INTEGRATED THINKING

Describing the "value proposition" of "integrated thinking" to some can be hard. The concept sounds admirable, and who would want dis-integration anyway? Integration assumes a process of synthesis, and of combining disparate parts into a whole. Integrated thinking aims to maximise constructive engagement from all the relevant stakeholders, from conception to completion, allowing "design thinking" to consider the full range of issues in the solution. So how does this differ from the way things are done now?

Much of the answer to this question lies in government "org charts". The official website of the Government of South Australia - www.sa.gov.au - lists 14 Government departments. Many, like the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) are an amalgam of interests that cast the net wider still. DFEEST alone lists 11 agencies and business units under its remit.

In addition to this, government also includes boards, tribunals, committees and authorities. Modern government is a large and dispersed organism. And while reporting procedures are designed to facilitate communication vertically and horizontally across organisations, individual agencies can often work in isolation, and at cross purposes with other arms of government.

A "whole of government" approach has long been a mantra of agencies everywhere. It's often said with a grin (or should that read grimace?), and generally when one agency has another by the balls.

But work across agencies is happening. Sporadically, and with mixed results. In this snapshot, PLACE explores two examples of collaboration that highlight how an "enabling" and "co-ordinating" authority like the Integrated Design Commission can make these ad hoc arrangements more consistent and lasting, and what the role of the Government Architect might be in this endeavour.

PROJECT 1: GLENSIDE

The redevelopment of the historic Glenside Hospital site will reveal a new model for mental health and substance abuse treatment – vital in the face of aging mental health infrastructure. Importantly it will open the 30 hectare site to the public domain and with intense public interest in other sites like St Clair it remains evident that the Government faces a challenge in communicating emerging concepts around Transit Oriented Development and Integrated Design Process.

Applying a more enlightened understanding of urban regeneration along with the 30 Year Plan's call for urban densification, Glenside presents yet another valuable opportunity to further change the face of inner suburban Adelaide. The site promises to open up the strategic inner-east location to greater public access, providing new community spaces for sport and recreation for both local residents and visitors. A wetlands catchment is also proposed for development by local councils.

The site is divided into five precincts:

- The new health facilities (featuring the new $130 million, 129-bed hospital and other services connected by a central shared garden),
- Cultural hub (home to the new Adelaide Film and Screen Centre and including the SA Film Corp),
- Commercial office accommodation (on Fullarton Rd),
- Retail (connected to the commercial and health areas by a new village green),
- Residential zone – mixed housing, including affordable options, which also include open space.

The final concept plans, released this month, show a network of streets, carparks and walking paths which will encourage access from all boundaries. Work has already started on the new Health Precinct with the hospital, supported accommodation and other support facilities due for completion in mid-2012.

The somewhat infamous site has been developed in an ad hoc way since the 1950s and represents a typical challenge faced by Government in achieving high quality outcomes among a diverse set of stakeholders. Tim Conybeare, of Swanbury Penglase Architects, says the plans benefited from close liaison between the primary State Government agencies - SA Health (major projects), Arts SA and the Department of Planning - local residents, Burnside Council, and the broader community.

David Bagshaw also of Swanbury Penglase Architects, who were commissioned to deliver the Master Plan, believes it is a real opportunity to reduce much of the fear and stigma surrounding this site "by removing physical and emotional barriers to create a therapeutic, interactive and enjoyable experience for both the users and the public. There will be some private and semi-private areas but it's more than just buildings and external spaces."

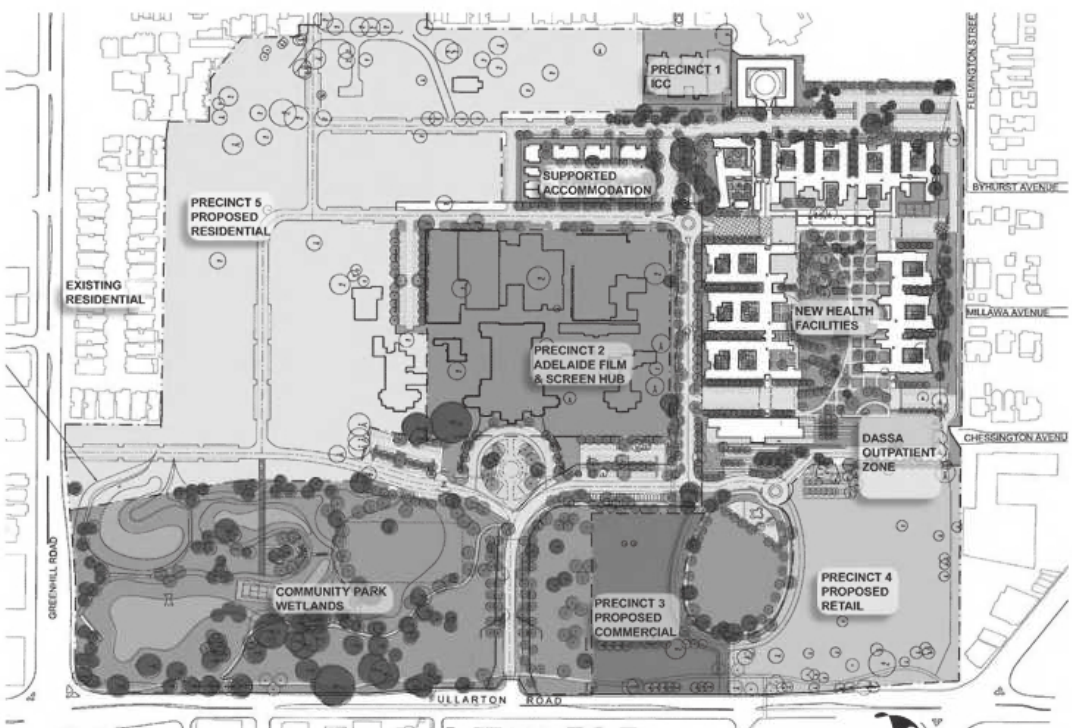
The site has seen a wide group of consultants working closely together. London-based Medical Architecture and Arts Projects (MAAP Architects) and Sydney urban design consultants CM+ were involved in planning the site along with Dr Christine Putland, an arts and health specialist.

Retaining the value of the heritage assets has added a further layer of complexity. Adelaide's Grieve Gillett Architects designed the new Adelaide Film and Screen Centre which is part of the cultural precinct. Lead consultant Steve Grieve believes the arts and cultural precinct is respectful of the location's 150-year history which features the revival of the watchtower administration.

All things said, the alienation of public space will continue to be a sore point with the community. Effective, transparent and non politicised communication and collaboration with the public has always represented major challenges for any government. It occurs best when it is given space early in any master planning process. The same can be said for ensuring the delivery of quality integrated design outcomes that engender more liveable communities.

It appears that Glenside has enjoyed some success in ticking a range of these boxes. The bigger picture though relates to how these regenerated urban sites connect both with one another and with the broader aims and aspirations of the people of SA and a Government who has taken a bold step toward embracing truly integrated design process.

Enter stage left… Government Architect. This surely is where the role is best expressed, through fostering a new level of connectedness between diverse and sometimes dispirit and complex stake holders, across different sites that ultimately connects the community to a more vibrant and liveable built environment. Let's hope the new incumbent is given the independence and broad reach to achieve what's required.



PRECINCT 1: SITE MASTER PLAN