

Cultural Issues In The Redevelopment Of Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane

P H Teys
BE(Civil), Grad Dip Bldg Sc

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a case study of the project management of the cultural issues involved in the redevelopment of Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane, Australia – with a particular focus on the stakeholder management associated with these cultural issues.

Suncorp Stadium (formerly known as Lang Park) is the traditional home of Rugby League in Queensland and is located one kilometre from the Brisbane Central Business District (CBD). The project was a State Government initiative to provide Queensland with a world-class modern rectangular sporting stadium to enable the State to compete for the ever-increasing sports tourism dollar. Successive State Governments from both sides of politics had mooted such a project with wide government and community debate on the likely size, site and ownership model. In 1999, the Labour State Government committed itself to the redevelopment of the government owned Lang Park. In July 2000, the government approved the plans for a \$280million project using a combination of direct government funding and government borrowings of \$45million to be repaid by operating income.

There was opposition to the project from a significant portion of the community at large because of the large commitment of government funds on a sporting stadium rather than essential government services. Private enterprise had their own objections based on self-interest due to various other project options not being selected. The local community had concerns about the increase in size from 40,000 patrons to 52,500 patrons in an inner city area that already had major traffic problems. The Brisbane City Council objected to the location based on insufficient services to the area and in support of the large community concern. On approval of the project, the significance of the cultural issues dealing with traditional owners' land right claims and the fact that the site was also the location of Brisbane's first cemetery after free settlement was proclaimed in 1842 were not fully understood. It set the scene for an interesting time for the project management team during the design and construction process.

Construction commenced in June 2001 with completion in June 2003. Suncorp Stadium will be the home of the Brisbane Broncos rugby league team and will host rugby league tests, state of origin matches as well as rugby union tests. The stadium has secured nine out of the forty-two matches to be held as part of the Rugby World Cup in late 2003, more than any other single venue in Australia.

HISTORY OF THE SITE

To identify and understand the cultural issues involved in any project it is necessary to understand the history of the site.

The areas surrounding Suncorp Stadium were amongst the earliest parts of Brisbane to be settled by Europeans. The stadium site overlays the area of the North Brisbane Burial Grounds, which between 1843 and 1875, were the main cemeteries servicing Brisbane. They consisted of seven denominational cemeteries (Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Congregationalist, Jewish and Wesleyan) and an Aboriginal cemetery. All of these cemeteries closed in 1875. The area fell into disrepair over the years and in 1910 the Government mooted a change in use to parkland. By 1914, those remains and headstones that could be identified were relocated. It is estimated that in excess of 9,000 unidentified burials remained at the site. The site was then used unenthusiastically as a public park with areas being used as a rubbish dump. In 1932 it became the home of Queensland athletics but concurrent use as a dump continued until the late 1930's. During World War II, the site was used for military purposes. The 1950's saw a struggle develop between various bodies over the control, financing and future direction of the park. Queensland Athletics wished to renegotiate its lease and Brisbane City Council, encouraged by national preparations for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, desired to develop Lang Park into an Olympic scale stadium. Furthermore, the Queensland and Brisbane Rugby Leagues were negotiating for the park as the new headquarters of the game. In 1962, the passing of the Lang Park Trust Act consolidated the dominance of Rugby League at Lang Park.

Piecemeal development over 30 years saw a site with two grandstands and spectator terracing which could hold 40,000 people.

The site used for the new redevelopment includes the Lang Park Rugby League ground plus areas leased by Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) and another major sporting body. Additionally, neighbouring land was made subject to Government resumption (at a fair market price) including some 20 properties or part properties belonging to Government and non-Government entities.

Predating European settlement, the aboriginal people say that the area had special cultural significance as part of the broader significance of the Brisbane area. In that the site sits in a small valley and contained a reasonable size swamp, it is likely that the area was a food and water source rather than an area of habitation.

THE PROJECT

The stadium is a coliseum bowl structure capable of seating 52,500 people. An existing stand (built in 1994) with 14,000 seats remains. The lower level of the project is set by the level of the existing stand (RL 5.0) and the roof of the new structure was to be not higher than the old structure (RL 45.0). High mounds comprising natural ground due to fall of the site and overburden from the "rubbish tip days" shaped the three sides of the old stadium. All excavation work was through the old cemeteries. The stadium is roofed to the extent of 75% of seating, with sports lights mounted under the roofline. Two main entry plazas are set at either end of the stadium at higher level than the pitch with the Northern Plaza being designed as a parkland that is attractive for use by the local community outside of event times. World War II facilities adjacent to the old stadium and used by the local PCYC were to be demolished and a new PCYC and Community Sports Facility were designed on the outside of the stadium bowl with public access from the Northern Plaza. Substantial Infrastructure works comprising in excess of 10% of the budget were designed, including an upgrade to the local rail station, a new busstation under the Southern Plaza, pedestrian walkways to the CBD and transport nodes and roadworks to increase bus access. Services infrastructure was upgraded to supply the needs of the new facility. Access was maintained to the adjacent Christ Church property.

CULTURAL ISSUES

Legislation

The State Government *Cultural Record (Landscapes Queensland and Queensland Estate) Act 1987* administered by the Environmental Protection Agency required that a cultural heritage assessment be carried out and that a Cultural Heritage Management Plan be established for the project. The *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* required management plans of listed heritage elements of the project.

Traditional Owners

The summary of the report commissioned by the Government in 2001 from the Turrbal people says, "The Lang Park area is of spiritual and cultural significance to the Turrbal people. The extensive inhabitation of the area and its proximity to Barrambin, Mee-aanjin and the home of Tuggan Dreaming at Spring Hill testify to this. It is recommended that ongoing discussions and negotiations with respect to native title, employment and training opportunities, cultural awareness and protocol be undertaken with Turrbal representatives prior to, during and post commencement of construction". The Turrbal people are the only registered native title claimant over the area, although previous ownership structures of the site had extinguished native title claims. The presence of the aboriginal cemetery on site added to the need to deal with the local indigenous representatives.

The Cemeteries

The former cemeteries on the site involved all of the main religions from this period of history and it was estimated that 9,000 burials remained on site. The attitude of the various religions varied with the Jewish

religion placing great significance on the human remains whereas most other religions placed greater significance on the soul that had left the body rather than the remains. The principle issue was the excavation and management of any remains to be disturbed. Artifacts from the graves and items from the old dump were also of historical and scientific interest.

Heritage Issues

Apart from the general historical significance of the site, there were three historically listed properties that required specific planning and management.

The Milton Brick Drain is one of Brisbane's earliest drainage systems designed by William Nisbet who was the Engineer in Charge of the City and who was credited with the design of much of the drainage of the inner city. Construction commenced in 1886 and its purpose was to drain the swampy area of the site below the cemeteries and to take human waste from the local suburb. Whilst the drain was a couple of metres below local ground level, it passed under an area of the proposed stadium requiring a high density of piling.

The Christ Church is located adjacent to the site with the project on two sides of the Church and new extensive pedestrian infrastructure on the other two sides. The two issues to be addressed were the impact of construction activities on Church operations and the ongoing impact of stadium operations on the Church. A church was built on this site in 1876. After severe storm damage, the current church was built in 1891. The rectory on the site was built in 1883.

Baroona Special School is located across the road from the stadium and adjacent to the pedestrian route being constructed from the stadium to the CBD. The adjacent walkway required the resumption of school property and at one point the walkway is within one metre of the nearest building. The Baroona Special School is one of the earliest surviving schools in Queensland with the first building constructed in 1867. Subsequent buildings were added or served as replacements for old buildings up until the 1980's. Buildings from 1867 and 1874 still exist on site today.

Local Residents

Concern from local residents and nearby businesses was high. The disruption caused by construction was likely to be two to three years and the end result would be a stadium with increased capacity from 40,000 people to 52,500 people. The problem was compounded by the fact that in latter years, the old stadium had a greatly reduced event schedule that would obviously be increased for the new stadium. Principle concerns centred on traffic and transport, noise, light spill with many games being night games and loss of local area amenity.

PLANNING AND DESIGN PHASE

In 1999, the Government commissioned an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that served to guide the schematic design for the project that was completed in mid-2000. The EIS process involved a process of open submissions; extensive consultation with local residents, local businesses and liaison with relevant authorities. The Government brief was for the stadium to run only 24 events a year and the major impacts of the events were identified as follows:

- Widespread traffic congestion in local streets and the adjacent road network.
- Widespread parking problems in the vicinity of the stadium.
- Social impacts due to anti-social behaviour of patrons moving through the streets before and after events.
- Social impacts due to patrons in nearby licensed premises well after event completion.
- Noise breakout from crowd noise, pre-match entertainment and public address system.
- Intrusion from light spill caused by the high lighting levels required for television broadcasting.
- The use of helicopters for live broadcasting purposes.
- Visual impact of the new stadium and associated infrastructure.

In addition, the usual construction impacts were identified including, noise, dust, parking and traffic as well as the specific site related cultural heritage issues. Development conditions that managed the high-risk

concerns were set up for the project in consultation with stakeholder authorities. The key design parameters used in response to the EIS were:

- Improving access to the stadium whilst minimizing impact on local residential areas.
- Adopting a transport strategy with an 80% mode split to public transport.
- Development of pedestrian routes to the various transport nodes and the CBD with benefits to the stadium and to the local community outside of event times.
- Incorporation of an internal service road on ground level to minimise vehicular use of local streets and reduce noise from servicing activities.
- Use of local materials (timber walls and tin roof) on the exterior of the stadium to fit in with the Brisbane context.
- Lower the effective mass of the building by use of external plazas and parklands that are also able to be used by the community outside of event times.

University of Queensland Archaeological Services Unit (UQASU) were engaged to carry out a cultural heritage assessment of the site and prepare a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for use during the construction phase of the project. In support of this assessment, UQASU commissioned a report from the Turrbal Association as representatives of the traditional owners of the area. The report prepared by UQASU divided the planning process into the three stages of significance assessment, management policy and the development of management strategies. The report concluded that the best management policy for conservation for material found on site was for in-situ conservation wherever possible.

CONSTRUCTION PHASE

The construction contract was let to a joint venture of contractors Multiplex (contractor for Stadium Australia) and Watpac (contractor for the Brisbane Cricket Ground) in June 2001. The first task of the contractor under the Development Approval was the establishment of a Community Liaison Group (CLG). The broad role of the CLG was to meet with the contractor on a regular basis in order to identify particular community issues, discuss possible mitigation measures, monitor new initiatives and to debrief after particular events. The membership of the CLG consisted of the Local City Councillor and representatives from local residents, businesses and community organisations. In addition, the Development Approval required the establishment of a Stadium Management Advisory Committee that consisted of the CLG plus City Police, Emergency Services and stadium management. The role of the SMAC was to advise on the development of management plans in accordance with the EIS, monitor the effectiveness of the management plans and advise on the coordination of local arrangements for stadium events. In addition, a specific regular meeting was established with the Christ Church being the only immediately adjacent neighbour to the redevelopment. A Visitor's Centre was established on site in one of the existing suites that included old site photographs, models of the completed project and with a view out to the centre of the arena. The Visitor's Centre was open to the general public two days per week and at other times by appointment. A Complaints Register system was established by the contractor under the control of a specifically appointed Community Liaison Officer. Every complaint was recorded in a register and responded to by the Community Liaison Officer or one of the contractor's management team with specific knowledge of the particular complaint.

Normal construction constraints were placed upon the contractor by the construction contract. Specifically, working conditions matched the Brisbane City Council's normal working hour and noise restriction conditions. The contract required the contractor to provide worker parking either on site or at some remote location. In practice, site space was limited and workers were generally prepared to face the wrath of the parking inspectors by parking in the local streets. Daily visits by the water truck and use of wheel washes at each of the entry points to the site helped to control site dust and dirt onto the local streets. Traffic Management Plans were established for the major phases of the project as well as for specific activities that were to have a major impact on local traffic flow.

A Cultural Heritage Management Plan written by UQASU governed the clearance of the cemetery sites. UQASU nominated an archaeological team for the project whose role it was to guide the construction team to work around potential burial positions that UQASU would then excavate in fine detail. The first phase was the excavation down to the bulk excavation level, followed by excavation where footings were to go, followed by trenches for future in ground services. Excavated material, with excess bulk soil removed, was taken to the University of Queensland for final cleaning, analysis and ultimately re-internment. The site

induction procedure for all workers included cultural awareness training. The Turrbal people had a full time representative on site when work was carried out within the Aboriginal Cemetery.

A significant Public Art component was included in the project to provide work for the art community, provide specific enhancement to areas of the project and to provide a less austere facility in what is predominantly a residential area. The CLG was represented on the Public Art Advisory Group.

PROJECT CULTURAL OUTCOMES

Traditional Owners

The Turrbal people were identified early in the planning process as the proper representatives of the indigenous owners. During the design phase, the Turrbal Association was commissioned to provide a report on the history and significance of the area. The Turrbals held a traditional smoke ceremony to launch the project and were recognised in the site induction process. They had at least one representative on site (paid for by the project) during excavation of the aboriginal cemetery and they participated in the Public Art process. The Turrbals wanted more out of the project, but their wishes needed to be balanced with the fact that the project was being built on land used by the Government for well over a century which was not of great indigenous significance..

The Cemeteries

591 burials were identified on site and 397 were exhumed from the four salvaged cemeteries, along with a broken headstone, a brick vault and trenches containing broken monumental masonry and other rubble. 183 burials were exhumed from the Anglican Cemetery, 16 from the Aboriginal Cemetery, 163 from the Roman Catholic Cemetery and 35 from the Presbyterian Cemetery. The concentration of burials varied in each cemetery with the Roman Catholic Cemetery containing almost triple the density of the Presbyterian cemetery. This reflected the amount of land allocated for each cemetery and the size of the relative denominations in Brisbane at that time. The remains have been re-interred in a single grave suitably marked in Brisbane's Toowong Cemetery. The aboriginal remains have been handed over to the Turrbal people. UQASU have prepared a detailed report on their activities and findings as well as an additional report which details the scientific analysis of 25% of the excavated remains including DNA studies etc. This latter report in particular was gathered to add to the cultural historical record of the State.

Heritage Issues

The Milton Brick Drain was left undisturbed and great care was taken in the piling process where the corner of the stadium passed across the drain. The Baroona Special School was untouched although protection measures were taken where an extended access walkway passes within a metre of one building. A heritage plan prepared for the Christ Church was discussed at length with the church and a generous scope of work was agreed for maintenance works and upgrading of the grounds. This work was designed, constructed and paid for by the Government. The construction process was unpleasant for the Church, but constant liaison and patience on behalf of the Church resulted in a good working relationship.

Local Residents

The CLG process worked well although there was disquiet in the community due to the fact that not all business and lobby groups could be accommodated as participants on the group. Major complaints related to lack of parking in the local area during working hours and dust. The Visitors' Centre worked extremely well for local residents and other parties who were interested in the project. The Visitors' Centre also became the main meeting room for key meetings of many groups. Despite some concerns that property values will go down as a result of the project, the fact is that the new stadium upgrades a site that was fast becoming derelict. Research overseas on similar projects and early indications in the local area are that property values increase. The high profile of the project and the improved urban infrastructure have served to raise the public's awareness of the area with a resultant benefit to local businesses.

CONCLUSION

Project management of a project of this size and complexity was always going to be a challenge. Cultural issues on projects are becoming more important as renewal projects are carried out in inner city areas with their own history and established living practices. We are in an age of social responsibility where interest groups are quite rightly heard and participate in the planning and construction process. The needs of these groups must be balanced with the needs of the project and they present a challenge that consumes more of the Project Manager's time than in years gone by. The processes followed on the stadium project have proven to be the correct ones, but the key to success of cultural management has had more to do with how the issues have been managed by the various parties involved in the process. The skill set required to manage cultural issues on a project is no different than the various other project management activities. The development of the Suncorp Stadium project has reinforced the fact that sound project management systems and procedures can deal with a broad range of issues and situations.

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Peter Teys
Project Services – Queensland Department of Public Works
Tel: 3876 4640
Fax: 3368 3421
Email: peter.teys@projectservices.qld.gov.au