

Wilson Bros site to Redfern Community Centre

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Background history to the Wilson Bros Site

The Wilson Brothers' site was located within the intersections of 29-53 Hugo St, 28-54 Louis St, and 12-36 Caroline St Chippendale, adjoining The Block. The site comprised three old factory buildings, which offered 4.723 square metres of floor space. The three story building was formerly a printing factory, timber yard and manufacturing business. The site had not been used for at least six years and was purchased by the South Sydney Council for over \$2 million in 1993. Their intention was to change the site from industrial/commercial to recreational/open space (Advocacy Workshop Case Study). Close to Redfern Station and within walking distance of the Sydney CBD as well as easy access to universities, the site's use was a controversial issue and divided community opinion.

TIMELINE OF THE DEVELOPMENT

<i>1990</i>	South Sydney Council endorses a plan to develop the site as an Aboriginal recreational centre. ¹
<i>1993</i>	South Sydney Council purchases the site, as part of a wider redevelopment plan for The Block. .
<i>December 1997</i>	The Redfern Aboriginal Corporation (RAC) proposes the 'Wilson Bros Community Facilities Plan' and begins consultations with the residents and community organisations regarding uses for the site.
<i>Early 1998</i>	RAC commences negotiations with Aboriginal Land Development Company (ALDC) to enter into a joint partner venture to purchase the site from South Sydney Council to create an environment through community consultation that would benefit the community and SSC.
<i>28 January 1998</i>	Letter to the Councillor of South Sydney Council expresses disappointment that the invitation to discuss the RAC plan was declined.
<i>17th February 1998</i>	Development application submitted to demolish the existing building to provide open space.

- 19th February 1998 Media release issued calling for community support for the RAC Community Facilities Plan. 'Community support launch and information day – Save the site for the community'.
- date unknown Steering committee established
Sarkassian Associates employed for community consultation
- 14th November 1998 Meeting 10am-12pm hosted by a local resident member of the Steering Committee at the Darlington Activity Centre to begin the consultation process (1st of 4 'initial meetings')
- 14th November 1998 Meeting 1-3pm hosted by a local resident member of the Steering Committee at the RAC building, 2 Holden St Redfern to begin the consultation process (2nd of 4 'initial meetings')
- 14th November 1998 Meeting 4-6pm hosted by a local resident member of the Steering Committee at the RAC building, 2 Holden St Redfern to begin the consultation process (3rd of 4 'initial meetings')
- 17th November 1998 Meeting 6-8pm hosted by a local resident member of the Steering Committee at the Darlington Activity Centre to begin the consultation process (4th of 4 'initial meetings')
- 28th November 1998 'Speak Out' Interactive exhibition; information about the community participation process presented.
- 16th December 1998 A public Steering Committee Meeting held at the Pine Street Leisure Centre in Chippendale re the Plan of Management and Master Plan.
- January 1999 The Wilsons Brothers Site Community Participation Newsletter released
- 16th January 1999 South Sydney Council releases an 'Options Paper' regarding the Section 94 Research Study: Planning Our Community's Future. The document addresses the need for a community centre, however makes no mention of the Wilson Bros Site or any specific future projects.
- 2nd February 1999 Wilson Bros site plan of management meeting hosted by the steering committee at the Pine Street Leisure Centre, focusing on principles to guide the development of the site.
- 6th February 1999 Checklist workshop held for the discussion of principles regarding the Redfern Community Participation program.
- 23rd February 1999 Redfern Agencies Search Conference held by Sarkissian Associates Planners, for South Sydney Council at the Erskineville Town Hall to discuss the Wilson Bros Site and its zoning.
- 28th February 1999 Wilson Brothers Steering Committee Community Representatives Meeting held at Darlington Community Centre at 3pm. The meeting covers issues of zoning, principles, and ideas for the development.

<i>7th May 1999</i>	Letter to the Mayor of South Sydney Council states that the Steering Committee has excluded vital design criteria such as 'Responsiveness to Aboriginal culture' and 'Supporting reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people.'
<i>8th May 1999</i>	Nitty Gritty Workshop - Final public meeting held at the Settlement in Chippendale to try and include the 'Vision Keeps Growing' as an option for the council.
<i>14th May 1999</i>	Letter addressed to the Mayor of South Sydney Council demonstrates support given by the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre, Redfern Aboriginal Corporation, The Indigenous Social Justice Association Inc, and the Australians for Reconciliation for the plans for the Redfern Reconciliation Community and Cultural Centre.
<i>8 September 1999</i>	Council releases their draft plan of management.
<i>10th May 2001</i>	Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Projects at the Australian Museum express their interest in creating artwork for the exterior section of the Redfern Community Centre.
<i>19th June 2001</i>	Wilson Bros Site Community Consultation meeting held at Yellowmunde Park for the community to have a say on the 'Wilson Bros Site Community Artwork Project'.
<i>3rd September 2003</i>	A Community Engagement Forum outlines potential uses for the centre.
<i>6th September 2003</i>	South Sydney Council led by Mayor Cr Tony Pooley has an information day on the project at Yellowmunde Park
<i>2003</i>	Wilson Bros Site due for completion

PERSPECTIVES

There was tension between South Sydney Council, the Redfern community and Redfern Aboriginal Corporation in regards to recognising the proposal for the site. [RAC negotiations (prior 19/2/98) with the Aboriginal Land and Development Company to enter into a joint partner venture to purchase the site from SSC.]

1. SOUTH SYDNEY COUNCIL

- ensured that it would consult the community during the process.
- declared that works could include a combination of open space and community facilities.
- was to look at funding from either the NSW or Federal Governments.
- gave approval in 1997 for the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation to be contracted to provide security services on the site.
- was to obtain a heritage and structural assessment of the building, however there is no date for this.
- planned that if demolition was approved it would occur in the first half of 1998.

2. A VISION THAT WAS GROWING

Four local groups developed a shared vision for the site, and proposed a community centre.

REDFERN ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

THE SETTLEMENT

REDFERN RESIDENTS FOR RECONCILIATION

RENEW [Redfern & Environs Neighbourhood Education Workshop]

2.1 REDFERN ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Redfern Aboriginal Corporation (RAC) was located on 'The Block' in Redfern. Their goals were to improve the living environment, enhance lifestyles, strengthen Aboriginal heritage and culture and provide a sound economic base for local Aboriginal residents. (RAC Community Development Project.) They also aimed to provide training for the local Aboriginal residents and create employment for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. RAC consulted the local community through two community barbecues as well as consulting with numerous individuals, groups and organisations. They proposed that the original buildings on the site be renovated for community use where possible and were interested in a management role for any community facilities on the site.

Proposals:

- believed a park would increase the current social dilemmas facing the residents, and would not create jobs.
- office space for community organisations
- function spaces for the local community
- cafe facilities
- gallery spaces
- workshop facilities for local artists at an affordable rate
- gym facilities
- monthly Koori markets
- expansion of the Yellowmunde Park to the Wilson Brothers site

2.2 THE SETTLEMENT

- proposed ideas to use the Redfern Community centre for their programs..
- supported the proposal of the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation

2.3 REDFERN RESIDENTS FOR RECONCILIATION

- believed that South Sydney needed a first-class living community and cultural centre for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
- promoted employment opportunities and cultural activities

Their proposal of how to use the space included:

- workshops

- studio spaces
- office spaces for both local community services and Sydney's best arts and cultural organisations
- a park could be developed, but couldn't take up the whole space.

3. LOCAL RESIDENTS

3.1 THE STEERING COMMITTEE

This committee for this project was formed by South Sydney Council prior to the engagement of consultants. It consisted of four local residents and three councillors. The decision making process for this committee was a consensus model. The four local resident members hosted 'initial meetings' for the public to begin the consultation process and for community members to voice their opinions.

3.2 SpeakOut - Interactive Staff exhibition - 28th November 1998

Below are some examples of what was stated at this exhibition.

'Please no police station. Not all flora park, but a park garden would be great. Space for all sorts / colours of community group, with multi-cultural committee. Council to retain ownership so it can be privately developed and planned- community users subverted.'

'Dear Sir,

RE: Wilson Brother's Site

We have been residents and ratepayers for ten years, and support the use of the Wilson Brother's site as open parkland.

The South Sydney Council had allowed vast areas within our environs to be used for high density housing, however has not ensured that more parklands are created. This area has only a tiny portion of zoned green space, this site offers a last opportunity to ensure open facilities for the use of all the community.

This land should be for all of the community and NOT just for special interest groups. We are hardworking ratepayers and do not desire having our environment degraded.'

'I was born and bred on the Block. Multiculturalism needs to happen, Wilson Brothers could be or should be a cultural meeting place, where people, no barriers, would each put in a talent, eg. painting, pottery etc., to those who through the reasons unknown will benefit from the teachings of the older generations and vice versa.'

Issues, Concerns, Suggestions

December 1997 - Local residents opposed RAC plans for the site based on concern for adverse impacts on the community:

- Develop the entire area as open parkland
- Develop existing building into security parking and sell parks to residents to offset parking problems, and remainder into a park

- Sell the building for security parking and sell parking spots to residents to offset parking problems, and remainder into a park
- Sell the building to be run by a profit running organisation and make the rest into park
- A museum/gallery would bring in tourists - this would increase jobs
- Lack of finance for creation/development of small enterprises - establishment of a branch of the Grameen Bank would benefit those with no financial base
- Commercial employment opportunities are much needed
- The site should be used for the whole community
- Concerned that open space is seen as territory in the area
- Great as it's an opportunity to get more pedestrian traffic through the area.
- Should be a place for visitors to experience Aboriginality
- Should include cheap accommodation for Aboriginal people who come to Redfern from the country
- There aren't enough activities for girls in the area.
- Good to involve youth in the construction process to provide a sense of ownership.

3.3 Wilson Bros Site - Stage 2: Summary of Findings

The summary of findings states that the plan presented by the Redfern Aboriginal Corporation was rejected by some residents as they believed that the proposal was just an extension of 'the Block' and shouldn't be controlled by one specific group.

3.4 Questionnaire in 1995

The public had the opportunity to voice their opinion and this is what we found:

- The majority of people preferred open space or artist studios and performance spaces.
- Some were in favour of a child care centre or community centre of some sort
- A few recommended rezoning the area to residential
- A few recommended a police station for the site

3.5 CHIPPENDALE RESIDENTS

Over 400 signatures were gathered supporting the representatives of this group being on the Steering Committee for the original proposal being for the police station on a proportion of the land to accommodate for the crime statistics, with the majority to be a park. Due to zoning problems the group had now supported plans for a native Australian flora park on the site. The park they supported would be designed for crime reduction and a place of cultural expression. The group was against the site being run by a private company and the RAC as it was council owned and hence there must be a benefit for the entire community.

References

1. Shaw, Wendy S. *Cities of whiteness* Wiley-Blackwell, 2007 p.114