WILL 0099

CENTRAL EQUITY LIMITED

Central Equity Limited

WILLSMERE

Redevelopment Proposal

LANDSCAPE REPORT

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April 1995

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INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the practical and philosophical approach to the landscaping of the proposed redevelopment of the former Willsmere Lunatic Asylum by Central Equity.

Inspection has revealed the extant garden and hard landscape features to be in a state of decay requiring urgent intervention to preserve what remains of historical, amenity or cultural interest and significance. Central Equity propose to employ a gardener to work in association with the Landscape Consultant, and to retain a full-time caretaker to ensure immediate implementation of a Landscape Management Programme. During Jennings ownership of the site no major works have been performed, although they had stated that a policy of renewal and conservation would be undertaken. Central Equity, through their experience of medium density housing developments, recognise the amenity value of existing vegetation, the impossibility of instant replacement and the financial advantage of established gardens to vendors or lessors. They are, therefore, motivated towards renewal and improvement.

A permit was issued to Jennings for the removal of 58 trees and shrubs registered variously as historically or visually significant, rare, unusual, or good specimen. The current application proposes to remove only 30 registered trees (Kew Planning Scheme - Willsmere Zone). Refer to Architectural A1 Drawings, Tree Removal Plan. Three of the trees on this proposal have died so their inclusion is academic. These are the group of Eucalyptus camaldulensis in the eastern corner of the site.

This minimisation of tree removal was achieved through careful planning by Central Equity to cause as little intervention as possible, and not through serendipity.

The proposed redevelopment will:

* Preserve and restore the forecourt south of the facade.
* Preserve and restore the wooded embankment abutting the Yarra Bend Park on the south-west boundary.
* Preserve and restore the character of the grounds as pedestrian precincts in an historic garden setting.
* Replant and screen carpark areas in front gardens and on north west boundary of site.
* Revitalise existing vegetation where possible and implement a dynamic plan for phased replacement of significant plantings.

1.0 HISTORIC VEGETATION CHARACTER

Some idea of the character established by the historic vegetation at the Willsmere Hospital site may be obtained from the existing vegetation and from analysis of contemporary accounts.

The style of landscape design which dominated the nineteenth century was the Gardenesque with its stress laid upon the character of the individual plant, its flower and its foliage qualities. Plant selection at Willsmere hospital appears to have followed the trend of the period, revealing a preponderance of strongly textured foliage plants as is typified by the plantings in the east and west car park areas and the forecourt. Typical of these trees are Araucaria bidwillii, Phoenix canariensis, Ficus macrophylla and Cedrus deodara.

Most significantly it is these trees which are seen to provide the character of the site as viewed today. The image of the large Victoria Hospital with its attendant vegetation masses is a most significant one and will be reinforced in this development. Notably the most significant impact on the site was made by tall growing trees and it is essential that such trees are used in future planting.

Trees form the major component of the site plantings because of their enduring quality. Evidence of the type of trees used throughout the site may be found in several areas and specimens include Platanus acerifolia, Quercus canariensis, Schinus molle var. arenaira, Quercus robur, Lagunaria patersonia and Cupressus macrocarpa.

Historically a more diverse range of trees was used as contemporary articles describe. These included Magnolia grandiflora, Pittosporum eugenoides, P. tobira, green and variegated hollies, double myrtle, double pomegranate and Leucodendron argenteum, "very fine". The extended range of trees used upon the site gives an extensive choice of plants to be used for future planting.

There is less evidence of the nature of shrub planting and of herbaceous material though contemporary accounts refer to efforts to cultivate these plants. For example, a flower bed ran the whole length of the Asylum "in which praiseworthy attempts are being made at floriculture".

However, as has been identified the inner courtyards and airing yards did include extensive diversity of shrub planting particularly. Little of historic origin remains in these areas apart from the tree cover already discussed. The large Prunus illicifolia now on the State's Significant Tree Register is an exception.

Plants used historically remain on the site, for example, Raphiolepsis species, Prunus lusitanica, P. laurocerasus, Michelia figo, Hakea suaveolens and variegated euonymous. They provide an effective direction for future plants.

1.1 Weeds

The ongoing lack of maintenance and development on the site has resulted in extensive weed growth on the site. These may be identified as being in different groups, woody species, shrubs and herbaceous weeds (Refer Appendix A).

Woody weeds make a significant contribution to the site and many of them may have been viewed as being ornamental when first established on the site. For example, Pittosporum undulatum and Ligustrum lucidum were available in the late nineteenth century from nurseries to provide ornamental display. Within the site they may be found to be in part to be fulfilling ornamental positions while in other situations they are clearly bird sown specimens growing at the base of walls, etc. Whatever their situation they remain a significant potential source of weeds, especially since the site is very close to the Yarra Bend park. The management of these trees and other weed species, eg. Fraxinus ornus and Ailanthus altissima on the site will need to recognise that their presence is a threat to surrounding land management policies and that they are occupying settings on this site otherwise available for more ornamental plantings.

Shrub weeds include a typical range of Melbourne shrub weeds including blackberry (Rubus fruticosus) and shiny leaf (Coprosma repens). The removal of such weed material will not have any detrimental effect to the quality of the site and indeed can only be beneficial. This will be most significant in relation to the woodland embankment where several weed species could be removed to allow replanting of ornamental material.

There are extensive areas of herbaceous weeds within the site. These will be controlled during the site development.

1.2 Philosophy of Tree Management

In general the development of the Willsmere site will be designed to retain existing vegetation, most particularly mature trees. These offer quality to the site and are especially important in the way the site relates to its surroundings.

Little effective replanting has been undertaken in the Willsmere landscape in recent years so that large numbers of trees on the site are in decline or at least, in the latter part of their life. The philosophy of tree management on the site will be to attempt to sustain the existing tree cover for as long as possible to retain a maturity on the site and the present site character while establishing new planting to carry this character into the next century.

This process is a dynamic one involving the removal of particularly aged and over mature trees, the careful treatment of significant aged trees with a good potential to contribute to the future of the site to extend their contribution and the establishment of young trees to provide for the future. After this initial phase of taking stock and of rejuvenation an ongoing programme of tree management will be initiated to ensure the policy established at implementation is continued. In this way the quality of the site will be available for enjoyment of future generations.

In the main entrance courtyard trees are being admired for their specific value as specimens. Here their individual amenity value is significant since this is what will be admired. The question of the safety of these trees is paramount; this will be a highly trafficked area.

Trees which might be retained in the woodland would possibly be removed in the entrance forecourt.

The quality and future amenity values of trees has dictated extensively the layout of the site development so that wherever possible existing vegetation has been retained within the proposed development. This retained vegetation is seen as providing significant amenity value within the development.

Tree evaluation on the site has been based on a number of factors. However, retention has been the normal recommendation except in the following cases:

1. Weed Species

   There is considerable concern about the relationship of this site to the Yarra Bend Park. There is danger of ongoing weed infestation from the Willsmere site into the park. It is desirable that control of these weeds should take place to minimise risk of this infestation.

   Many of the weed species identified upon the site are environmental weeds, that is plants with a significant weed potential in areas where native vegetation is to dominate.

   Weed species identified on the site and proposed for removal include:

   * Pittosporum undulatum
   * Ligustrum lucidum
   * Ailanthus altissima
   * Fraxinus ornus

2. Dangerous Trees

Trees in decline that have achieved a stage in their life where they may prove dangerous to visitors to the site are a problem. To some extent problems with these trees may be addressed by suitable tree surgery, however, others need to be removed because of the very real threat they make.

3. Unsuitable Trees

Changes in vegetation cover on the site in recent years have not always been in sympathy with the period or style of the development. It seems desirable that at a time when a new plan is being developed for the site the removal of ill-suited plantings should take place to allow replacement by better suited specimens.

2.0 LANDSCAPE DESIGN

2.1 Design Philosophy

The design philosophy for the landscape design at Willsmere is based on a process of rejuvenation of the existing landscape, enhancing and underlining the historic character of the site through the use of existing materials, furnishing and vegetation whilst also recognising the needs of modern communal townhouses and apartments.

The existing character of the site will be enhanced developing the indigenous vegetation theme at the edge of the site, enhancing the existing nature of the site entrance and car parks, retaining the open grassed nature of the courtyards and east and west gardens and developing treed gardens around the townhouses and apartments. Thus the historic nature of the site entrance will be enhanced while a more contemporary landscape style will be established around the townhouses.

Wherever possible existing vegetation will be retained and the character and style achieved by this vegetation will be reinforced.

Plant selections will be sympathetic to the period and style of the Willsmere hospital development namely reflecting the ideals of the gardenesque style. In conjunction with this the selection of hard surfaces will reflect those used in the building and reproduce the trims and details of the general site construction.

In general the design philosophy will reflect the large scale character of the site. Small scale treatment will occur in pedestrian areas close to townhouses though larger material will be used to establish the scale of these buildings within their overall context of the Willsmere site.

Essential to the townhouses and apartments will be the sense of a pedestrian scale suited to residential areas. More closely defined pathways will permit access to accommodation units while open grass areas punctuated by trees will offer shaded and protected areas.

2.2 Planting Philosophy

Where possible existing vegetation will be retained. However, there has not been any active replanting programme undertaken on the site for many years. A critical aspect of the planting of the site will be the establishment of a mixed tree canopy to retain the mixed character of the original nineteenth century gardens.

Indigenous vegetation will be used at the site limits to reinforce the sites relationship to the adjacent Yarra Bend Park and to create its broad landscape setting. Areas adjacent to access roads, areas of the embankment and especially to the west of the site will be treated most particularly with indigenous plants.

Nineteenth century gardens were notable for the use of plants with exotic foliage. This tradition will be continued in the planting schemes proposed, most notably in areas to the south front of the buildings. The embankment, car parks, entrance forecourt, east and west gardens and central courtyards will reveal the major reflection of nineteenth century character.

Planting will be aimed at reinforcing the existing character of the site, rejuvenating an existing scheme eg, by use of Cedrus deodara in the forecourt, extending the use of existing site feature plants, eg, Pinus radiata and extending the diversity to include other major trees and shrubs frequently used in the nineteenth century. This treatment will ensure that the significant skyline of the site will be retained.

In the areas to be developed as townhouses a distinctly different approach to plant selection will be made. This will reflect the newer origin of those buildings and the ornamental garden character of this landscape. The scale of this development will be different from that of the rest of the site and plant selection will reflect this difference.

A key aspect of the development of the site will be protection of the existing vegetation and its retention to contribute to the site for as long as possible. A programme of tree works designed to re-establish the vigour and health of existing trees is currently being prepared.

2.3 Hard Landscape Philosophy

To retain and repair all old or original features, eg. brick spoon drains, and generally remove, later, unsympathetic accretions eg. ramps or ramp extensions, obsolete pathways and roadways.

To recreate the 1898 pathway system where possible and appropriate, eg. west Inner Courtyard, north of east-west Walkway and the Yard space north of the kitchen block.

To minimise new hard landscape additions as far as practicable.

To design all new additions (including structures such as substations, pits, bollards, lights, steps, etc), with a common theme (materials, shape, colour, style) in a simple, modern and well-considered manner.

To distinguish all new additions such as pathways, walls and roads serving the townhouses and sunken car spaces in the Front gardens, using low-key materials differing in detail from those used in reconstructed pathways or other original features, eg. use of 'Aged' concrete edge or curbing for introduced roadways and pathways, but no edge treatment to re-created pathways.

2.4 Inner Courtyards (East and West)

These central courtyards are formal historic spaces critical to the relationship between the development and its landscape setting. They are symmetrical in area and will retain this character through the development. Early photographs and drawings suggest the two courtyards had distinct characters.

Essential to the treatment of these spaces is a recognition of the functional role that they will fulfil. They were historically, and are to remain, areas of passive and mildly active recreation whilst their open nature will provide an harmonious visual element viewed from within or without the buildings.

Open lawns will dominate but there is a need for planting to relate to the massive scale of the towers to both the east and west courtyards. Large trees will be established in the western Central Courtyard, to complement existing plantings. The 1898 radial path system and central flower bed evident on early photographs and drawings will be re-established in 'red' bitumen with a timber edging strip.

The existing constructed features within the courtyard will be retained where they are early or original. Brick gutters and bluestone edges will be retained and where possible the existing terracotta pavement beneath the covered walkways will be retained.

The eastern Central Courtyard will retain its sunken grassed area for lawn bowls or croquet, etc. with plantings restricted to areas outside the low retaining wall. Central Equity prefers that pedestrian traffic be encouraged away from the walkways in the interests of the privacy of the residents whose living and bedroom spaces are very close by. For this reason it is proposed to establish, along the low retaining wall perimeter of this courtyard, a pedestrian path of "Grass Pavers', which will serve this function with minimal intrusion.

The 1898 pathway system proposed for the western Inner Courtyard fulfils Central Equity's functional requirements, as outlined above, admirably.

2.5 Central Inner Courtyard (Sited behind Main Building)

This area will remain open and plantings will be improved through careful management (pruning, fertilising, etc). Existing concrete pathways will be amended to reflect pedestrian circulation requirements, (generally reduced in extent) and to service the proposed opening in the north wall of the office adjacent staircase in administration building. Prunus ilicifolia will be retained if it responds to a programme of renewal (currently undertaken in part) or suitably propagated and replaced. Evidence of symmetry in planting will be reinforced.

2.6 Townhouse Landscapes

The townhouses provide a smaller scale landscape where the houses themselves and their associated parking pavilions establish an enclosed landscape. Critical to these areas will be the establishment of a smaller scale landscape treatment, suited both to the built environment and to pedestrian use.

Hard surfaces and planting will both reflect this change of scale while drawing together these areas via consistency of material selection and vegetation. A single tree species will be selected to create the backbone to the site, shading and enclosing driveways and pathways.

3.0 TREE CARE

The dynamic nature of the management philosophy demands that immediate programmes are implemented to ensure the effective achievement of objectives.

3.1 Tree Surgery

An extended programme of tree surgery will be implemented on the site. This will follow a tree by tree assessment of tree condition and requirements and will involve dead-wooding, cabling and other techniques to ensure the long-term well being of the vegetation.

Extended care will be required for those trees where short-sighted policies of lopping have been implemented. This will involve an on-going shaping and forming of trees.

The policy proposed will control turf around the base of the trees, apply mulch to the root zone of the trees, remove deadwood and apply high nitrogen fertilisers over the root zone prior to growth flushes. This should achieve effective regrowth while the use of possum rings on the trunks will help to reduce the damage caused by possums.

Trees requiring special attention include the following

Schinus molle var. areira Pepper-corn tree.
A large specimen tree has been recorded on the National Trust Significant Tree Register. This is because of the girth dimensions of the bole of the tree. It is in very poor condition with significant parts of the upper canopy in decline. The cause of this decline is not clear and may have been a result of herbicide application, a change in drainage pattern or irrigation pattern or a change in soil levels within the trees root zone.

An attempt will be made to re-invigorate the tree using techniques outlined above. If there is no indication that this process has achieved any notable re-invigoration after two or three years then the future of the tree will be re-assessed and its possible replacement by the same or alternative species should take place.

Prunus ilicifolia
This species is a Californian native which has not been extensively planted in Australia. There are several specimens of this tree on the site and this is one of the largest thus it is on the Significant Tree Register. It is not in particularly good health revealing signs of cavitation and branch decline.

There is some potential for the tree to remain in this position and given its rarity and size the previously outlined steps will be taken.

The condition of the tree will be monitored and if continued significant decline is noted the tree should be removed and a replacement made but only after suitable propagation has been implemented.

Quercus robur & Quercus canadiensis
Many fine examples occur throughout the site, many of which would benefit from intensive treatment as outlined above. Phased replacement will be implemented where necessary.

3.2 Tree Protection

The following procedures will be implemented upon the site to achieve protection of trees.

All excavation on the site will be supervised by the landscape architects who will also supervise the implementation of tree surgery works and any tree removals. Trees where works are to be undertaken will be clearly marked by the Landscape Architects prior to commencement of any works. Strict site discipline as to the storage of soil and other materials, location of parked vehicles, site bonfires, disposal of chemicals, fuels or oils and general trafficking by pedestrians or machinery will be implemented and supervised by the Landscape Architects.

Wherever possible the zones around trees will be fenced off at the drip-line of the tree to establish a protection zone around the tree.

Where services are to be implemented within the root zone of trees alternative procedures will be followed, either directing services directly beneath the centre of the root zone or excavating by hand or by use of an air-knife to ensure protection for roots of 2cms. or greater. Soil build up over the root zone greater than 15cms. will be avoided.

3.3 Phased Replacement

While trees will be protected and preserved on the site as far as possible a dynamic process of replacement will be implemented. An example of this policy is the oak trees in the south west corner of the western hotel garden.

Of these Quercus robur several show decline as a result of possum damage and overshadowing by the large Pinus radiata which dominated this section of the garden. Retention of oak trees in this corner of the site is viewed as very desirable but there are trees here in such serious decline that their removal and replacement is desirable. This will permit replanting and the achievement of a sustained effect and can be done so by removing tees in decline. Most seriously one of the trees has a major fracture through its trunk and this constitutes a hazard and should be removed for the sake of safety.

4.0 HARD LANDSCAPE

In general hard surfaces and site furnishings will be sympathetic to the historic period of the development. The existing paved surfaces are strong and effective, underlining the period of the development. In general they are both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

4.1 Paved Surfaces

The use of paving on the site will be designed to achieve three objectives, those of underlining the historic period of the development, effectively fulfilling their prescribed functions and communicating to users the role of these paved areas. Separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic is achieved.

4.1.1 Carriage Drive

Existing bitumen surface to be retained; adjustments to concrete curbing to re-establish original alignment envisaged but not finalised.

4.1.2 Oval Forecourt

The 1898 plan and 1905 photographs show this area enclosed with a hairpin fence, apparently as a space for ornamental planting. Its established use is as a carparking area, bitumen paving has contributed to the decline of the vegetation. It is proposed to remove the bitumen and associated curbing; re-establish the 1898 alignment using border treatment and low planting; replant any declining trees (Using trees re-located from the escarpment as previously suggested), and install a gravel surface and maintain the area for carparking.

4.1.3 Garden Spaces Flanking Forecourt

These areas contain a remnant character (and some old plantings, possibly original, i.e. Rosa banksiae hedge) of the erstwhile flower border running along the front of the Asylum. The west side is mostly paved in bitumen. The east side is a garden. The proposed treatment of both spaces is to retain and restore the borders of these areas as garden spaces; retain all sound tree specimens and create informal gravelled car parking within.

4.1.4 New Fencing and Gates

New perimeter fencing to the north (rear) of the site will be a modern red brick wall, consistently reflecting the height of the original wall above the natural ground level. This wall may be punctuated by sections of semi-transparent wall. It is envisaged that a concrete capping to the fence reflect, in a simple shape, the original brick capping on the extant wall.

A 2.1m high fence is required to provide security to the hospital grounds (refer HBC submission, 1993). This will be placed on the alignment of the original picket fence enclosure, fabricated from steel with a simple welded rod and bar design. Automatic security/vehicular gates are to be set into this new fence line rather than at openings in the original brick perimeter wall.

New fencing to Townhouse rear gardens are to be simple, painted timber picket type, 1.4m high.

4.1.5 Treatment to Original Brick Perimeter Wall

Refer to HBC submission, 1993

Three new openings for vehicular access are to be carefully cut through with masonry saw and left unadorned, except that a new free-standing landscape feature (such as a bollard, post or lamp standard) would be set in front of each side to mark these as main car entrances.

Repairs and replacements to the extant perimeter wall will include reconstruction of sandstone balls at four locations, removal of paint from brickwork and remedial tying of cracked corner on south west.

4.1.6 Sunshades

The two remaining sunshades are to be retained, with one relocated. Refer HBC submission, 1993.

4.1.7 Clotheslines

Some rotary clothes hoists exist on the site but will be removed. All apartments are to be fitted with electric tumble dryers but should the Body Corporate decide that a need exists for outside clotheslines the following is proposed:

* Three or four removable rotary clothes hoists could be located in a line in each of the east and west Airing Courts. These hoists could be stored away in the Privies when not required.

* Townhouse residents could erect fold away clotheslines within their rear gardens.

APPENDIX A

Major environmental weeds present within the Historic Gardens adjoining the Park As identified by Darcy Duggan, on behalf of the Yarra Bend Trust.

Woody Weeds - Trees and Shrubs

Ailanthus altissima	Tree of Heaven
Arbutus unedo	Stawberry Tree
Chrysanthemoides monilifera	Boneseed
Coprosma repens	Mirror Bush
Cotoneaster glaucophyllus	Cotoneaster
Crataegus monogyra	Hawthorn
Hakea suaveolens	Hakea
Fraxinus excelsior	English Ash
Ligustrum spp.	Privet
Fraxinus oxycarpa	Desert Ash
Pittosporum undulatum	Sweet Pittosporum
Populus alba	White Poplar
Ulmus procera	English Elm

Herbaceous Weeds - Creepers

Hedera helix	English Ivy
Rubus frutticosa	Blackberry
Vinca major	Blue Periwinkle

Smothering Ground Covers

Allium triquetrum	Angled Onion
Agrostis Capillaris	Brown Top Bent Grass
Crocosmia x crocosmiflora	Golden Copper Top
Cynodon dactylon	Couch
Erhardtia erecta	Veldt Grass
Paspalum dilatatum	Paspalum
Pennisetum clandestinum	Kikuya
Oxalis pes-caprae	Soursob
Sporobolus indicans	African Rats Tail Grass
Tradescantia flumensis	Wandering Jew

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