

711 Hunter Street
Newcastle

Indigenous Design Strategy | October 2022



Indigenous Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and abroad, and their continuing connection to culture, community, land, sea and sky. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and future, whose wisdom ensures the perpetuation of Indigenous culture now and forever.

Any Cultural Intellectual Property “ICIP” arising out of this work remains that of the Traditional Custodians contributing and Indigenous Design Team, and is only to be used in relation to this project and the purposes as described.

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Date | October 2022 | 711 Hunter Street

Issue | C | Indigenous Design Report

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01 Introduction

A Note on Language

Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Peoples, First Nations

When we use the above terms, we refer to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person or community. Throughout this document, these terms are used interchangeably.

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies themselves as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and is accepted as such by the community in which they live. The term Aboriginal refers to people Indigenous to mainland Australia, while Torres Strait Islander refers to people Indigenous to those islands.

As is the case with all other proper nouns - such as English or Australian - all references to Aboriginal people (whichever term used) should be capitalised.

Acknowledgement of Country

Refers to the practice of showing respect to the Traditional Custodians of place and their ongoing connection and sovereignty over land. It differs from a Welcome to Country, which is given by Traditional Custodians to welcome others to Country.

British Invasion, British occupation, colonisation, colonists

We emphatically reject the softening of language when referring to British Invasion and forcible colonisation of land, and ongoing processes of colonisation. The propensity for these processes to be referred to as ‘arrived’ and ‘settled’ denies our history, perpetuating violent myths of *terra nullius* and the trauma this continues to inflict on our communities.

Caring for Country

This refers to the reciprocal obligations Indigenous people have to care for the systems embedded within cultural landscapes to ensure balance and continuity. Based on traditional practices, it includes landscape management techniques such as totemic relationships and knowledge systems, fire farming, forage farming and the like. Given cultural practices adapt to new technologies and contemporary limitations, Caring for Country has many contemporary iterations where Traditional Custodians continue to express and perform their cultural obligations to care.

Country

This encompasses Indigenous cultural understanding of the lands, seas, waters and skies to which they have ancestral connections with. See opposite page for a more nuanced description of Country.

Dreaming/Dreamtime/Lore

The Dreaming is an English translation adopted to describe complex cultural knowledge systems embedded within the landscape and passed down through cultural expressions such as art, dance and story telling. It encompasses the creation of things to the explanation of why and how things have come to be. It is for all places and for all times, and has different meanings for the different Indigenous groups across the continent.

Elder(s), Knowledge Holders and Lore-people

Elders are the custodians of knowledge who have been chosen and accepted by Indigenous communities for their services and role to community in the perpetuation of Indigenous culture and knowledge. They are highly respected individuals who play a large role in the health and leadership of community. Knowledge Holders and Lore-people are respected people who have learned and are learning traditional cultural knowledge, including performing and teaching dance, art and ceremony.

Nations, clans, language groups

These are terms that have been adopted to describe the social organisation of Aboriginal groups. Nations generally refers to a group of people connected by lands and language, with clans describing the smaller sub-groups within a nation or language group, for example, the Mulgoa clan of the Dharug Nation.

Songlines

Routes through the landscape understood as travelled during the Dreaming, as well as often being migratory routes of animals. The stories describe the landscape and events that happened during the Dreaming, can be songs as mnemonic devices. They are passed from Elder to Elder over thousands of years. Many of todays roads and highways are built over ancient songlines.

Totems

Objects, plants or animals prescribed to people and the landscape as spiritual connection. They transfer obligations, roles and characteristics to each other.

Traditional Custodians

Our preferred term over Traditional Owners, as it more succinctly describes the reciprocal relationship and obligations to Country. This term describes Indigenous people with Ancestral connection to specific geographical locations.

01 Introduction

711 Hunter Street, Newcastle

Mulubinba Awabakal - Worimi Ngurra

In 2021 St Hilliers entered into a joint venture with The Spotlight Group to develop 711 Hunter Street, Newcastle West - Mulubinba, shared lands of the Awabakal and Worimi peoples.

This key site is in the centre of Newcastle and is within walking distance of the transport hub and the Hunter River, with views achievable from the development out to the ocean and back to Sugarloaf Mountain. The site was once used as warehouse department stores such as Spotlight and Anaconda, and sits within a cultural hub known for live music and art.

In 2021, Plus Architecture won a competition to transform the site with a two-tower mixed-use redevelopment. The concept aimed to create an iconic landmark building and place that will stand the test of time.

Sitting at approximately 90m high, the development combines up to 267 dwellings and 1,400 square metres of commercial floor space and 322 parking spaces, at an estimated construction cost of \$100 million.

During Early 2022, COLA Studio was engaged by St Hilliers to help refine the competition winning design to craft a Country - driven, place based response that celebrates the identity and culture of Mulubinba - ranging from its eons held identity as Mulubinba through to its colonial contemporary identity and dreaming of its future for the generations to come.

The design competition launched by the City of Newcastle together with property developers St Hilliers and The Spotlight Property Group was coordinated by an independent jury process under the governance of the City of Newcastle and the NSW Government Architect's Office.

A three-member independent jury unanimously selected the innovative design by Plus Architecture for the proposed redevelopment of 711 Hunter Street, Newcastle West, which extends from Hunter Street to King Street and along the northern side of National Park Street.

The competition's jury said the Plus Architecture entry was selected for stand out design elements including the 'meeting place' concept - a public domain to facilitate and encourage people to meet, and the visual link between National Park Street to the Army Drill Hall, with jury members also supporting the design's warm tonal palette and horizontal stacked layers.



NSWGA’s Guidance on Country and Design

NSWGA’s Draft Framework provides proponents of development, approval bodies and community members with an introduction to Indigenous concepts of Country and Country centred design, offering strategies for connecting with Country and understanding Indigenous perspectives when considering the life of projects. The framework provides principles for action, direction and guidance on implementing these strategies, accompanied by a selection of case studies to illustrate the ways in which designing with and connecting with Country can be implemented.

Strategy 1 - Pathways for Connecting

- **Cultural awareness** - develop, plan for and commit to continuous cultural awareness throughout the life of the project
- **Cultural expression** - engage with cultural expression, including language, place names, cultural practices and facilitate ongoing cultural practices
- **Relationship with Country** - endeavour to build relationships with Country and community, developing mutually beneficial relationships with Country
- **Learning from Country** - Indigenous people have innovated and learned from Country for eons through observational data gathering and analysis told through lore.
- **Knowledge-sharing** - a two way process that can help strengthen relationships, knowledge sharing involves all team members being open to other ways of receiving knowledge that may be outside of their cultural comfort zone. Through knowledge sharing, we can find common ground and pathways to living sustainably.

Strategy 2 - Considering project life cycles from an Aboriginal perspective

- Understanding that connection with Country is a life-long process - requiring commitments to paying attention and evolving our understandings; guided by the Traditional Custodians of place. This requires a paradigm shift in design and project thinking, which the NSWGA suggests as:
- **Sensing: Start with Country (project formation)** - Actively seek the sense of Country. What does this Country feel like? Guided by Traditional Custodians, use your senses to connect to and understand Country.
- **Imagining – Listen to Country (project design and conceptualisation)** - Listening, engaging and facilitating aspirations of Traditional Custodians and Country via design.
- **Shaping – Design with Country (project delivery):** The materials from Country have a direct association and responsibility to place, therefore use of materials from Country will be innately more of place.
- **Caring for Country (project maintenance):** By shifting the life of the project from maintenance to care, we support ongoing custodial obligations and create economic opportunities for cultural practice.

“Aboriginal culture is developing a stronger presence in the NSW planning system. Undertaking archaeological investigations and recording Aboriginal heritage is a well-established part of the planning process, but response to Country and culture in the design of places is a relatively new idea.”

- NSWGA, 2021

NSWGA Draft Framework Principles for Action

1.

We will respect the rights of Aboriginal peoples to Indigenous cultural intellectual property, and we will support the **right of Country to be cared for.**

2.

We will prioritise Aboriginal people’s relationship to Country, and their **cultural protocols**, through education and enterprise by and for Aboriginal people.

3.

We will prioritise **financial and economic benefits** to the Country where we are working, and by extension to the Traditional Custodians of that Country.

4.

We will **share tangible and intangible benefits** with the Country where we are working, and by extension the Traditional Custodians of that Country, including current and future generations.

5.

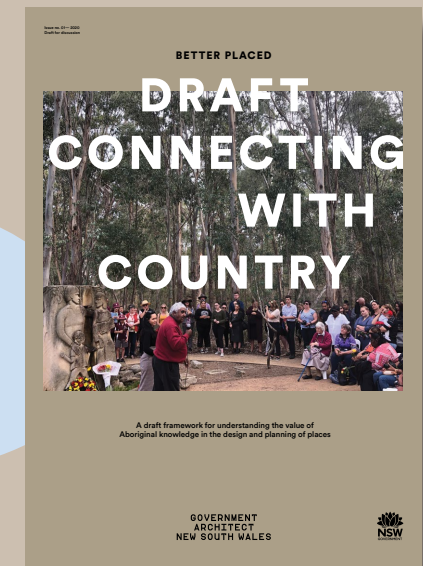
We will respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, but we will prioritise the local, place specific **cultural identity of the Country** we’re working on. Aboriginal people will determine the representation of their cultural materials, customs, and knowledge.

6.

We will prioritise recognition and **responsibility of Aboriginal people**, supporting capacity building across Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and across government project teams.

7.

We will support Aboriginal people to continue their practices of managing land, water, and air through their ongoing **reciprocal relationships with Country**. We will create opportunities for traditional first cultures to flourish.



Engaging with Local Cultural Knowledge Holders

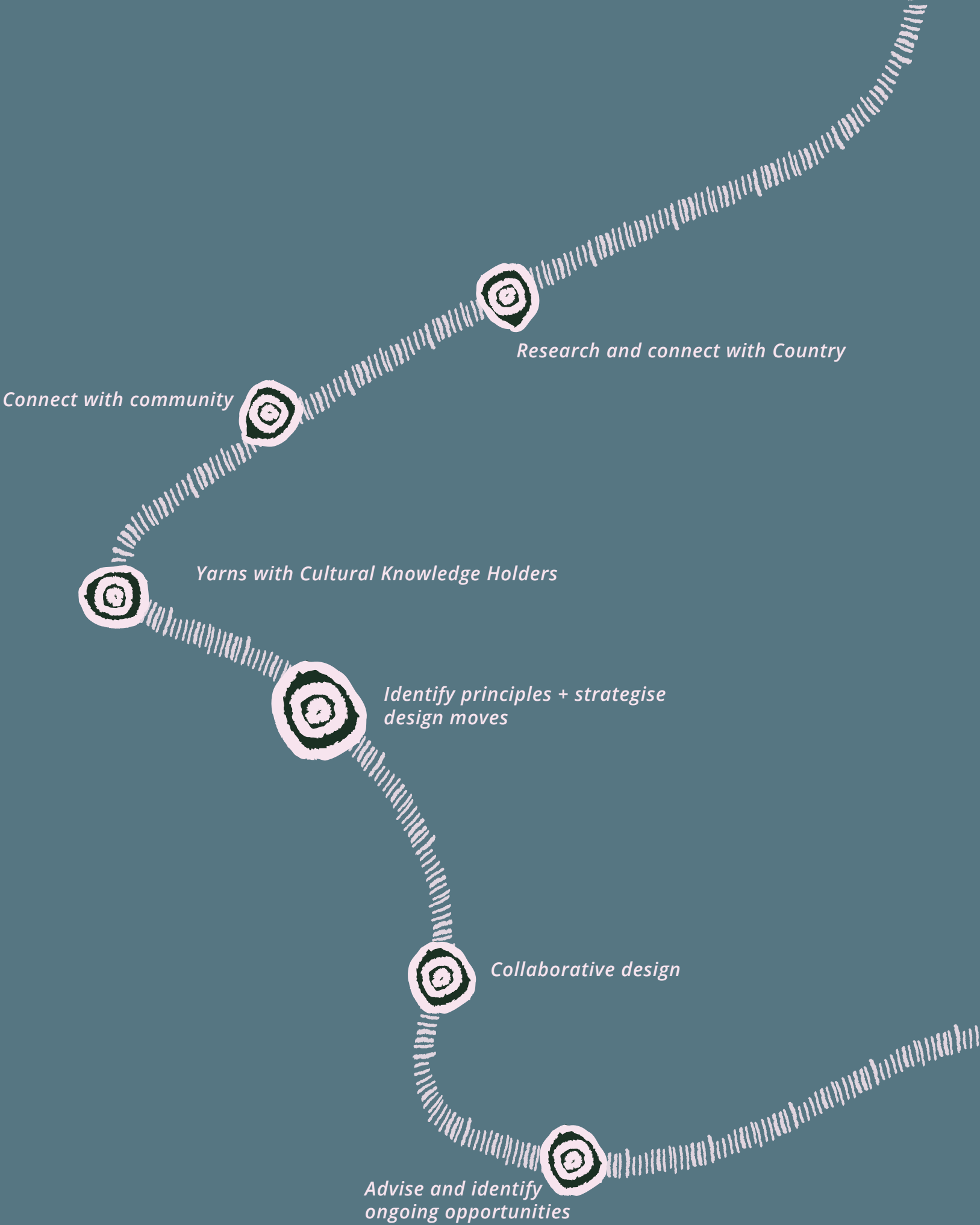
In April 2022, COLA Studio began the process of engaging with local Cultural Knowledge Holders to help guide the design response. The process involves yarning workshops with Cultural Knowledge Holders and the design team. Research conducted by COLA Studio, along with insight from ongoing experience in this field helped to establish and support the principles identified during the engagement process.

Consulting parties:

Wannangini Pty Ltd - Represented by Peter Leven - Awabakal
Awabakal designer - Shellie Smith - Awabakal

Discussion overview:

- Introduction to the site and COLA's role in the project
- Yarning about Country
- Discussion on engagement protocol and design process thus far
- Discussion on water narrative
- Dreaming stories - Kangaroo at Whibayganba/Nobbys, the creation of coal
- Gathering place and proximity to corroboree grounds near where Honeysuckle now stands
- Discussions on planting, ecological references
- Waste management paradigms
- Discussions on material responsibility
- Discussions on community benefit



Understanding of Place

Mulubinba / Newcastle

The place of sea ferns

Long before this place became Newcastle, before the Coal Harbour and Hunter Street, before the wharves, shipyards, freight and steel, this place was Mulubinba.

Underneath the colonial veneer of sandstone, steel and concrete, it is still Mulubinba - Her sandy silty soils speaking to her identity as a place of confluence, shaped by water and wind.

The Mulubinba clans lived around this area, extending to Merewether. The site of the project sits along what was the sandy banks of the river, close to fresh water from the creek that now forms the polluted cottage creek canal.

Country has been caring for the Awabakal and Worimi people, plants and animals who have loved and cared for her in return since the beginning of time. Their footsteps shaped this land, their voices singing to Mulubinba as she provided and cared for them.

Mulubinba has been forged by volcanic activity and tectonic forces, shaped by water and wind, cared for with hands and fire.

Soft sensuous forms of the river meet the rugged coast of the saltwater, soft silt meets the salt and sand of the sea.

In the East, monumental sandstone cliffs bow down to the sea, while the rolling hills of the WEst meander down to meet the river. Pockets of casuarinas, eucalyptus, figs and tea trees hug the hills, hinting at Mulubinbas pre-colonial presence.

For Eons, Awabakal and Worimi have shaped this place, finding camp in her hills, fishing her waters, shaping the forests and plains. Smoke wafting through the air, carried with the sound of bird song and insects chirping. The colours are vivid coastal blues, oranges of sandstone and deep greens of the coastal forests.



Sensing Place

When we think about built form connecting with Country, we talk about the materials being of place, allowing for light, air, for visual connection to the sky and prominent landscape features, to plant the plants of place, to allow for the animals that belong to place, to allow for water.

This allows Aboriginal experience of place to be supported - we are able to connect to the sky and know our direction, feel light and air; smell water, eucalyptus, earth, smoke; feel the textures of place, hear the songs of Country through the chirping insects and bird song. To feel welcome and seen in a place that we are a part of, a place that is a part of us.

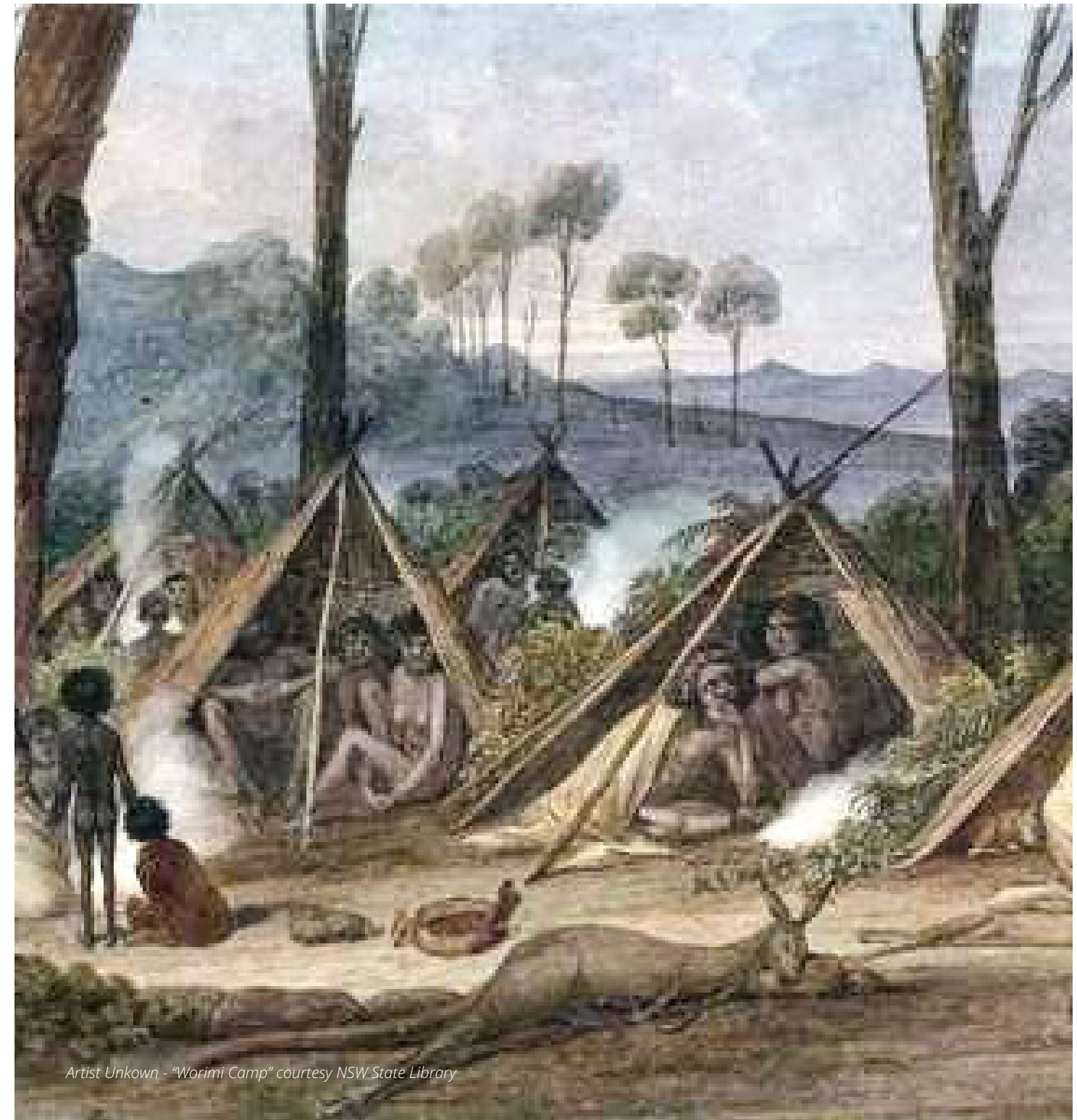
There is opportunity to speak to this process of sensing place, supporting Indigenous experience of place and invite non-Indigenous people to sense place in the design via:

- + Blurring the thresholds between indoors and outdoors
- + Use of natural materials from place

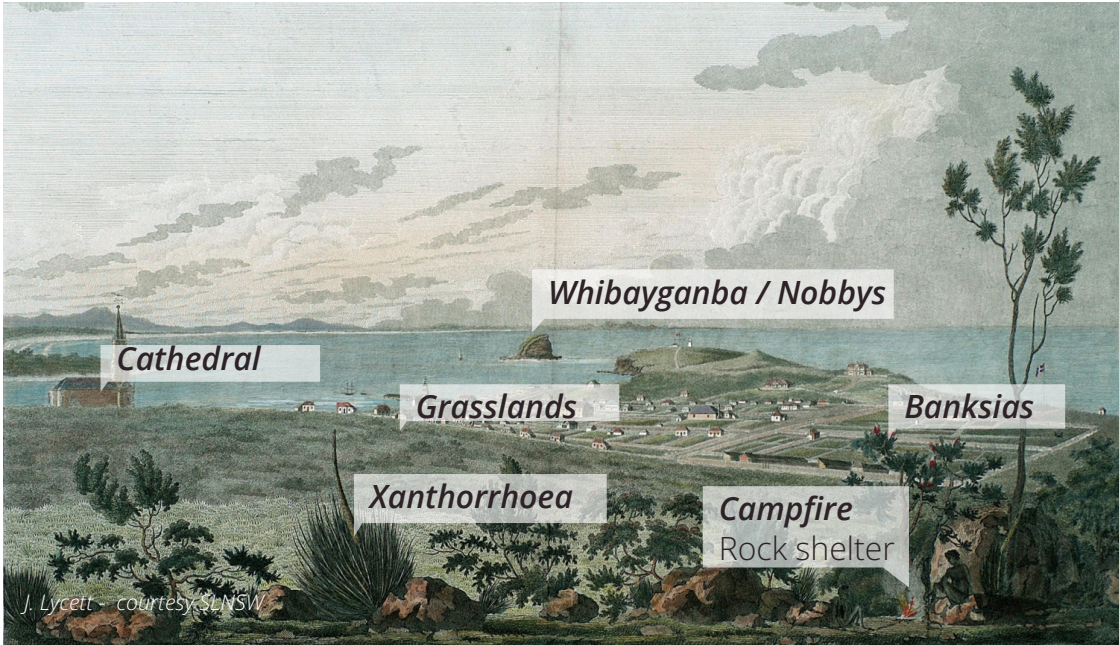
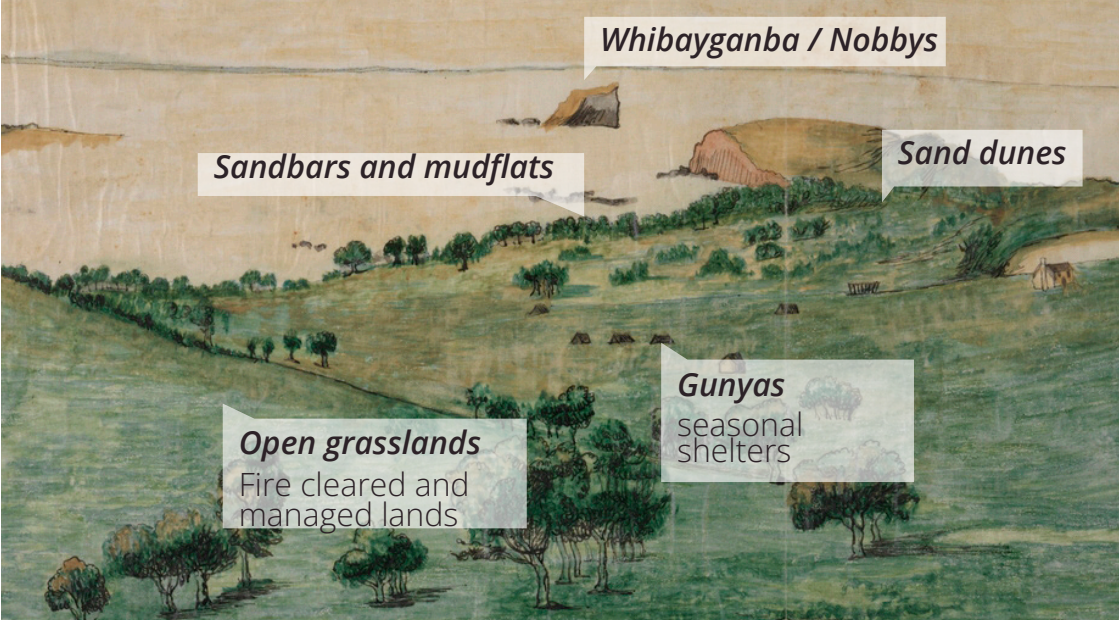
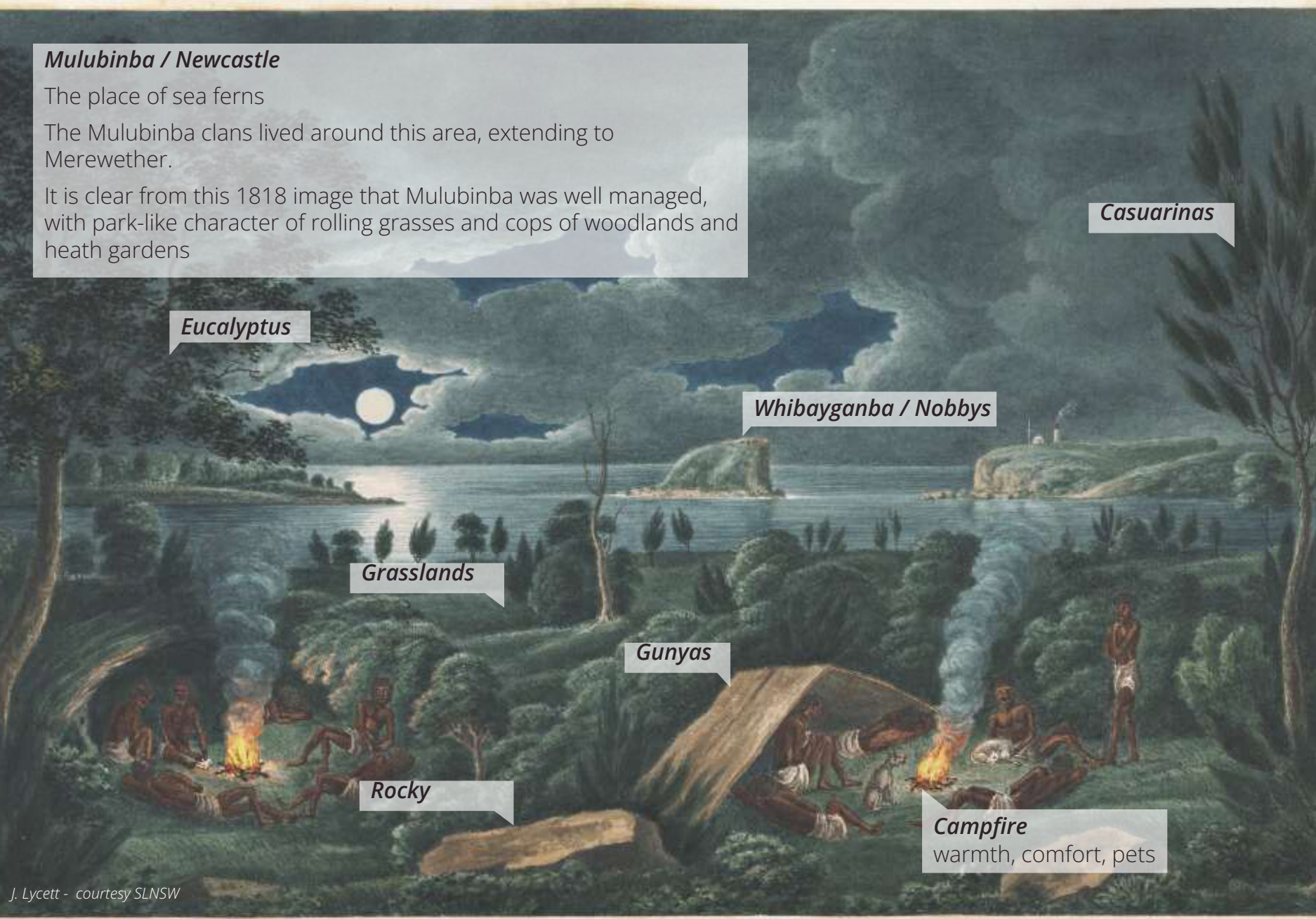
- + Creation of culturally safe environments for Indigenous people
- + Maintaining visual and physical access to the river, hill crest and other important landscape elements
- + Use of native endemic planting to support local systems, encourage local wildlife and support sensory experience + smells of local eucalypts, melaleucas, sounds of local birdsong, chirping of insects
- + Access to sky, light, water

This is still Aboriginal Country - the Worimi and Awabakal still have presence here at Mulubinba. There is opportunity to facilitate ongoing custodianship and cultural practice through design, to connect with Mulubinba through a collaborative process with local Traditional Custodians.

Today we set out to build upon Country again, but this time we seek to honour Country whilst doing so. We seek to respect the Traditional Custodians of place and amplify their voices in this process of design. We respect Elders by learning their teachings and unlearning the damaging processes that have harmed Country in the past.



Remembering Country



Early colonial paintings provide a window to Country's pre-colonial presence, illustrating the parkland qualities of Country under Aboriginal management and care, as well as speaking to Indigenous life and cultural practice. It is clear from the early paintings of Lycett and Wallis that life at Mulubinba was one of everyday abundance and comfort, that it is a place of prospect and refuge.

02 About **Mulubinba**

**Textures of Country: Saltwater / freshwater;
sand, silt and rock**

Visual and cultural analysis tells us that Mulubinba is a place of confluence, of movement.

The site sits within a cultural nexus of fresh, brackish and salt water; of the silty volcanic soils meeting the sands of the coast.

A confluence of language groups - the Awabakal and Worimi.

This character has persisted into colonial and contemporary times, seated on the Western Edge of the city centre, within a cultural nexus of art and music.



Textures of Country: Themeda grasslands + Tidal Flats



03 Yarns + Workshops

Workshop 1

The initial workshop was held with Peter Leven representing Wannangini. This workshop and informal yarns prior introduced Tracie Howie and Peter Leven to the site location, the winning competition design and discussed some of the ways in which the design could connect and engage with this part of Awabakal Country, known as Mulubinba.

Key points of the discussion included:

The Water Story

- We discussed the historical location of the river bank as being much closer to the site than it currently is - Peter suggesting that the original river banks were between the rail line and Hunter Street
- The nature of the site would have been a tidal - coastal river zone, characterised by sandy soils, sand dunes, rocky outcrops and coastal planting
- A place of confluence and brackish water - a place where fresh water meets saltwater, making for good fishing, mollusc harvesting, access to ochres

Geology and Archaeology

- We discussed the geology of the area and touched on the Dreaming stories attached to geology, speaking of the sandy alluvium covering the sandstone, shale and carboniferous stratum of earth
- We spoke about the deposits left by the Old People - the tuff, silcrete artefacts that are found up and down the coast, indicating trade. We spoke about the high incidence of artefact scatters found around Honeysuckle are indicating a large Bora Ground and trading area, in addition to early settler accounts of corroborees taking place by the riverside

Anthropocene and Waste Management

- The conversations around archaeology led to discussions on the difference between waste management paradigms and how the difference between the two presents physically as a layer of debris on the earth's crust.
- Aboriginal waste management paradigms meant that unused materials went back to Country or, as in the case of middens, became an extension of Country
- We spoke about the opportunities for this type of thinking to align with regenerative, cradle to cradle design thinking and how that would be a very positive outcome for Country

Urban Habitat

- We discussed the disappearance of the many plants, animals and insects that have walked these lands since the beginning of time, and the need for development to consider not just human habitat but also places for the non-humans as well
- We discussed the opportunities to create urban habitat in ways that connect people with the ecological systems of Newcastle, and instill an attitude of caring/stewardship



03 Yarns + Workshops

Workshop 2

The second workshop was held with Shellie Smith, an Awabakal architect and PhD candidate, with Peter Leven unable to attend due to industrial action. This workshop and informal yarns prior introduced Shellie to the site location, the winning competition design and discussed protocol and built off the previous workshop.

Key points of the discussion included:

Protocol of Engagement

- We discussed the tensions between Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Traditional Custodians, deciding that as the point of engagement at this stage of design is to engage with Country, the Traditional Custodians are most appropriate - should community provisions be sought to be realised, extending opportunity to collaborate with LALCs would then become more appropriate
- Ongoing discussions and workshops throughout the design stages will be more genuine and fruitful in teasing out the detail on engaging with narrative, place and culture

Being of Place

- We discussed the need for built forms to be of place - to draw from the local surrounds, cultural practices, ecological communities, systems, plants and animals
- We discussed how this affects the approach to material selection, geometries, approach to textures etc

Material responsibility

- We spoke of the need to reduce burden on Country through adaptive re-use/recycling of materials wherever possible
- Explore the ways in which design can minimise impact on Country, having a net positive effect on Country
- For materials to be of place - locally sourced or obtained through relational, ethical trade

Community benefit and balancing needs

- We discussed the tensions that may arise between the program of the ground plane, Newcastle's night life and the residents of the towers - Shellie questioned whether a community plaza space would become a reality given some of these tensions
- We discussed the opportunities for giving back to community - asking, how can Awabakal people directly benefit from the development? Ideas posited included health services, community art and training



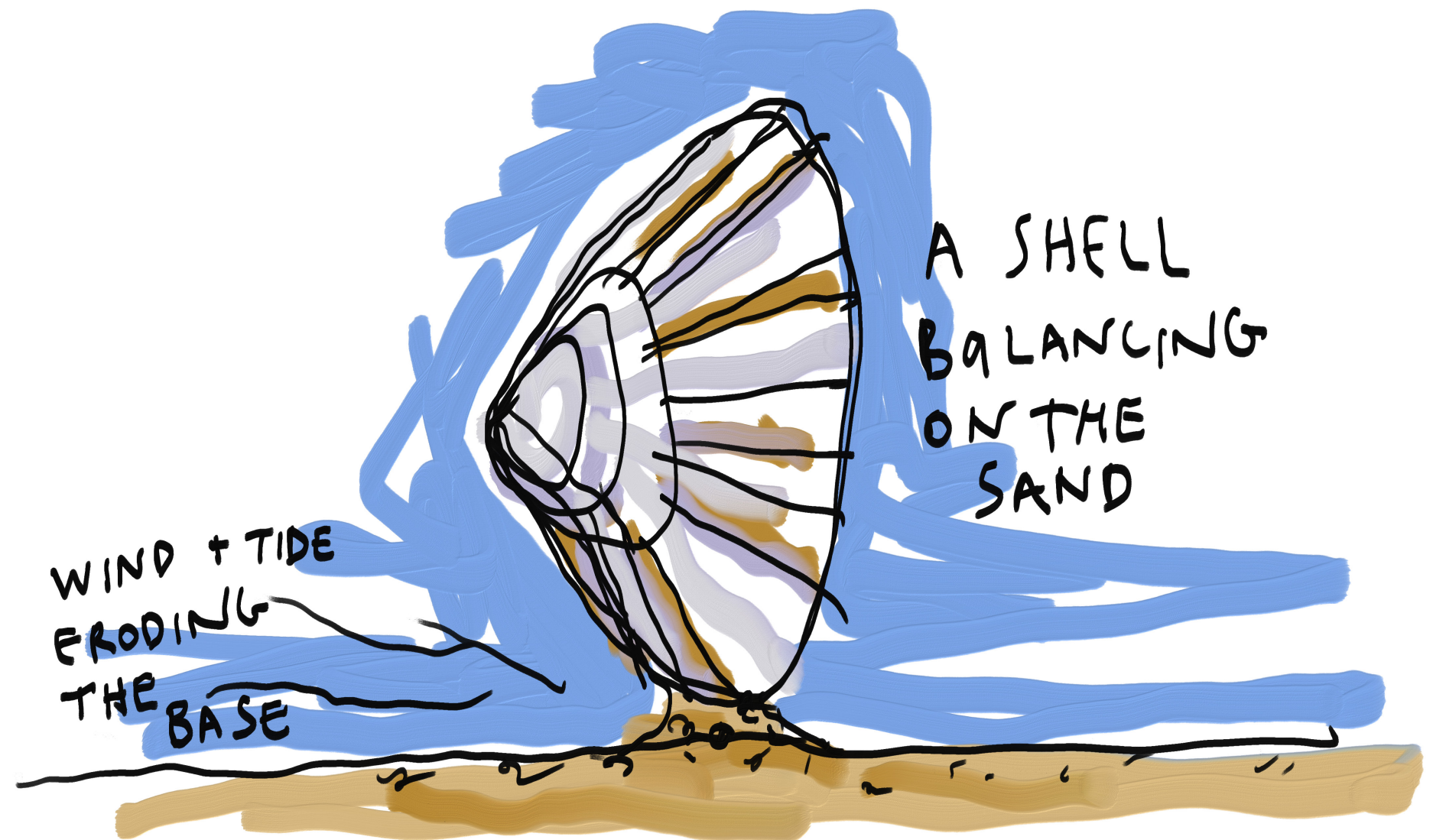
03 Yarns + Workshops

Design Team Workshops

Throughout the DA design process, the team has met on several occasions to workshop the design and refine the Country driven response.

Key meeting points have included:

- Overview of local engagement workshop outcomes and identification of design principles
- Landscape design workshoping
- Public realm workshoping
- Architecture workshoping and podium presentation
- Workshoping life of project opportunities with St Hilliers to support ongoing custodianship of Country



The design team have been presented with a series of calls to action throughout the designing with Country process. The above diagram illustrates a simple Country driven design instigator - of shell lightly sitting on sand, the creative movement of wind and water expressed at the base.

Design Principles

Saltwater/Freshwater

Draw upon the coastal river mouth location, the confluence of freshwater and saltwater, a place of trade and congregation as design narrative:

- Flowing geometries
- Layered textures
- Reference to sedimentation and erosion
- Water story throughout
- Diversity of spaces - performance spaces, meeting places
- Use of coastal, sandy colours and materials
- Highly sensory - smell and sound of water, textures of sands, stone, timbers, mollusc shells
- Draw on relationship with lunar patterns, interpreting the tidal and seasonal patterns

Urban Habitat

Draw on coastal landscape characteristics, provide for humans and non-humans to encourage connection with Country:

- Use of endemic, local coastal planting
- Explore opportunities for habitat creation, particularly pollinator species
- Explore urban food production opportunities
- Allowing Country to breathe, to connect
- Create spaces that encourage physical and visual connection with nature - avoid overuse of planter walls
- Create spaces for nourishment, refuge
- Layered, textural environment
- Emphasis on sustainability
- Use of language and cultural cues throughout

Material Responsibility

Explore ways in which the built form can truly be of place through sourcing local materials, minimise burden on Country:

- Re-use and recycle materials where possible
- Prioritise locally sourced materials
- Employ Indigenous ethos to materiality - where traded materials are sourced through relationality - prioritise locally sourced, then look to fair, ethical and sustainable materials
- Importance of facilitating an ethos of care - for Country, for one and other
- Materials to be of place - colour, texture, types - to feel as an extension of Country

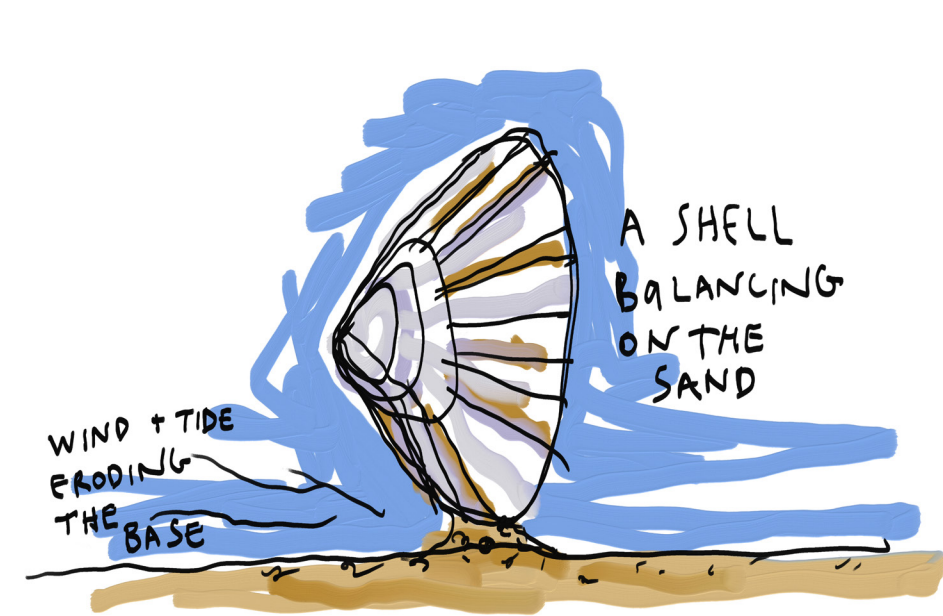
Building relationships

Explore the ways in which the development strengthens our relationships with Country and community via:

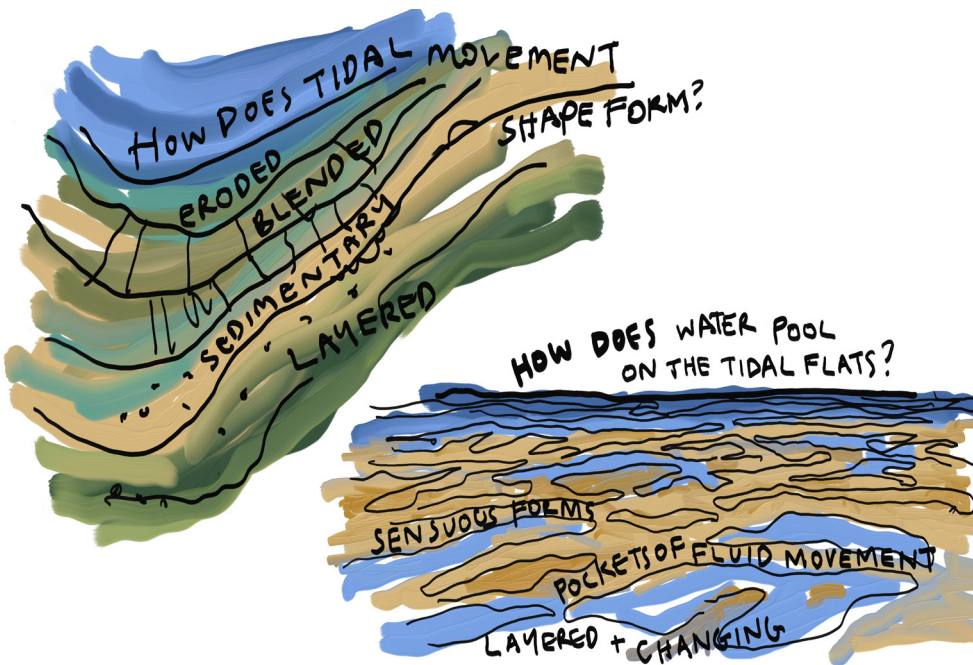
- Employing a net positive effect on Country, minimising burden and extraction from Country
- Seeking out opportunities for community partnerships and perpetual benefit
- Seeking out opportunities to facilitate cultural practice, explore educational and cross cultural exchange opportunities
- Seeking out relationships with local Indigenous artists, community organisations



Drivers



Shell and Sand - form, colour, process



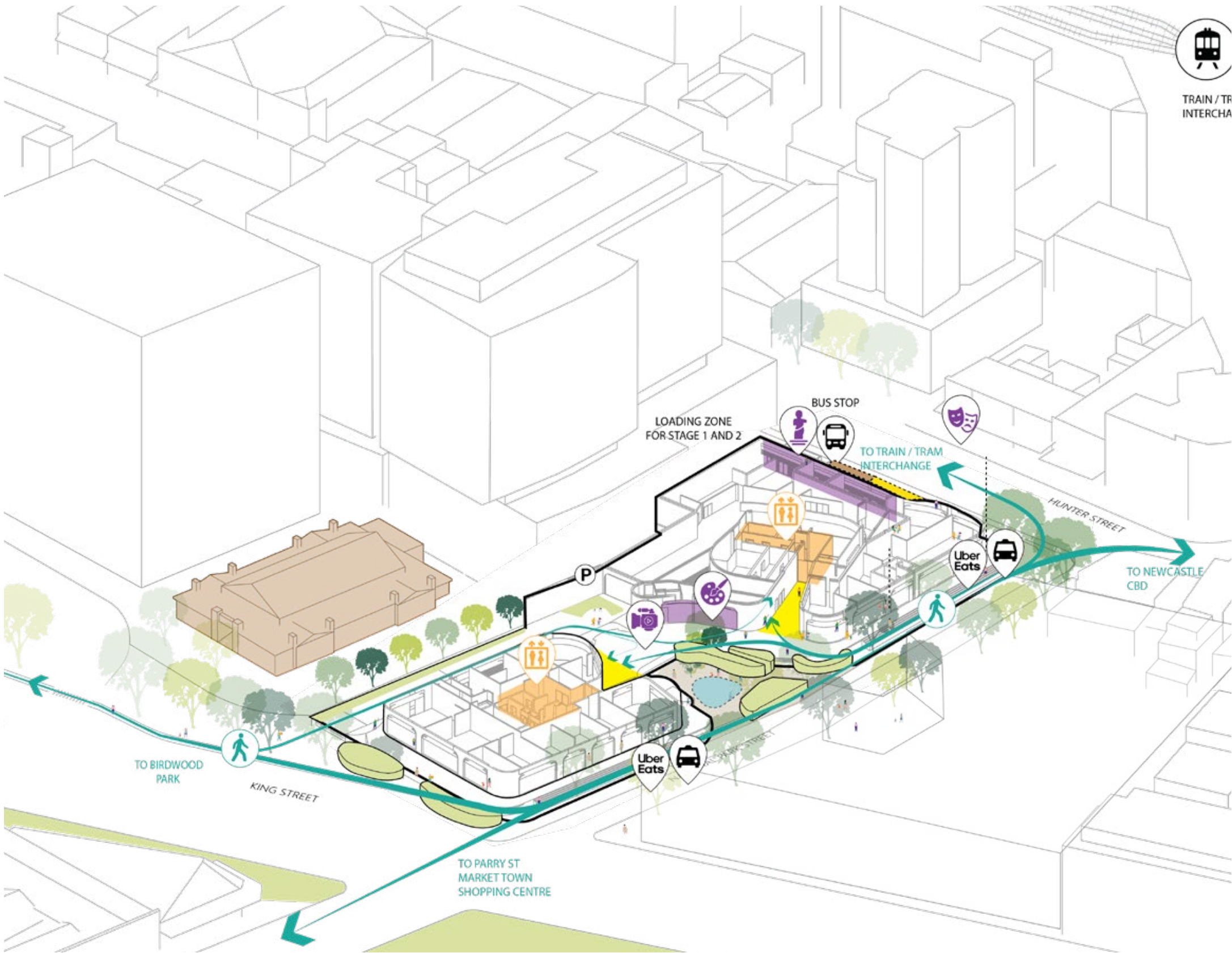
Tidal movement - confluence, layering, pooling



Earth and water, dwelling, erosion, strata

05 Design Response

Place of Trade and Congregation



The active ground plane is defined by the retail façade and ceiling which further guide both people and landscape through the site. The sculptural nature of the podium and horizontal ground layers are brought up into the building to define the overall composition of the buildings creating the optimal outcome for the amenity of both the buildings and public domain. The brickwork which frames the ground floor retail has a sandy colour to connect the ground plane to the ceiling and unify the overall sculptural gesture.



Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture

05 Design Response

Flow of Movement



FOOD PRODUCTION



WATER

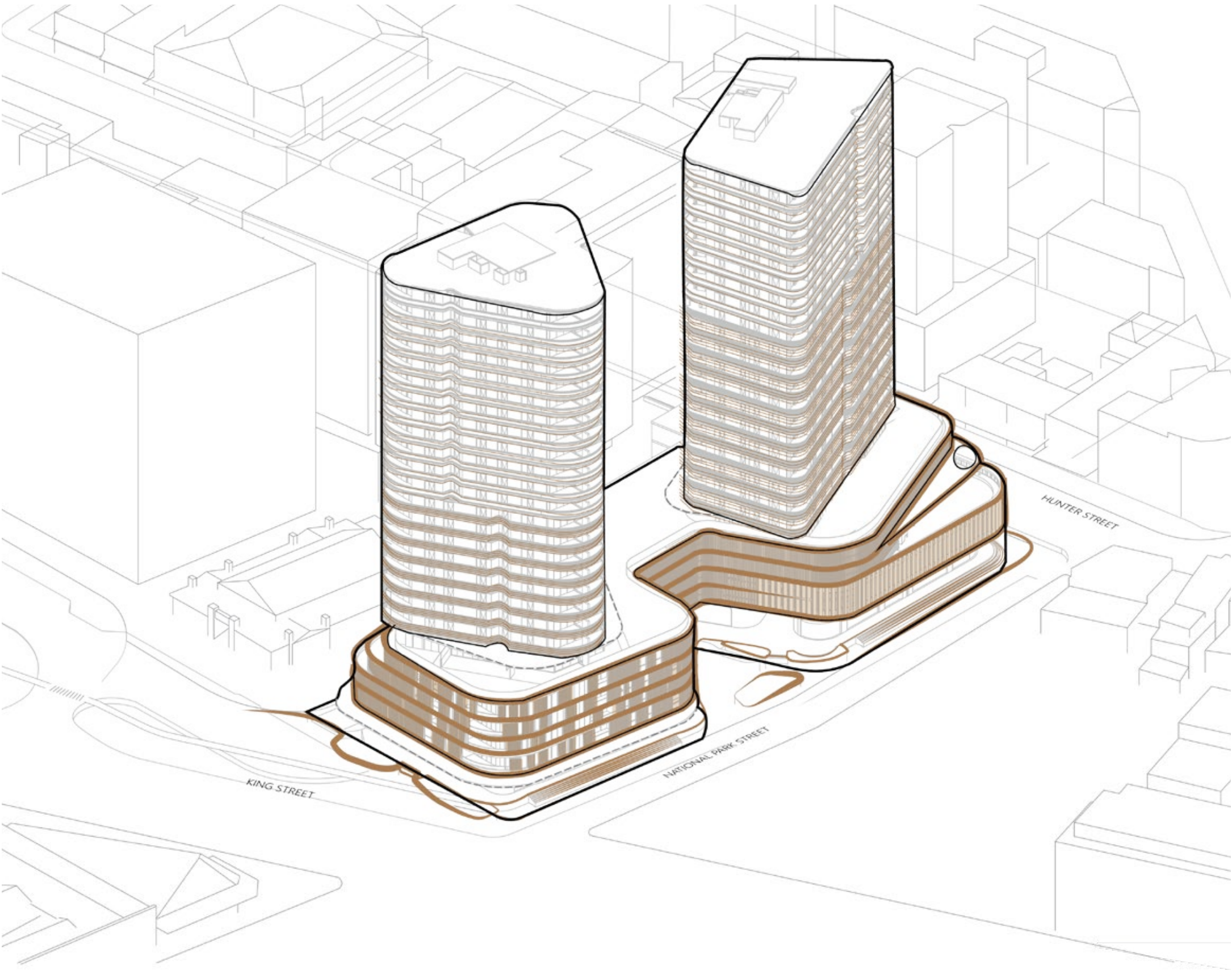
We draw inspiration from shells sitting lightly on the beach, sculpted by wind erosion and providing a response to the flow of movement, wind, people and landscape. The proposal has no basement which has little impact on the original geography and provides opportunity to bring deepsoil landscape into the heart of the development. The flow of through site link resonates the confluence of salt water and fresh water. Together with landscape water feature and ceiling lighting artworks, it brings the experience of Hunter River into the site.



Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture

05 Design Response

Layers of sedimentation



SEDIMENT LAYERS



HORIZONTAL LAYERING

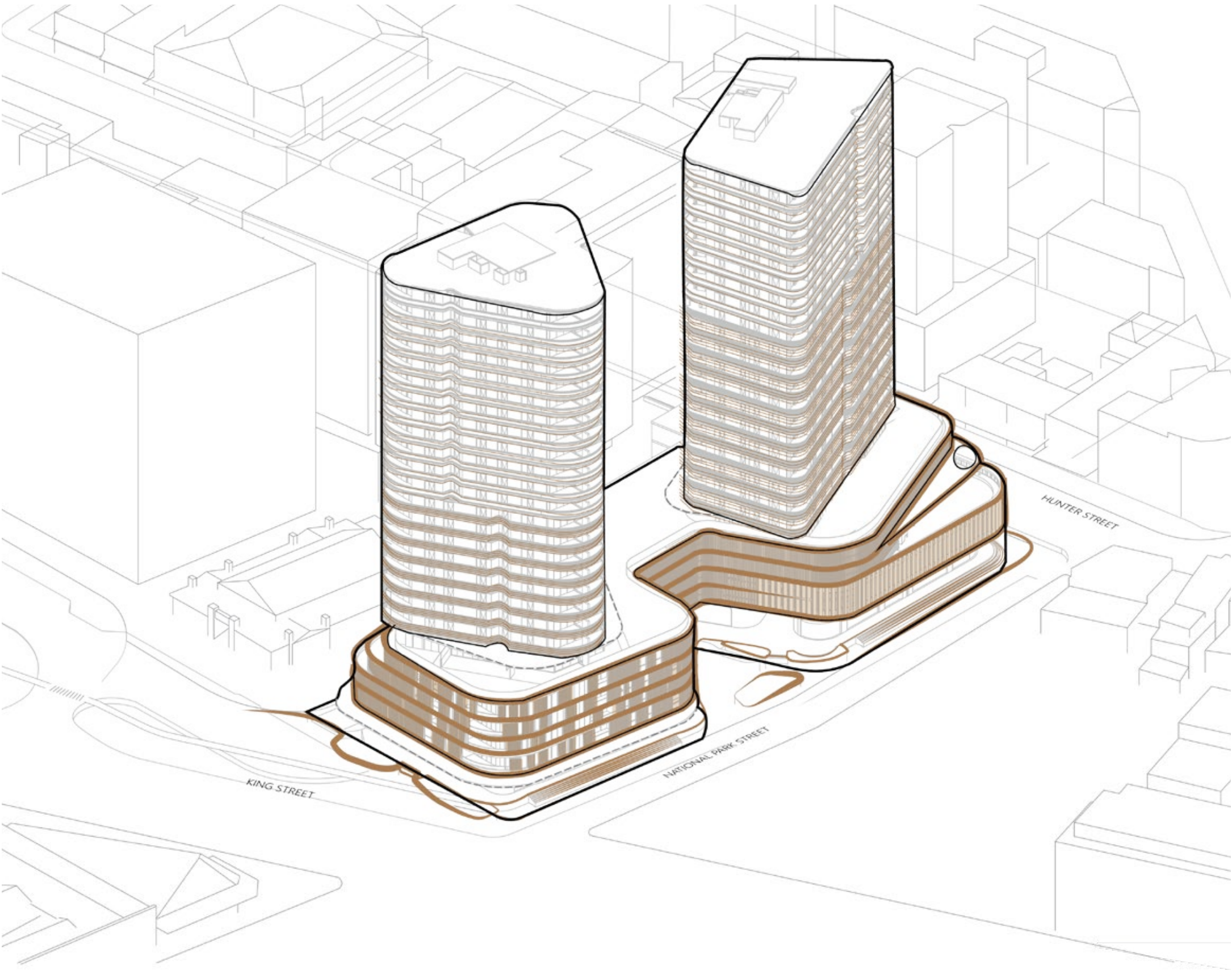
We acknowledge the location of our site is positioned along the former sandy riverbanks. The layering and flowing segmentation has been interpreted through our floodplane response through steps and materiality which help to define the building ground plane and shape the central plaza creating a community gathering space at the heart of our development. The materiality and tonality of ground floor represents the sandy environment of Hunter River. The form of the proposal expresses the layering of the beach which is revealed by the waves



Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture

05 Design Response

Layers of sedimentation



SEDIMENT LAYERS



HORIZONTAL LAYERING

We acknowledge the location of our site is positioned along the former sandy riverbanks. The layering and flowing segmentation has been interpreted through our floodplane response through steps and materiality which help to define the building ground plane and shape the central plaza creating a community gathering space at the heart of our development. The materiality and tonality of ground floor represents the sandy environment of Hunter River. The form of the proposal expresses the layering of the beach which is revealed by the waves



Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture

05 Design Response

Fluidity



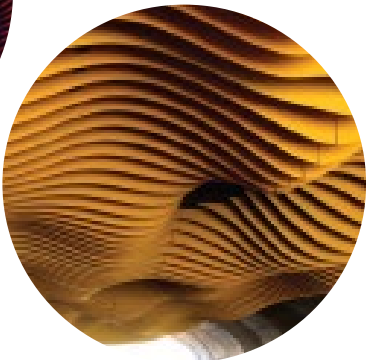
SEDIMENT LAYERS



HORIZONTAL LAYERING



LIGHTING SCULPTURE



SOFFIT ARTWORK

Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture

05 Design Response

Landscape

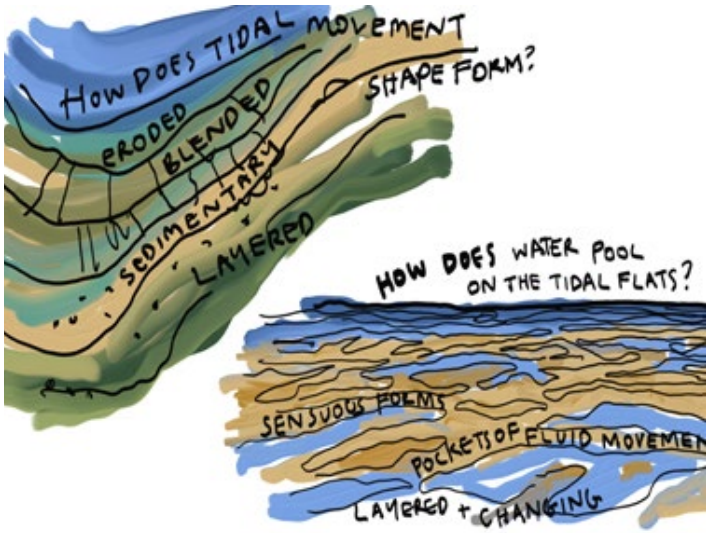


FOOD PRODUCTION



WATER

The landscape is drawn from the adjacent park into through both the ground plane and over the steps created in the podium, conceptually connecting the park to the generous communal landscape areas over the podium providing a series of community gathering spaces for the new community to occupy the land. The rich landscape character of the park is drawn through the ground floor to reveal itself towards national park street. The landscape architects have worked through a detailed response to bring design for country into their design approach and planting selection. The opportunity for public art and interpretation further enriches the experience for the wider public.



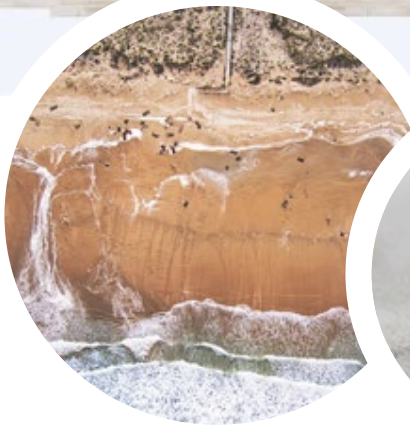
Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture

05 Design Response

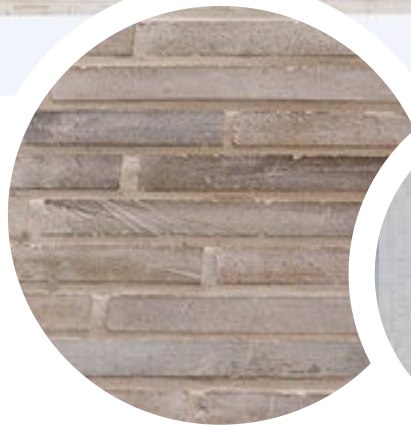
Material Responsibility



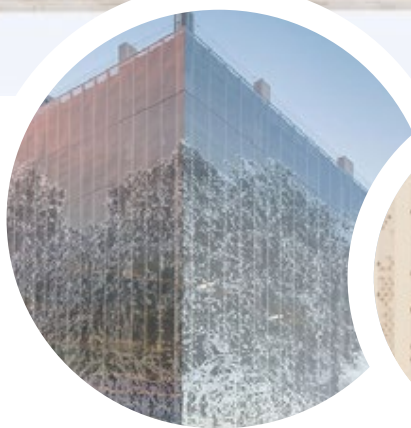
LANDSCAPE



CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY



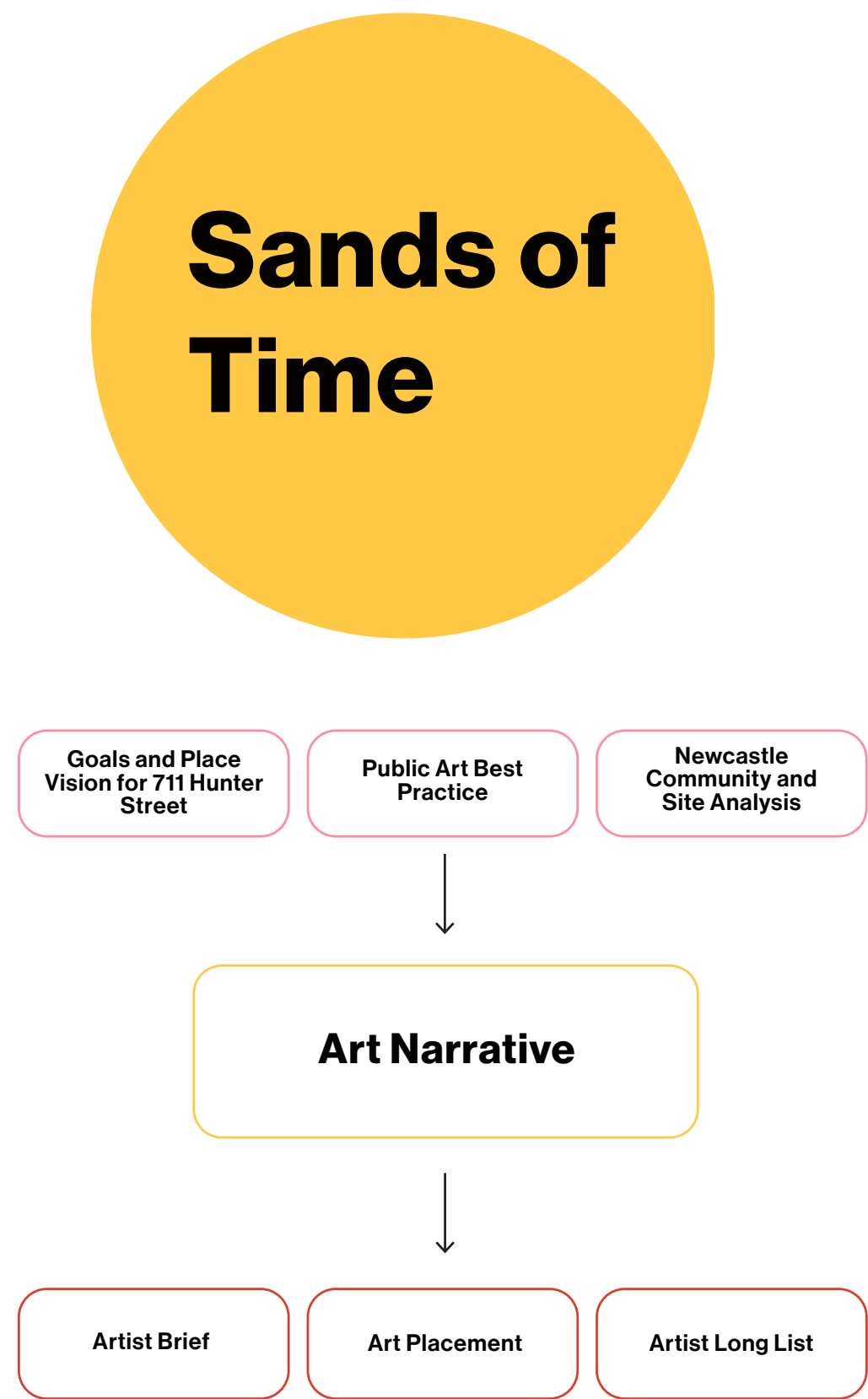
GROUND FLOOR - MASONRY / BRICK



PORCH - METAL SCREEN



Images and text courtesy Plus Architecture



The term ‘*Sands of Time*’ is often used to refer to the passage of time that has both buried and uncovered new knowledge, processes and ideas.

The art narrative ‘*Sands of Time*’ highlights the rich cultural history surrounding 711 Hunter Street, from its extant Awabakal and Worimi history, its once booming coal industry and the development of the area from industrialism to contemporaneity.

Further, ‘*Sands of Time*’ offers the play on the word ‘sand’, referring to Newcastle’s location as a growing coastal city, and focuses on the memory of the iconic Marcus Clark clock tower once on the Northern corner of Hunter Street.

The historical location of the river bank is much closer to the site than it currently is - freshwater and saltwater once met to provide for the Awabakal and Worimi people.

This narrative becomes a metaphor for the concept of confluence, where saltwater has transformed into freshwater and natural habitats become entangled with new urban habitats.

Themes will include growth, history, memory, sustainability, material consciousness and change.

Images and text courtesy Art Pharmacy

Thank you ***Didgerigura***

