

Resolution of Council

14 May 2018

Item 12.1

Shakespeare Place

By Councillor Thalís

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) Shakespeare Place is the name of the urban space in front of the principle sandstone façade of the Mitchell Library. This space is currently dominated by traffic access to the Cahill Expressway through the Domain;
- (ii) an open space in this location predates the Library, previously being the city end of the Fig Tree Avenue through the Domain to Woolloomooloo. A major statue of Governor Bourke was placed in this open space in 1840. In 1906, construction commenced for the new Mitchell Library on the site immediately to the south, although the work on the completion of the building's northern façade continued up to the 1960s;
- (iii) in the 1920s, this open space to the north of the Library was formalized on its projected central axis. At the centrepiece of this re-formed space (then named as Shakespeare Place) was a commissioned bronze memorial statue, which features a life-sized figure of William Shakespeare standing with pen in hand at the apex of a supporting marble pedestal. At the base of the pedestal is a selection of his most celebrated characters: Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Portia and Falstaff;
- (iv) this ensemble, unveiled in 1926 after decades of planning, is the work of leading Australian expatriate sculptor Sir Edgar Bertram Mackennal (1863-1931), who was also responsible for the Cenotaph in Martin Place. Working mostly in Europe from 1882, Mackennal executed many private works and public monuments. He was the first Australian to be elected an associate of the British Royal Academy, the only Australian to be elected to full Royal Academy membership, and the first to be knighted;

- (v) however, in 1959, the construction of the Cahill Expressway drastically reconfigured and reduced Shakespeare Place, and the memorial was repositioned to the eastern end where it is difficult to access or appreciate. When initially erected, Shakespeare faced east, towards the ridge above Woolloomooloo, however, in 1959, the statue was turned to face west, looking toward the city;
 - (vi) the Morshead Statue, a work by the leading architect and fountain designer Robert Woodward, that sits in the Botanic Gardens to the north of Shakespeare Place, is part of the significance of the place and also needs to be considered;
 - (vii) the State Librarian is now instigating a series of additions to the Library, returning its principal entry to Shakespeare Place and adding an access ramp to the portico of the 'Mitchell Building' of the State Library of NSW; and
 - (viii) there is an opportunity to remake Shakespeare Place as a major gateway to the city, and as an appropriate setting for the Library's principal façade in time for the 220th anniversary of the first advertised production of a Shakespeare play in Australia (on 8 April 2020); and
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate the opportunity to host a roundtable discussion with the State Librarian, Roads and Maritime Services, the NSW Government Architect, Create NSW, the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney and other key stakeholders to consider options to reorganize this major city space to:
- (i) decrease the dominance of vehicular traffic;
 - (ii) provide a better address to the Library;
 - (iii) create a better setting for the Library's grand sandstone façade;
 - (iv) improve pedestrian access and amenity; and
 - (v) reposition the Shakespeare Statue and consider the placement of the Governor Bourke Statue so that they have a more satisfactory relationship to the place.

Note – the above motion was not carried. The resolution as follows was carried.

Moved by Councillor Thalys, seconded by Councillor Scully -

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note:
- (i) Shakespeare Place is the name of the urban space in front of the principal sandstone façade of the Mitchell Library. This space is currently dominated by traffic access to the Cahill Expressway through the Domain;
 - (ii) an open space in this location predates the Library, previously being the city end of the Fig Tree Avenue through the Domain to Woolloomooloo. A major statue of Governor Bourke was placed in this open space in 1840. In 1906, construction commenced for the new Mitchell Library on the site immediately to the south,

although the work on the completion of the building's northern façade continued up to the 1960s;

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 - (vi) the Morshead Statue, a work by the leading architect and fountain designer Robert Woodward, that sits in the Botanic Gardens to the north of Shakespeare Place, is part of the significance of the place and also needs to be considered;
 - (vii) the State Librarian is now instigating a series of additions to the Library, returning its principal entry to Shakespeare Place and adding an access ramp to the portico of the 'Mitchell Building' of the State Library of NSW; and
 - (viii) there is an opportunity to remake Shakespeare Place as a major gateway to the city, and as an appropriate setting for the Library's principal façade in time for the 220th anniversary of the first advertised production of a Shakespeare play in Australia (on 8 April 2020); and
- (B) the Lord Mayor or delegate be requested to host a roundtable discussion with the State Librarian, Roads and Maritime Services, the NSW Government Architect, Create NSW, the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney and other key stakeholders to consider options to reorganize this major city space to:
- (i) decrease the dominance of vehicular traffic;
 - (ii) provide a better address to the Library;
 - (iii) create a better setting for the Library's grand sandstone façade;
 - (iv) improve pedestrian access and amenity; and
 - (v) reposition the Shakespeare Statue and consider the placement of the Governor Bourke Statue so that they have a more satisfactory relationship to the place.

Carried unanimously.