

(2)



P
711.557
P
AUS

NATIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL AREA
OF CANBERRA INCLUDING ASPECTS RELATED
TO THE NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

NOVEMBER 1967

CANBERRA, A.C.T.

CENTRAL AREA OF CANBERRA

The original plan for Canberra provided for a population of 75,000. This was passed in 1964 and the population is now well over 100,000. Recognising these growth pressures, current planning accepts and provides for a Canberra population of 250,000 by 1980.

Despite these pressures, the integrity of the original concept of the central area of the City as the symbolic heart of the Australian Nation has been retained. It is within this triangular central area, formed by the three points of Capital Hill, City Hill and the Australian-American Memorial and bisected by a $2\frac{1}{4}$ mile land axis from Capital Hill to Mount Ainslie, that the Parliament and the monumental national buildings will be located.

Any consideration of the development of the central area must take into account the siting of the permanent Houses of Parliament. The notes that follow cover the historical background, some recent considerations, and aspects of the lakeside site and other locations.

SITING OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE

Historical Background

Walter Burley Griffin's winning design for "The Federal Capital City of Australia" in the international competition in 1912 provided a site for the Houses of Parliament on Camp Hill. It also showed a building called "The Capitol" on Capital Hill. Griffin's report on his designs said that the Capitol would be a building for "popular reception and ceremonial and for housing archives and commemorating Australian achievements, rather than for deliberation and counsel", a conception similar to the National Centre which is now proposed.

Griffin discarded the possibility of placing the Houses of Parliament on Capital Hill because he considered that "the fact that it is in two Houses precludes making it a focal feature".

In 1913 an International competition was launched for the design of Houses of Parliament for Camp Hill but the competition was deferred and later cancelled because of the war.

In 1921 the Federal Capital Advisory Committee was established and one of its early tasks was to consider the provision of Parliamentary buildings. The alternatives at this time were:-

- (a) A revival of the competition, with the intention that the first stage of the permanent Houses of Parliament would be built (which Griffin supported); and
- (b) The consideration of constructing provisional Houses of Parliament elsewhere.

The Advisory Committee supported the latter and recommended the building of the provisional Houses of Parliament on the site now occupied by the building. This recommendation was accepted by the Government.

In 1923 the House of Representatives referred the erection of provisional Houses of Parliament to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report. During the Committee's investigations witnesses expressed many differing views on the siting. Griffin himself favoured the provisional Houses of Parliament being erected as the first stage of the permanent building and opposed any departure from his Camp Hill site. The Committee generally favoured substantial adherence to the plan. Its recommendations included the alternatives of

erecting the nucleus of the permanent building on Camp Hill or of erecting a provisional building on the site below Camp Hill. The alternative recommendation was adopted and the present building was constructed for the opening of Parliament in 1927.

The official plan of Canberra published in the Gazette in 1925 showed Camp Hill as the site for the permanent Houses of Parliament but this did not appear on subsequent variations of the plan.

Recent Considerations

Little interest seems to have been shown in the question of siting from 1927 until 1955 when a Select Committee of the Senate was appointed to report on the development of Canberra.

In dealing with the site for the permanent Houses of Parliament, the Committee reported that the erection of the provisional Houses of Parliament and the King George V Memorial had marred Griffin's plans for the Parliamentary Triangle. It recommended that the permanent Parliamentary buildings should be sited on Capital Hill. A minority report dissented from the Committee's findings and recommended that an eminent town planner should be appointed to consider, among other things, the ultimate site for the Houses of Parliament. The report on "The Case for a Permanent Building" submitted in 1957 by the Speaker and the President of the Senate also supported the siting of the new Parliament on Capital Hill.

In 1957 the Government invited Sir William (now Lord) Holford to visit Canberra and report on its future development. He said that Camp Hill was now unsuitable for Parliamentary buildings because the provisional Houses of Parliament obscured both Camp and Capital hills when viewed from Parkes Place. In

recommending that the Houses of Parliament be sited centrally on the southern shore of the lake central basin, Holford said that they would be "symbolically and actually out of place" on Capital Hill. He believed that Parliament was an active democratic institution which should be housed in the forum and not on the hill top and would be more satisfactory in the centre of the main land axis than at one end of it. Without reinforcement, he considered the main axis to be too long and too uneventful but with the Houses of Parliament it would register a marked impression on the beholder.

Holford's report was referred by Cabinet for advice by the then newly established National Capital Development Commission. The Commission and its advisory body the National Capital Planning Committee agreed that if the lake were established the best site would be on the lakeside. This view was accepted by Cabinet in July 1958.

PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Until the completion of the Kings and Commonwealth Avenue Bridges and the filling of the Lake the concept of the Central Parliamentary area only existed in plan form. Now the plan is partly a reality. A landscaped setting for monumental buildings has been created and some major buildings have been constructed.

The attached plan illustrates the development proposals in the central area of Canberra. The area south of the lake is divided into three related zones.

The largest of these is the parliamentary zone centering on Parkes Place, and extending from the present Parliament House to the lake shore between Kings and Commonwealth Avenues. Here, centrally located on the lake shore is the site proposed for

the new Parliament House, flanked on one side by the National Library, and on the other by the proposed High Court group of buildings. These buildings, together with the new Treasury, the Administration building and the new and existing Parliament House would define the most important open space in Canberra, Parkes Place, which could be paved and landscaped as the forecourt to Parliament.

Next is the conference zone centred on Camp Hill. Here the proposals provide for the development of major departmental offices required to be located near Parliament and conference facilities to accommodate the rapidly increasing number of national and international conferences which are being held in Canberra. This zone includes the existing Parliament House, which it is thought could be most appropriately used as the nucleus for a first class conference centre when Parliament moves to its new building.

The third zone, proposed as a historical and cultural zone, is centred on Capital Hill. Here the proposals provide for the development of a national centre of a type originally intended for the area in which the nation's cultural heritage can be recorded and displayed in museums and galleries.

On Aspen Island, in the lake itself, it is proposed to erect the United Kingdom gift carillon. A competition restricted to three Australian and three British architects is in progress and designs for the carillon will be submitted in March 1968.

On the north side of the lake development is well advanced. The Defence Offices at Russell, the buildings flanking the entrance to Anzac Parade, and

the Parade itself leading to the War Memorial, as well as many new commercial and governmental buildings in the City are beginning to give Canberra a metropolitan character.

The design intentions for the three zones are that they should provide an attractive landscape setting for major public buildings and that the climax of the design should be the new Houses of Parliament sited on the shores of the Lake.

The landscaping and buildings of the central area must be of the highest quality. The buildings should have a character of permanence and stability appropriate to their important national function and should contribute to the creation of an environment worthy in every respect of the Seat of Government of the Australian Nation.

A major transportation study has established that the Parliamentary area can be isolated from noise and traffic congestion and at the same time provide ready access to the Parliament and to its supporting buildings for Senators and Members, office workers and for the large number of visitors to the area.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LAKESIDE SITE AND OTHER LOCATIONS

The technical factors which have a bearing on the present enquiries are as follows:

1. The lakeside site is a dominant visual feature and stands on a virtual promontory in the lake.
2. Investigations carried out over the past eight years have validated the view that this site is eminently satisfactory in all technical and aesthetic respects. These investigations have included geological and hydrological studies associated with its proximity to the Lake margin and the flood plain.

3. The site has been prepared for a new building. It provides for two, or if necessary three, service floors to be located under the main floor, thus enabling all the parking and service requirements associated with Parliament to be incorporated under the building. This has marked aesthetic as well as practical and economic advantages.
4. The site is eminently suited for a large building planned to provide predominantly horizontal communication between the main components. No difficulties are likely to occur in providing for future extensions to the building on any of the main floor levels.
5. Traffic movements to and from the site can be provided with ease, utilising the grade-separated intersections that have been provided at the bridge heads to connect the Parliamentary Triangle with Kings and Commonwealth Avenues.
6. Movement to other major buildings within the Triangle is readily available now by surface connection or it could be provided in future, by an underground system similar to that in the Capitol in Washington.
7. Aesthetically speaking, the view is held by eminent authorities that the design of Canberra would be greatly enhanced by siting a major building at the central point of the Triangle. The expert opinion is that the central axis is too long, visually, and that it needs an intermediate point on which the eye can rest. A major building on the site now proposed would help to establish a satisfactory visual relationship between the Australian War Memorial, the Houses of Parliament and the

proposed National Centre grouped on Capital Hill. The Houses of Parliament, being bicameral, provide a suitable type of structure for this position. (This is consistent with Griffin's view that the Houses would be difficult to locate at the apex of the Triangle).

8. A lakeside setting would permanently establish Parliament as the heart of the Government precinct where other major national institutions could be grouped reasonably close to it. The full development of the Parliamentary Triangle of Canberra involving the establishment of defence buildings at Russell, the B.M.R. and other Government offices on Constitution Avenue and various other Government offices at Civic indicate that the site proposed at the centre of the Triangle is in fact the central location of government in Canberra, in contrast to the comparatively remote position of Capital Hill.
9. The previously approved site was Camp Hill. The building of the provisional Houses of Parliament on its present site has nullified the prospects of the permanent building being built on the Camp Hill site. The advice of the Senate Select Committee in 1955 supported this view. Further studies of present and future traffic requirements confirm the opinion that the Camp Hill site would be inadequate.
10. Capital Hill will have a strong appeal as an alternative because it is a prominent topographical feature from some parts of the City. However, it is not readily visible from Parkes Place which has become the traditional centre of the Capital.

11. If a very large building were placed on Capital Hill a substantial part of the crown of the hill would have to be removed to provide a large enough base. This would greatly reduce the prominence of the site. Alternatively, if the natural eminence were preserved for the central elements of the building, the supporting components, together with any future additions, would have to be on the lower slopes of the hill. This could well provide an attractive massing of buildings but would lead to a complex circulation system and considerable differences in levels, unlikely to be convenient for the operation of Parliament. It could militate against easy horizontal access between the chambers and other parts of the building.
12. The Capital Hill site is at the node of a number of heavily trafficked arteries, the traffic from which can be handled simply by Capital Hill Circle. However, the traffic between the Houses of Parliament site and the remainder of the triangle imposes an additional complexity which would be very difficult to resolve satisfactorily. Further notes on traffic implications and site works are appended to this report.
13. The additional cost of development on the Hill based either on the removal of the top to provide a level platform for a horizontal building, or on a series of different levels to suit the existing topography would probably be considerable. The site formation involved in the preparation of the lakeside site has already been completed.
14. There is no doubt that the permanent Houses of Parliament could be located on Capital Hill but

there is every indication that locating them there would not have the convenience of the lakeside site and development costs would be greater.

These views have been endorsed by the National Capital Planning Committee.

NATIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

TRAFFIC AND SITE IMPLICATIONS OF
CAPITAL HILL

The following notes enlarge on the paper's general statements regarding the use of Capital Hill.

Commonwealth and Kings Avenues will continue in the future to be used as important arterial roads and as such will have to carry substantial volumes of traffic, in excess of 40,000 vehicles per day.

They will also have to serve as part of the framework for the Parliamentary Triangle and as such must maintain their character as monumental avenues.

In addition to these two avenues, other major arterial routes serving development to the east, south and west are directed to Capital Hill via Brisbane Avenue, Canberra Avenue and particularly Adelaide Avenue.

Capital Hill thus will become the nodal point of a complex regional traffic pattern. The solution in this area will rely on the development of an inner ring road which will serve primarily to carry a peak flow of vehicles between the main avenues and to divide traffic according to length of trip and destination.

Because of the complexity of the traffic situation in the area, it seems desirable to use the land contained within the circle for a purpose which, though requiring to be accessible, does not of itself generate extra traffic between the Triangle and the circle.

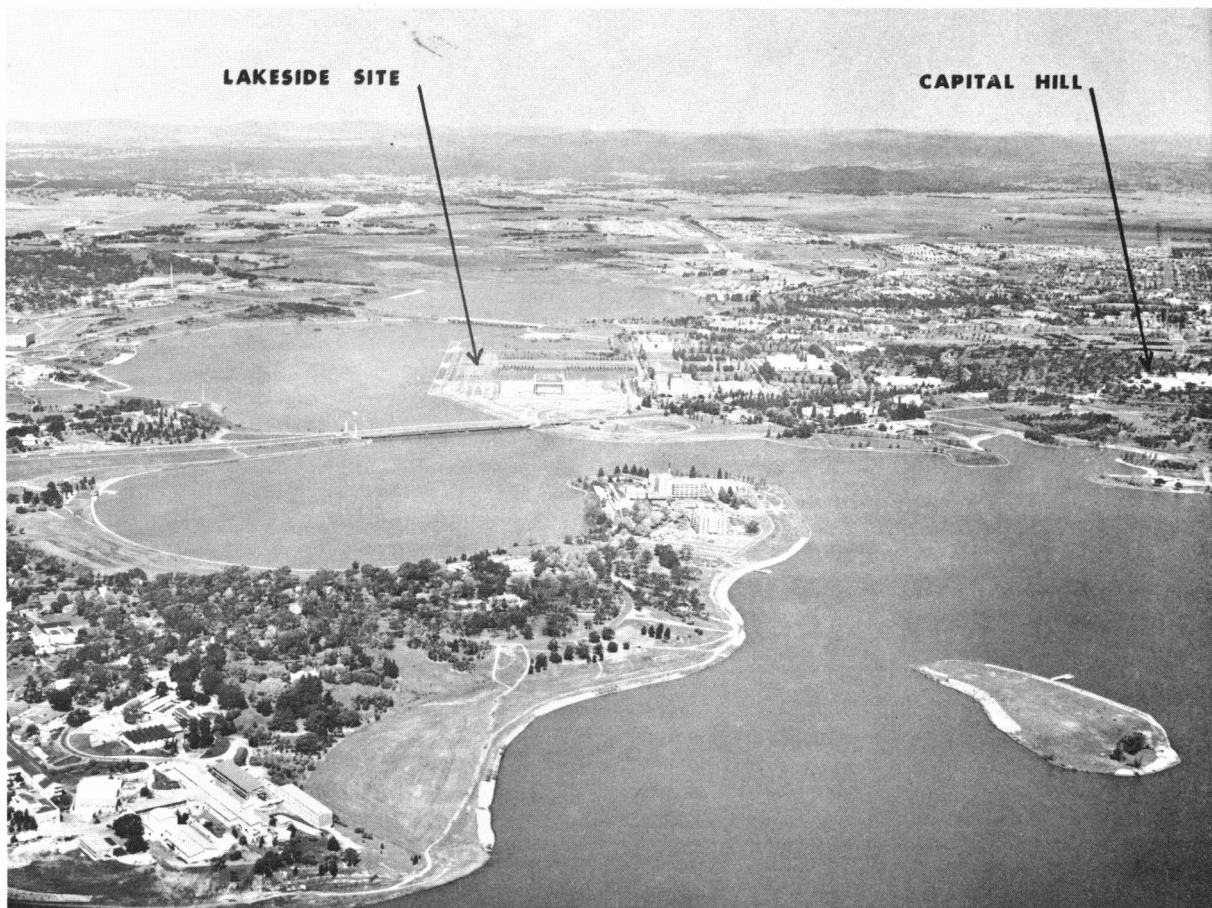
Parking requirements for the Houses of Parliament as now contemplated could be located within the Capital Hill site, but only at very considerable cost. However, the provision of additional space for special occasions would be more difficult to provide.

Because of its comparatively rough topography and many steep slopes, any scheme for the development of the Houses of Parliament on Capital Hill must involve extensive site works and early implementation of special communication routes by way of tunnels and bridges. Cuts of between 20' and 35' at the top of the hill, and fills of up to 40' in depth would be involved in producing a site on which such major buildings as the Houses of Parliament could be located. The cost of these works would be very considerable involving extra expenditure of the order of \$2 to \$4 million.

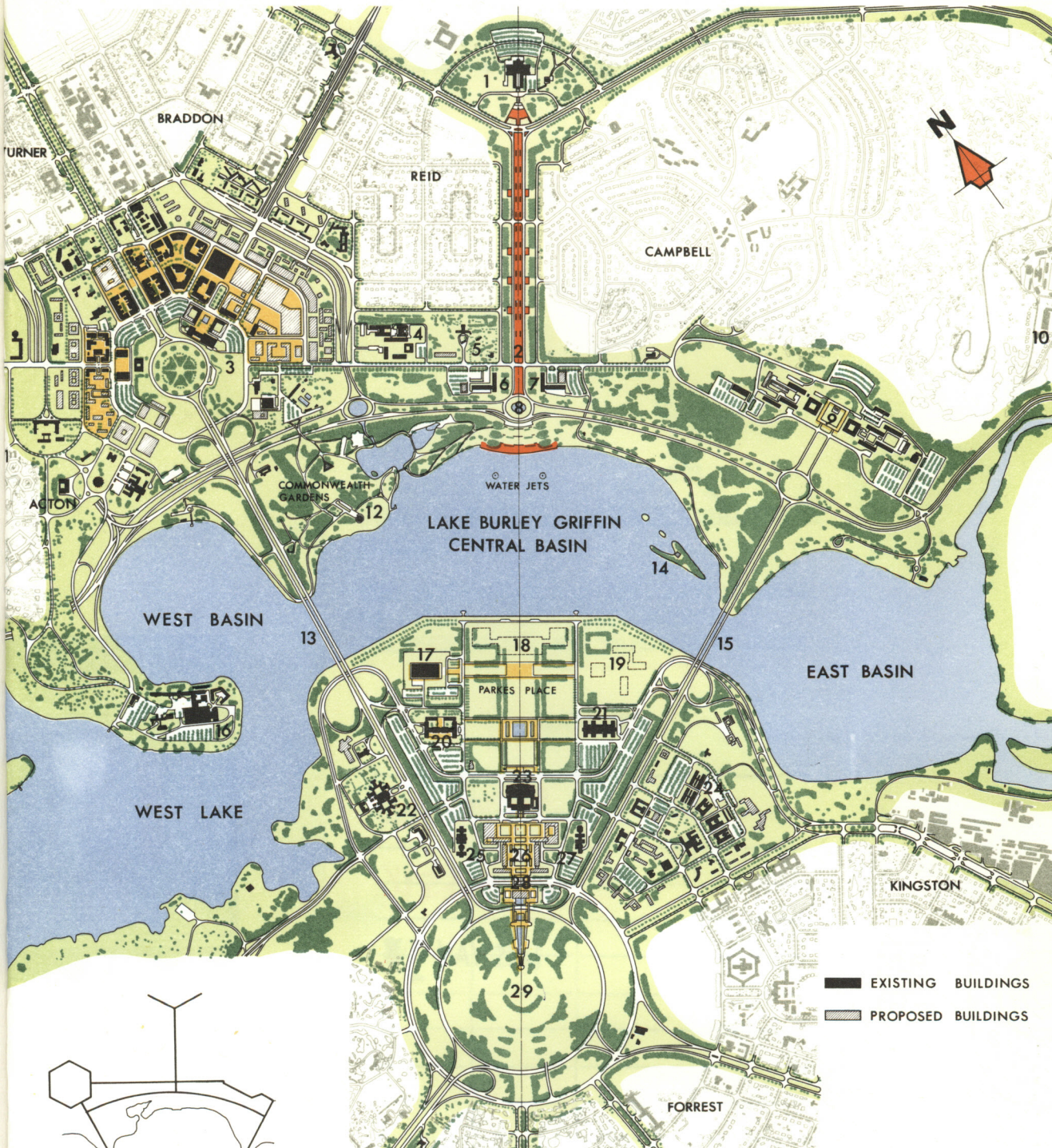
There are therefore considerable physical and economic restraints on the development of the Houses of Parliament on Capital Hill.

National Capital Development Commission

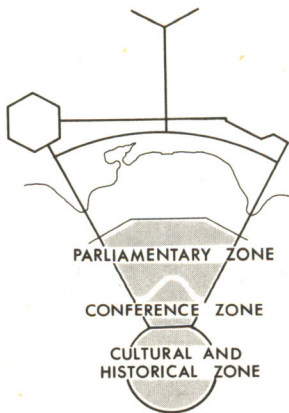
November 1967



Aerial views of Lake Burley Griffin, October 1967

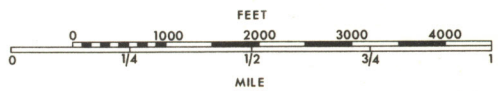


EXISTING BUILDINGS
 PROPOSED BUILDINGS



CANBERRA

THE CENTRAL AREA



1. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
2. ANZAC PARADE
3. CIVIC CENTRE
4. TECHNICAL COLLEGE
5. ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
6. ANZAC PARADE WEST BUILDING
7. B.M.R. BUILDING
8. THE ELLIPSE
9. RUSSELL OFFICES
10. R.M.C. DUNTRON
11. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
12. REGATTA POINT PAVILION
13. COMMONWEALTH AVENUE BRIDGE
14. TOWER
15. KINGS AVENUE BRIDGE

16. COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
17. NATIONAL LIBRARY
18. PARLIAMENT HOUSE SITE
19. HIGH COURT SITE
20. THE TREASURY
21. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
22. HOTEL CANBERRA
23. PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE
24. BARTON OFFICES
25. WEST BLOCK
26. CONVENTION CENTRE
27. EAST BLOCK
28. NATIONAL GALLERY
29. CAPITAL HILL