Draft
Araluen Cultural Precinct
Development Plan
2010–2015
Vision

The Araluen Cultural Precinct aims to fulfil broad community aspirations across the arts, culture and history fields, by creating an integrated visitor experience encompassing the region’s key cultural institutions and collections.

The Precinct provides a balanced program of activities, events and displays for the benefit of local people and visitors to Alice Springs, while supporting and encouraging the development of unique experiences, festivals and events, celebrating the unique histories of life in Central Australia and fostering life long artistic expression.

The Precinct collects, displays and interprets objects and information of art, culture, history and heritage, while developing and presenting living experiences for enjoyment, entertainment and inspiration.

Background

Many local people and community organisations have contributed to the continual development of the Araluen Cultural Precinct, and there is a deeply embedded sense of community ownership, pride and partnership at its core.

The Araluen Cultural Precinct is a keeping place of stories, about life in Central Australia from time immemorial. From the Big Bang, and the creation of life, to the living now, the objects and information of cultural knowledge housed within the walls of its buildings and the land they are built on serve to provide an experience of the life and times of its ancestral and living inhabitants, through differing times and cultural shifts in the local community and the wider development of Australian society.

The ancient land of the dinosaurs and the ancient culture of Aboriginal people bind together to create a backdrop for the story from then till now, with old stories melding and shaping life now and into the future.

The Aboriginal Dreaming stories which traverse the Precinct form the earliest story of human association with the land, connecting it to the wider stories of the town of Alice Springs and the wider Central Australian region.

The story of aviation in the region then begins as an overlay, with an aviation service operating from the location from the late 1930s until the late 1960s.

In recent times, the Precinct has grown to encompass an aviation museum, a multi art form centre, a craft centre, an Aboriginal keeping place and research centre and a natural history museum, while retaining historical structures and landforms of cultural and social significance to the place itself.

Community Consultation of the Draft Plan

The release of the Draft Araluen Cultural Precinct Development Plan 2010-2015 on April 30, 2010 is the second phase of community consultation for this Precinct planning document.

A community consultation meeting will be held in May 2010 to facilitate discussion around the release of this Draft Plan. The Draft Plan will close for public comment on 31 May 2010.

The initial Draft Plan was released to the community on 15 August 2009 and closed for comment on 1 December 2009. Community meetings to discuss the plan were held on 1 September and 19 November 2009.

Members of the community are invited to submit their comments either in writing, via telephone, email or through the Precinct’s website. These details are available below:

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Introduction

The draft Development Plan for the Araluen Cultural Precinct takes a wide view of the Central Australian region and the town of Alice Springs. It has been designed to integrate with other Government and community strategies for the future development of Alice Springs and Central Australia and the views and aspirations of its Arrernte custodians, community organisations and stakeholders in the region. It will help achieve government goals for arts development, Aboriginal employment, tourism and regional development and link closely to the social and economic aspirations of many community groups, arts and tourism related businesses.

It is designed to make a major contribution to achieving the goals of:

• Moving Alice Ahead
• Territory 2030
• NT Tourism Industry Strategic Plan
• NT Indigenous Tourism Strategy
• Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage
• NT Climate Change policy
• NRETAS Strategic Objectives
Art, Culture and Tourism in Central Australia

Since the Precinct and its component facilities have been established, much has changed in relation to arts, culture and tourism in Alice Springs and the Central Australian region, including:

- International recognition of the Central Australian Aboriginal art movement continues to grow in respect and stature.
- The Aboriginal arts industry is very valuable to the NT economy.
- The population of Alice Springs has grown considerably and it has become more multicultural and sophisticated, with new waves of artistic endeavour and interest emerging.
- Growth of festivals and events such as Desert Mob, the Alice Desert Festival, the Wearable Arts Awards, the Alice Prize and the Alice Springs Beanie Festival has been appreciable.
- Community involvement in established and emerging events such as the Wearable Arts Awards and the Alice Springs Beanie Festival is strong and socially inclusive.
- Arts education has changed from a didactic transfer of facts and meaning to a participative, collaborative and networked approach.
- Technology has dramatically changed the way we view the world, plan travel, use venues and seek information.
- Tourists expectations have changed dramatically from a passive observer approach to a desire for deeper cultural and spiritual experiences.
- Aboriginal employment and business development have emerged as very high priorities for the Region.
- A new generation of artists that are gaining inspiration from the desert has emerged. Aboriginal art centres in the region have multiplied from three in the early 1980’s to now more than forty in the Central Australian region.
- The Red Hot Arts Space has been established as an arts industry infrastructure and program support hub in Alice Springs.
- The number of arts organisations has increased significantly, along with the number of paid employees within these organisations.
- The role/identity of museums and galleries has changed from one of “hallowed halls” to one of community engagement and participation.
- The Strehlow Research Centre and the Araluen Arts Centre have moved more towards becoming “keeping places”.
- Youth and music events have grown in the region.
Outcomes and Strategies

The plan will deliver the following outcomes:

• Support continued growth of the arts industry and arts and cultural tourism in the region to create economic and cultural benefits for the community.

• Support and present a wide range of events and programs in the areas of visual arts, performing arts culture, history, heritage and entertainment.

• Provide professional venues for arts practice and presentation to enrich community life and increase understanding of different cultures and views.

• Increase Aboriginal engagement.

• Deliver education and training that enhances and promotes tourist experiences, improves sustainability and increases Aboriginal employment regionally.

• Attract corporate, Commonwealth and philanthropic money.

• Develop major partnerships and integrate with the Town of Alice Springs and the Central Australian Region.

• Increased community involvement and engagement.

• Continue to develop the role of the Precinct as a keeping place.

• Make the Precinct shady and pleasant, linked and logical, renewing its tired aspects.

• Solar City targets and appropriate climate control.

• Provide adequate storage capacity for Collections.

• Increase visitation and further enhance the visitor experience.
The key strategies are:

- Widen the representation of Aboriginal art from Central Australia in exhibitions and displays to include all art forms, styles and periods in the continuing evolution and development of the art movement.
- Create opportunities for visitors and local people to interact with artists from Central Australia.
- Support local arts and entertainment initiatives, with an emphasis on growing festivals and events.
- Increase interpretation of the Precinct’s historical structures and landforms.
- Develop education programs.
- Improve the look and feel of the Precinct.
- Improve access to the Precinct.
- Reflect what is unique and quirky about Alice Springs.
- Develop and link with strong Aboriginal employment and training programs.
- Integrate activities with wider Northern Territory Government initiatives and visions, the Region, and the town of Alice Springs.
- Lower carbon emissions and the environmental impact of the Precinct’s operations.
- Deliver public program and events which capture the imagination and aspirations of local people and visitors.

In the longer term:

- Develop a national identity and reputation for the display of Aboriginal art from Central Australia in appropriate facilities.
- Develop a regional presence through the Western MacDonnell’s Visitor Centre experience.
- Develop national links through art and story telling.
- Develop stronger relationships to the town of Alice Springs.
Developments – Overview

Short term

• A new site plan for the Precinct leading to overall cohesion.
• Develop the Precinct’s infrastructure to enable future development.
• Ongoing development of exhibitions and associated resources, with a focus on the display and interpretation of collection material.
• Continue to develop visual arts, theatre performances and social, cultural and artistic events and programs in the Araluen Arts Centre, the Museum of Central Australia, the Strehlow Research Centre, Central Craft and the Central Australian Aviation Museum, increasing program linkages.
• Solar air conditioning project for the Araluen Arts Centre.
• Installing interpretative displays within the solar power generator to promote the use and benefits of solar energy to the community.
• Increase the historical and interpretive information available on landforms and heritage buildings,
• Return the Araluen Arts Centre rehearsal room to community use and access.
• Support the continued development and display of the biennial Alice Prize exhibition, in association with the Alice Springs Art Foundation.
• Increase community engagement in decision making processes.
• Make visitor access to the Precinct more accessible.

Medium term

• Position the Araluen Arts Centre and the Museum of Central Australia as a linked, key tourism attraction, incorporating interconnected displays to create a unique experience for visitors.
• Develop and facilitate an artist in residence program in combination with existing facilities and programs.
• Enhance the Precinct grounds to encourage greater community use.
• Redesign and reposition the car park and front entrance of the Araluen Arts Centre to allow for the continued growth and development of Desert Mob, the Alice Springs Beanie Festival and other events, creating a forecourt to the building’s entry.
• Develop new displays of collection material from the Museum of Central Australia natural history collections at the Alice Springs Desert Park.
• Develop an attractive and appealing coffee shop for use by Precinct visitors.

Longer term

• Develop education and audience engagement programs that deliver clear social, economic and cultural outcomes for a wide variety of customer groups including schools.
Development – Detail

Infrastructure
Upgrade the power, water, sewage and information technology infrastructure of the Precinct and its amenities in order to sustain and maximise the possibilities for future developments of facilities, services and programs.

Overall plan for the Precinct
Develop and overall site plan for the Precinct, incorporating all the proposed concepts into a final design that can then be reviewed, costed and implemented in stages, as funding is available.

Solar Air Conditioning for the Araluen Arts Centre
This project is a central component of the successful Alice Springs bid to the Solar Cities program, an initiative of the Australian Government’s Australian Greenhouse Office, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The project will see the construction of a solar collecting array field, with an adjacent thermal plant room in a location to be chosen in consultation with the Araluen Arts Centre Solar Air-conditioning Project Community Reference Group. The solar air conditioning system will provide stable and cost effective air conditioning for the whole Arts Centre, with international museum standard conditions for the display and storage of works of art in the art galleries and store rooms. An interactive visual display unit linked to the solar field will be located in the Arts Centre foyer, with continually changing information on its operation and solar energy generation output.

Community Reference Group - Solar Air Conditioning Project
A Community Reference Group has been established to advise the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport on the preferred location and general design elements of the Solar Air-conditioning Project, that is both practical for the operation of the Araluen Art Centre’s air conditioning and aesthetically fits into the Araluen Precinct.

The Community Reference Group was formed following submissions of Expressions of Interest that closed on Wednesday, 7 April 2010.

The following eight people have been appointed to the Community Reference Group:
Mark Wilson, Lyndon Frearson, Glen Marshall, Margaret McDonnell, Fran Morey, Domenico Pecorari, Ruth Elvin and Faye Alexander.

The members appointed to the Community Reference Group cover a broad spectrum of relevant skills and experience in the areas of community art, building and solar technology, and the majority of the Group’s members have been Alice Springs residents for more than 20 years.
Options for Location of Solar Field
There are currently four options for the Community Reference Group to assess for the Solar Airconditioning Project, and its associated design elements.

These options are the corner of Larapinta Drive and Memorial Avenue, the area between Central Craft and the Museum of Central Australia, the Circus Lawns, and the area of land adjacent to the Alice Springs Memorial Cemetery.

Solar Demonstration
The solar air conditioning project, once completed, will be a benchmark example of sustainable energy creation and usage within a cultural facility in a regional area. In particular, the combination of solar energy and an air conditioning system, and the opportunities for public education were viewed by the Australian Government as critical elements contributing to the overall merit of Alice Springs’ Solar Cities bid. It is estimated that each year, the Araluen Arts Centre Solar Air Conditioning project will demonstrate to 90,000 local, national and international visitors how cost effective ‘deep cuts’ in energy costs and greenhouse gases can be achieved in an existing building. The project can be used as an early Solar City case study to motivate change in other commercial facilities.

Art and Technology
Development of the solar power generated air conditioning system will create a natural link between the arts and technology. This theme will be further enhanced by the development of interactive and audio visual experiences throughout the Precinct facilities, to assist with display interpretations and education strategies, along with changes and additions to the Precinct’s website capabilities.

Public Information
Develop further, publicly accessible interpretative information in regards to the landforms on the Precinct, and their Arrernte context, along with history of the heritage buildings on the Precinct and their context in its changing history.

Connecting the Araluen Arts Centre, Central Craft and the Museum of Central Australia / Strehlow Research Centre
By linking the Araluen Arts Centre, Central Craft and the Museum of Central Australia / Strehlow Research Centre building, with connecting structures and pathways, a cohesive visitor flow and visitor experience would be created.

A shade structure, to protect the refurbished Clifford Possum mural from excessive sunlight, could also double to create a community access space between the Araluen Arts Centre and the Central Craft facility, suitable for events such as craft markets, artists in residence activities and other visual arts and performing arts programs.
Social history displays in the Museum of Central Australia to provide further context to the culture of the region

Social and cultural history displays in the Museum of Central Australia may focus on stories of land, culture and people. A feature component could be the interpretation of Arrernte stories and history as this relates specifically to Mparntwe (Alice Springs) township and its land forms.

Stories about key events in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history and important people in Central Australian history and life will also be a focus of the displays, to be developed in liaison with the Precinct’s Arrernte Custodians Reference Group and local historians.

A Digital Story Centre will be developed at the Museum of Central Australia to enable people within the local community to create multi media digital stories which will be incorporated into multi-media exhibitions and displays and provide interpretation to augment and enhance existing displays. The material produced will also be accessioned into relevant collections bringing to life and making community and local history accessible. The proposal is based on the concept of community engagement through the co-creation of digital stories using new technologies.

The Digital Story Centre will be developed with the capacity to link with the Northern Territory Library’s Community Stories database housed on site to provide an access hub for Indigenous people living in Alice Springs. The Digital Story Centre will also have the capability to connect with the National Indigenous Knowledge Centre (NIKC) project as a regional hub.

The development and exhibition of natural history multi media content through the Digital Story Centre will connect the Museum of Central Australia with the West MacDonnell Visitors’ Centre at the Alice Springs Desert Park and the West MacDonnell tourism trail experience.

Natural history displays

Develop new natural history displays at the Alice Springs Desert Park linked to the current natural history displays in the Museum of Central Australia, in order to create better connections between the past and the present, and to engage museum visitors with living experiences in the natural environment.

Performing Arts

The Performing Arts Program at the Araluen Arts Centre will continue to present works of quality theatre and performance from the national touring circuit for all age ranges and across a wide range of performing arts mediums. Community access space for local artists, arts organisations, schools and community groups will continue to be supported wherever possible, with local productions supported to achieve the highest possible production and audience development outcomes.

Araluen Arts Centre Rehearsal Space

The original rehearsal space in the Araluen Arts Centre will be returned to community use, creating a space for performing arts groups, companies and local artists and musicians to rehearse and practice.

Visual Arts

The Visual Arts Program at the Araluen Arts Centre will continue to offer community access space for local artists and arts organisations, while developing and presenting exhibitions and displays of works from the Araluen Collection and the community collections it houses. Touring exhibitions of national significance will also continue to be sourced and presented, as available. All exhibitions in the Arts Centre will continue to be selected and programmed by the Exhibition Programming Committee, which maintains community representation.
Aboriginal Art

The display of Aboriginal art from Central Australia recognises the importance of the Central Australian Aboriginal art movement within the National and International art world.

Ongoing and changing exhibitions and displays will provide a dedicated focus to the interpretation of Aboriginal art, with works drawn primarily from the Araluen Art Collection. Exhibitions and associated catalogues and education material will continue to trace and explore the development of Aboriginal art in Central Australia, from the early 1930’s through to current time, focussing on the origins of Aboriginal art in cultural practice and the development and innovative qualities of key Central Desert artists and arts communities.

Artists in Residence

Develop and facilitate an artists in residence program, in order to provide inspiration, an exchange of ideas and the ongoing transference of conceptual and practical knowledge and skills for the benefit of the wider community.

Central Craft

Continue to develop the facility and its programs in partnership with Territory Craft Central Australia Inc Committee, along with craft workers and community groups accessing the facility.

Central Australian Aviation Museum

Continue to develop the facility and its programs in partnership with the Central Australian Aviation Museum Inc Committee and members and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Community engagement will be maintained and developed through increased membership programs and increased promotion of initiatives, activities and opportunities.

Ongoing inclusion of community representatives in decision making processes across the Precinct will continue with community representation on the Strehlow Research Centre Board, the Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory Board, the Araluen Cultural Precinct Public Programs Reference Group, the Annette Custodians Reference Group and the Araluen Arts Centre Visual Arts Programming Committee.

Further community engagement and representation in decision making processes will be expanded by the creation of a Community Reference Group for the Araluen Cultural Precinct.

Aboriginal employment and engagement

The Annette Custodians Reference Group was formed for the Araluen Cultural Precinct in 2008. The Reference Group advises on matters related to Annette culture and the relationship of cultural protocols to the development and management of the Araluen Cultural Precinct, both strategically and on a day to day basis. The Annette Custodians Reference Group, along with members of their families, will continue work closely with Precinct staff to develop new initiatives to create employment and engagement opportunities for local Aboriginal people. The Araluen Cultural Precinct actively promotes all mainstream employment opportunities to Aboriginal people, as appropriate and as they become available. The primary focus for increasing Aboriginal employment is in the area of cultural tourism and arts management.

Youth engagement and involvement

Develop unique experiences to enhance the ongoing engagement of young people in the activities and programs available on the Precinct, through new initiatives such as the development of school based exhibitions, school holiday programs and through the development of a youth component to the Precinct’s website.

Access

Improve the access to the Precinct for traffic via the development of a slip lane off Larapinta Drive, while working to improve access to facilities, program and services for people with a disability.
Outdoor events spaces, Arts Centre entrance and car park

Suitable and available public space on the Precinct does not adequately accommodate the ever expanding audiences for key annual events such as the Desert Mob exhibition and associated activities and the Alice Springs Beanie Festival.

In order to continue growing the audiences for these events and adequately accommodate their continued growth and success, it is proposed that the foyer of the Arts Centre be expanded and the road in front of the Centre be converted into a courtyard.

Such a space would also allow for the possibility of installing seating and public art to create a grander, forecourt entrance to the Arts Centre, while providing expanded indoor and outdoor event space. In addition, the car park area itself will be ressealed to create a more modern look, with a redesign of traffic flow to better accommodate the local bus service and tourism coaches.

Signage and Event Promotion

Develop signage and placement opportunities for promotional banners for key, individual components of the Precinct – the Araluen Arts Centre, the Museum of Central Australia, Central Craft and the Central Australia Aviation Museum - that link to overall Precinct Signage, and allow for the promotion of key events developed and presented by each facility.

The Grounds of the Cultural Precinct

Public sculpture placed and developed as integral to the grounds of the Precinct will create an experiential environment that links all the buildings and displays. Continued development of the grounds will create and encourage usage by the community as an adjunct to Frank McEllister Park, including access to water and other recreational requirements. Space and facilities to accommodate and cater for outdoor events will also be developed, with an overall landscaping design for the Precinct developed.

Coffee shop

The overall visitor experience on the Precinct requires a high quality, commercially viable food and beverage service for customers, encompassing both visitors to Alice Springs and the local market. Such an experience will require extensive planning and consultation to develop the infrastructure, business model and service levels.

Education and Audience Engagement Strategies

The transfer of knowledge to visitors will be provided through passive and active interactions, to inspire emotional and intellectual engagement with the displays and programs. Education and audience engagement strategies will support the development of conversations with visitors, acknowledging who they are and where they are from, rather than just delivering messages to them. These conversations and connections may be virtual, through interactive programs, or through person to person interactions. Audience experiences will be designed to facilitate interaction and participation in a wide range of spiritual, natural, cultural, manual and physical experiences, allowing for active learning and offering a wide range of methods and tools for investigation. Education and audience engagement strategies will be designed to give meaning and help visitors construct their own meanings from experiences on offer.

Storage and display of Collections and work areas

Develop further capacity for the storage and display of collection material in all facilities on the Precinct, with spaces also for staff to access and work in specialised areas as required.
In the Longer Term

Develop a national identity and reputation for the display of Aboriginal art from Central Australia in appropriate facilities

An appropriate facility may be a “National Gallery of Aboriginal Art”. Located in Alice Springs, in the heart of a region where the contemporary Aboriginal art movement has become internationally recognised, such a facility has the capacity to become world renowned. The facility could initially exhibit and house artworks from the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and the Araluen Collections. It could then broaden the display of artworks through loans, donations and partnerships. While it is possible that such a facility could be located at the Araluen Cultural Precinct, it could be located in the CBD, at the Alice Springs Desert Park or at another suitable site in Alice Springs, but remain inked to the Cultural Precinct displays and programs.

Develop national links through art and stories

Many stories pass through Alice Springs. These stories could be the basis of a national “Big Picture” plan in the longer term. The Plan works towards a long term vision that no Australian or tourist has experienced the real Australia unless they have “done” the pilgrimage from Adelaide to Darwin. The east coast may provide scenery, beaches and even “outback” experiences but the unique Australian cultures, spirituality, landscape, art(s) and legends can only be experienced here.

Key relationships, partnerships and structures

The key relationships, partnerships and structures to the overall Araluen Cultural Precinct development plans include:

- Key Precinct stakeholders, including Central Craft and the Central Australian Aviation Museum
- Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- The Friends of Araluen
- Arrernte Custodians Reference Group
- Desart and its member Arts Centres in Central Australia
- Alice Springs Beanie Festival
- Alice Springs Town Council and local Shires.
- Department of Construction and Infrastructure (DCI)
- Alice Springs Desert Park
- RedHot Arts Central Australia / Alice Desert Festival
• Alice Springs arts organisations, including the Central Australian Art Society, The Alice Springs Arts Foundation, the Alice Springs Quilting Club, Dupdara Dance Company, the Alice Springs Music Teachers Association and Red Dust Theatre
• NT Archives
• Tourism NT
• Tourism Central Australia
• Desert People’s Centre, Alice Springs
• Territory Eco-Link

**Develop stronger relationships to the Town (Alice Springs)**

Developments at the Araluen Cultural Precinct will enhance the success of Alice Springs and the region as a tourism destination and Centre for learning about Australian art, cultural and social identity.

Integrated planning and cooperative activity are essential to achieving the goals of the Territory Government, the Region and the Precinct, and will be achieved through ongoing consultation within Government and within the community.

The key roles of the Central Business District could be described as retail, welcome, regional orientation and relaxation, tourist information gathering and regional story telling through the Visitor Information Centre and other technologies and experiences.

These are not key roles of the Precinct and there is no intention of creating another major retail precinct or visitor information centre at the Precinct. The Precinct needs to link strongly to all Central Business District functions.

Future Precinct development will also take into account the roles and displays of other cultural and social history attractions in Alice Springs, making sure that the Precinct displays and programs are complimentary.

These attractions include the Alice Springs Telegraph Station and its focus on the history of the Overland Telegraph Line and the use of the area as a place to house Aboriginal children from the Stolen Generations; the National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame and it’s primarily focus on women in history; the Adelaide House Museum; the National Road Transport Hall; and the Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitor Centre.

Regionally, Araluen Cultural Precinct developments will also take into account displays at the Nyinkka Nyunyu Cultural Centre in Tennant Creek and the Cultural Centre in the Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park.

When looking at the possibilities of the Araluen Cultural Precinct to tell stores related to Alice Springs, art history, social history and cultural traditions and practices, in relation to other cultural and historical attractions, there is a great opportunity in the market generally, with many stories remaining untold that could be displayed and interpreted, for the benefit of local people and visitors alike.