tie-in with the performing arts role of the street and the Glasshouse, and provide a direct view line from Hay Street Plaza to the water, drawing people down Hay Street to utilise and enjoy the Town Green.
- The boardwalk and tourist boat area contributes to the coastal experience that tourist’s desire. The timber boardwalk through this area also in need of improvements, and the adjacent Short Street and Clarence Street environments are not appealing spaces for people to use.
Figure 11 – Key Issues - The Town Green
5.2.2 Key directions

- **A safe, active and comfortable space** – To ensure that the Town Green and Horton Street Town Square are safe, comfortable, and usable public spaces, at all hours of the day. Adjacent or nearby uses should address engage with these spaces, providing passive surveillance and activity along its edges.

- **Sense of Place** – To ensure landscape treatments and buildings within and adjoining the Town Green and Horton Street have a specific relationship to the local landform, wider regional landscapes and distinctive regional features specific to Port Macquarie.

- **Attractive pedestrian facilities** – To ensure the location of paths consider pedestrian desire lines and the width accommodates a variety of users including cyclists and pedestrians. Shade and weather protection, as well as seating, drinking fountains and other facilities should enhance the amenity of the space for pedestrians.

- **An integrated open space network** – To ensure the Town Green forms part of a larger regional open space network and links to other areas of the town centre through safe and attractive walking/cycling links.

- **A public place and community space** – To ensure the town centre is flexible to accommodate a range of community and social events with Port Macquarie, as well as a range of users (from children, to families, disabled and the elderly); and

- **Legible and accessible** – To improve legibility and wayfinding from the town centre to the Town Green. Visual cues should enhance wayfinding and create a legible and navigable network.

5.2.3 Design Response

- **A waterfront promenade that provides for continuous public access along the waters edge and allows people to enjoy unrestricted views of the Hastings River. This would create a link between the Breakwater Promenade and the commercial wharf.**

- **Hard spaces adjacent to built form and businesses to encourage uses to engage with the Town Green. The hard spaces should be wide enough to accommodate alfresco dining, while a pedestrian path should connect these spaces to other pedestrian paths within the Town Green.**

- **A flexible lawn area that encourages informal play and can accommodate large festivals and events. A seating wall encloses the large lawn and directs views towards the water.**

- **Upgrades / refresh to the playground area to provide a range of traditional play elements, soft fall and seating areas, integrated sympathetically with the existing Fig Tree. Water play may also be incorporated to provide a safe way for families to interact with water and enjoy the space.**

- **Large shade trees along footpaths to provide shelter and shade for pedestrians, while maintaining views to the water.**

- **Provision of shelters, barbecue and tables to enhance the family friendly character of the Town Green.**

- **Provision of a number of ‘green rooms’, that can be used for various passive recreational activities including picnic areas, gathering and relaxing.**

- **Upgrades to the existing Commercial Wharf to provide safe and legible access to the boat ramp, rivers edge and allow for views of the water.**

- **Seating nodes located along the waterfront promenade to allow people to rest and relax and enjoy the tranquility of the space.**

- **Retention of Norfolk Island Pines that have a strong influence on the character of the Town Green.**

The Town Green provides for a range of community events including Tastings on Hastings and the Iron Man competition.
Signage and wayfinding to and throughout the town green limited

Playground is dated and does not contribute to the character of the town green

Plaza is visually cluttered. Scattered trees and seating limits opportunity for use of plaza as an event space

Footpaths locations do not respond to the pedestrian desire lines

Limited shade opportunities

Arrival into town green is unexciting

Pedestrian crossing of water ramp is illegible and unsafe

Arrival into town green is unexciting

Front of motel unattractive

Horton Street path provides the key link between the town centre and the town green

Path access along front of building is restricted

Waterfront promenade is set back from the waters edge. Its width does not accommodate large volumes of pedestrians

BBQ and picnic facilities are not provided for in this area

Figure 12 – Existing conditions - The Town Green
Reinforce the family and childrens zone, with play equipment, shade, adjoining coffee and cafes, and well considered seating.

Retain and enhance the sense of a memorial space, centred around the current Memorial, that also acts as an informal day-to-day family kick about space.

Reinforce the clear view lines along Horton Street to the waters edge and the wharf, with simplified and less cluttered public realm and an expended footpath and path zone.

Establish a grassed gathering zone, with walking paths to each edge, for people to gather, sit and enjoy the foreshore. This clear area also supports local events in the Town Green.

Create a clear view line from Hay Street Plaza to a new landmark – potentially a sculptural or lighting element that draws people to the Town Green.

Reinforce the view lines along Short Street to the Town Green, and upgrade the public realm in this area with lighting, seating and potentially a local landmark to signal the western end of the Town Green.

Figure 13 – Functional Layout Plan - The Town Green
Figure 14 – Proposed Concept - The Town Green

- Area at the end of Short Street to be clearly defined by the converging paths, and a clear pathway across the boat ramp. Potential for a distinctive sculptural or lighting piece on the Short Street/Town Green view lines to draw people to the Town Green.

- Re-locate the path out of the memorial space to create a clear grassed zone for daily informal family activities, and formal memorial events and commemorations.

- Revitalise The Green as a simpler, less cluttered public space, a amphitheatre type space taking advantage of the stunning views to the water.

- Establish a generous Building Edge Promenade that allows people to walk the southern edge of the Town Green, engage with the adjacent uses, and enjoy seating and shade away from the waters edge.

- Establish a generous Waterfront Promenade that allows people to walk next to the water’s edge and enjoy the north-facing foreshore.

- Re-plan the Horton Street area as a new market plaza space, that re-claims road pavement for expanded footpath areas to the western side, retains current car parking numbers and allows a seamless market stall space when required.

- Create more intimate and sheltered social spaces for picnic’s, social events and smaller scale gatherings.

Upgrade and expansion of the existing play facilities to include water play elements, shade and seating. This should interact with the new southern promenade and potential development with activated frontages between Fig Cafe and the Motel.

Establish a generous Waterfront Promenade that allows people to walk next to the water’s edge and enjoy the north-facing foreshore.

Create more intimate and sheltered social spaces for picnic’s, social events and smaller scale gatherings.
There is duplication of the pedestrian paths which is not needed, confusing and limits the open space treatments and continuity.

The lighting and seating can be simplified to clearly identify the pedestrian activity along the building edges.

Existing activated edge to the Town Green works well.

Encourage new activated uses (cafe, restaurant or similar) fronting the Town Green.

Single pedestrian path and logical locations for lighting and seating.

Improved continuity and space for the green public space (visually simpler and easier to maintain).
THE ‘GREEN’ HASTINGS RIVER

MEMORIAL

EXISTING FIG TREE

BUS PULL OVER

NORFOLK PINES

BUILDINGS

ALFRESCO DINING

CLARENCE STREET

EXISTING NORFOLK PINES

EXISTING NORFOLK PINES

The existing fig tree should be retained as part of the future Town Green. Opportunities to integrate the tree into the design of the children’s playground should be explored.

Potential Water play

Water play elements featuring soft fall family areas, bubblers and associated shallow water play areas. These are integrated with more traditional play elements. Water play provides a safe way for children to interact with water, while in close proximity to the river.

Children’s Playground

Children’s playground featuring traditional play elements, soft fall and seating areas. The playground reinforces the family friendly nature of the Town Green and its role as a place for the entire community. Theming could draw from the history of the site, its location on the river or the existing Fig Tree (for example, a Pirate Park or an Enchanted Fairy Park).

Figure 17 – Proposed Concept - The Fig Tree
Figure 18 – Cross Section - Existing Rydges Interface

Existing sparsely planted palm trees provide minimal shade to open space areas

Existing topography slopes gradually to the water with no articulation

Existing pedestrian paths worn into the grassed areas (no path)

No provision of lighting, seating, or shade for people at the waters edge

Existing pedestrian paths worn into the grassed areas (no path) where people are drawn to the water edge

Figure 19 – Cross Section - Proposed Rydges Interface

New landscaped beds between path and buildings to soften edge and clearly delineate public/private interface

Re-located palm trees visually define the edge of the grassed spaces

New shaded seating and path areas with generous public lighting

New building edge promenade for people to interact with uses fronting the Town Green

New waterfront promenade that allows people to walk along the foreshore, and interact with the waters edge and the panoramic views

New opportunities to creatively use the gradual all to the water to create delineation of movement and passive spaces, and grassed banks for people to lie or sit against

New seating and public lighting to draw people to, and along the water’s edge
Circular Lawn
Subtle sloped lawn areas, allow people to view the water while sitting on the ground. The slope may also provide places for informal play.

Seating wall
A seating wall encloses the large lawn and directs views towards the water. The wall provides seating opportunities, while the garden bed behind provides a visual separation from the busy town centre and car park beyond.

Event Space / Memorial Lawn
The Town Green is an important location within the Port Macquarie Town Centre for community gathering and events. Lawn areas provide flexibility for large and small events while allowing for passive recreation during other times.
Figure 21 – Cross Section - Existing Sunset Parade Interface

- Existing grassed open space and seating is open, unprotected and unshaded.
- Existing street trees visually define the edge of the Sunset Ave and the Town Green.
- Existing pedestrian paths worn into the grassed areas (no path) where people are drawn to the water's edge.
- Existing path is not wide enough and is poorly lit.
- Retain Sunset Ave and on-street car parking for easy access to Town Green.

Figure 22 – Cross Section - Proposed Sunset Parade Interface

- Create a new pedestrian path along the front of the bbq/shelter area to define the space and the grassed open space beyond.
- Establish a second row of trees of same species and spacing as the street trees, to create a more intimate and sheltered environment for seating, picnics and gatherings.
- New waterfront promenade that allows people to walk along the foreshore, and interact with the water's edge and the panoramic views.
- New seating and public lighting to draw people to, and along the water's edge.
Canopy / Shade trees
Large shade trees are located along footpaths provide shelter and shade for pedestrians, while maintaining views to the water.

BBQ facilities
Shelters and barbecue and tables are strategically positioned to capture expansive views along the waterfront.

Green rooms
Paths along and to the waters edge divide the lawn into ‘green rooms’, that can be used for various passive recreational activities including picnicking, gathering and relaxing.