

05. Woodley's Shed Architecture

This chapter outlines the architectural strategies, concepts, and design details, with a particular focus on Woodley's Shed and its associated amenities.



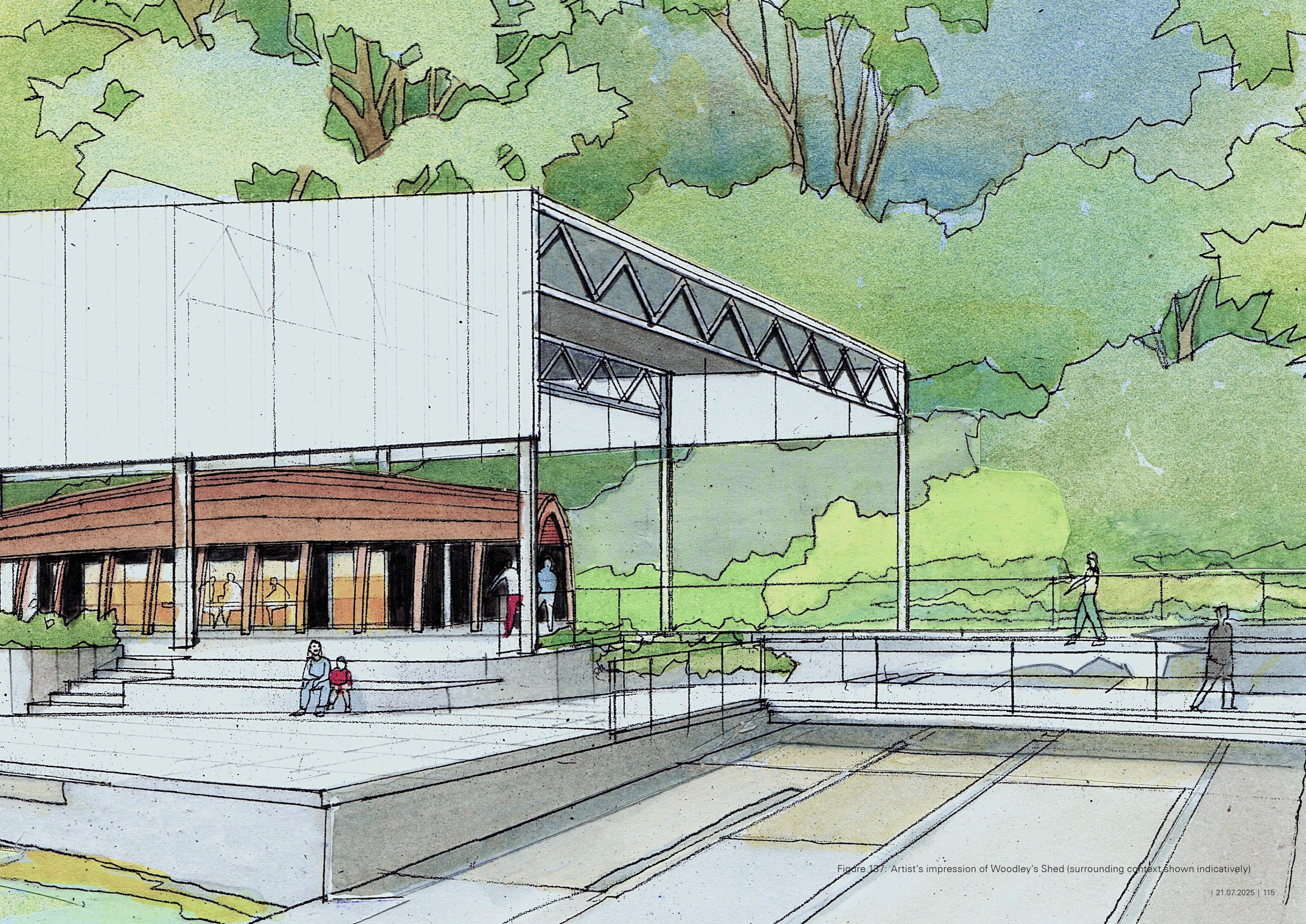


Figure 137: Artist's impression of Woodley's Shed (surrounding context shown indicatively)

5.0 Woodley’s Shed architecture

5.1 Background

5.1.1 Scope overview

Woodley’s Shipyard has played a significant role in the history of Berrys Bay and has long served as a local landmark. The site is listed as a local heritage item on the North Sydney Local Environmental Plan (NSLEP). 2013.

The State Heritage Inventory (SHI) contains the following Statement of Significance for the Woodley’s Shipyard Site:

This shipyard was the second largest shipyard in the council area and part of the Berrys Bay ship building tradition. It is named after the Woodley family who had a long involvement in this industry. Maritime function- working harbour significance. Some technological interest in equipment and slipways. Bushland setting at rear. Seawalls of sandstone and sandy beach.

However, the existing Woodley’s Shed structure is currently unused and has been assessed as having a poor structural integrity. The proposal involves the removal of the existing shed and annex buildings, to be replaced with a new community pavilion offering a range of gathering spaces that reflect both the heritage and future aspirations of the site. The fit out of these spaces will be undertaken by NSC under a separate planning process.

The proposal includes:

- A new flexible community space, including:
 - » A large, roofed outdoor gathering space (Woodley’s Shed)
 - » An indoor events building (community building) with support facilities to include:
 - A community room to accommodate 80 people in a banquet configuration
 - Toilet facilities and support spaces, sized to serve the park and community spaces
 - Provisions for a kitchen, to be fitted out in future by NSC
 - Provisions for storage and office space, to be fitted out in future by NSC
- Outdoor plazas, waterfront foreshore path, and associated outdoor spaces, including:
 - » Kayak storage
 - » Water, communications, and electrical provisions to support maintenance and use for markets

The original ‘WOODLEYS PTY LTD’ signage and winches will be carefully salvaged for reinstatement and interpretation within the new design. Where feasible, salvaged elements such as corrugated sheeting, structural members, and timber components will be reused or integrated as interpretive features.

The shed and surrounding precinct are viewed as an extension of the park offerings, allowing for gathering of various sizes of groups under shelter in inclement weather, while still permitting views out to the Harbour and Balls Head.

The design of the new pavilion honours the site’s deep Aboriginal and maritime heritage and has evolved through several iterations to ensure it reflects community input, cultural values, and site-specific constraints. The design process and its key drivers are detailed in the following sections.



While the area of the parklands was developed for industrial purposes, as early as the 1830s with the development of the stone warehouse seen in this photo from 1875, the area at Woodley’s Shed remained relatively

untouched through the 19th century. This condition highlights the interplay between the natural and industrial



Cammeraygal Country

Nature and encroaching industrialisation

1877

In 1877, works were undertaken at the site that would become Woodley’s, with the arrival of the NSW Torpedo Corps. Explosives were stored in the old stone warehouse and a slipway was constructed that would later be repurposed for boat building. By Federation, the Torpedo Corps had moved on from the site, leaving only the slipway as evidence of the use. However, the name “Torpedo Bay” remained in use by locals, as evidenced by the oral history being undertaken as part of this project.

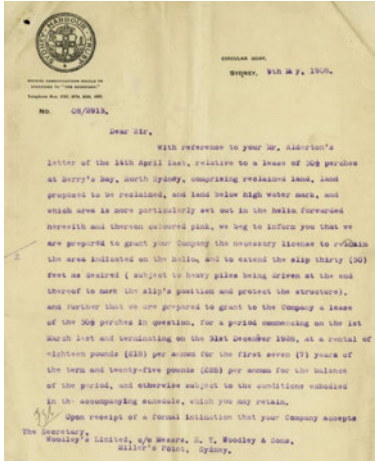
AN AFTERNOON WITH THE TORPEDO CORPS.

The men of the Torpedo Corps had a “day parade” on Saturday afternoon. By the steamer Princess, Colonel Cracknell and some 120 of his command left Circular Quay for Berry’s Bay, a secluded inlet to the south-west of St. Leonards, where the torpedo stores and the exercise ground of the corps are situated. The ground is not too spacious, and the store-house—where all the ingenious mechanism of the torpedo is deposited—was once a distillery.



Pre-colonisation

Prior to colonial settlement in the 1800s, the Cammeraygal people lived on the north shore of Sydney Harbour. Evidence of their occupation is found at Balls Head, including the carving of a whale located just 100m from the park site. An 1803 engraving by Charles Alexandre Lesueur depicts Cammeraygal people gathering at Balls Head, with nawi in the water—a testament to the connection of the intrinsic link between land and water that has existed on the site for thousands of years.



From its inception, Woodley's business boomed, with construction of a range of vessels for commercial and expedition use. Within the decade, land had been cleared and new workshop sheds were erected.

These are just a few examples of the range of wooden boats built at Woodley's in 1913 and 1914, including a boat for exploration of Papua and a 90ft long tug boat for work on the harbour. The firm also began to build boilers to be fitted on the boats.

From the 1960s onward, Woodley's subleased land at Berrys Bay to other boat builders, with Bob Gordon operating on the land just south of the shed, and other smaller boat builders setting up ad hoc operations.

1908

Early industrialisation

In 1908, land at Berrys Bay was leased to E.T. Woodley & Sons to commence boat building operations as Woodley's Limited. The firm erected a rudimentary shed and began constructing timber boats for use on the harbour and further afield. The shed constructed in 1908 was quickly replaced by a larger shed, which forms the centre of the still larger structure that is there today. The lease allowed for reclamation of land, and integration of the existing Torpedo Corps slipway into new slipways.

It was also around this time that Balls Head was cleared of the native vegetation.



Boat building

WOODLEYS, LTD.
Woodley's, Ltd., Berry's Bay, advise:
"We have in hand two Colonial type boilers, 12ft. long, 6ft. 6in. diameter, for the Coffs Harbor Timber Co., also several other smaller boilers. We have just signed a contract to slip and carry out extensive repairs to one of F. Buckle and Sons' Iron Hopper Pumps. Also we are building an Auxiliary Trader for the islands and a large deck lighter for the Vacuum Oil Co., Ltd. We are very busy in all our departments and the Patent Slip is never idle."

LAUNCH AT BERRY'S BAY.
A new tug boat, built by Woodley's, Ltd., Berry's Bay, for Mr. Alexander Allen, was successfully launched at nine yesterday morning. Her dimensions are:—Length, 90ft.; beam, 18ft.; and depth, 10ft., moulded. She is built of spotted gum, with kauri topalides, the keel and keelson being of 10 x 10 ironbark. The steamer was christened by Mr. Alex. Allen "Cowman." The engine is by Ross and Duncan, Glasgow, with cylinders 12in. x 24in. and a 16in. stroke. The new vessel will be fitted with electric lighting plant and salvage pump capable of pumping 60 tons of water per hour. The vessel is intended for towing work, also fishing and Harbor excursions.

SPEAR PROOF.
VESSEL FOR THE CANNIBAL COUNTRY.
LAUNCHED AT BERRY'S BAY.

There was dauncher at the yards of Woodleys, Ltd., Berry's Bay, yesterday a vessel of the type dear to the boyish readers of tales of adventure.
The vessel, which has been named the Kismet, is a spear-proof motor launch, specially designed for adventurous voyages amongst the cannibals of Papua. She is to carry Sir Rupert Clarke and his expedition to the Fly River, Papua; and as some of the country along the banks of this little-explored river is inhabited by savages, care has been taken to make the Kismet as invulnerable from their attacks as possible.
As the Kismet, on her journey up the Fly River, will continually be within range of the arrows and spears of hostile natives on the banks, a strong wire screen of fine mesh is being stretched right over her in order to protect those on the deck from any sudden shower of missiles. The brass ports of the little vessel may be opened for shooting, but the portholes will also be protected by a similar wire screen.
The Kismet is 35ft long, 12ft broad, and has a draught of 2ft 6in. She is constructed of hardwood, with kauri topalides, and has a particularly large carrying capacity for her size, special attention having been paid to this on account of the fact that the expedition will require stores for about six months. The vessel is fitted throughout with electric light, and a powerful electric searchlight will be carried. This will be used for night travelling, and will enable those on board to illuminate either bank of the river, and thus detect any natives

Industrial peak and decline





Figure 138: Woodley's Shipyard with Quarantine Station at left, 1963. Source: Rob Gordon collection



Figure 139: Woodley's Shed and slips, 1915. Source: Stanton Library Historical Services

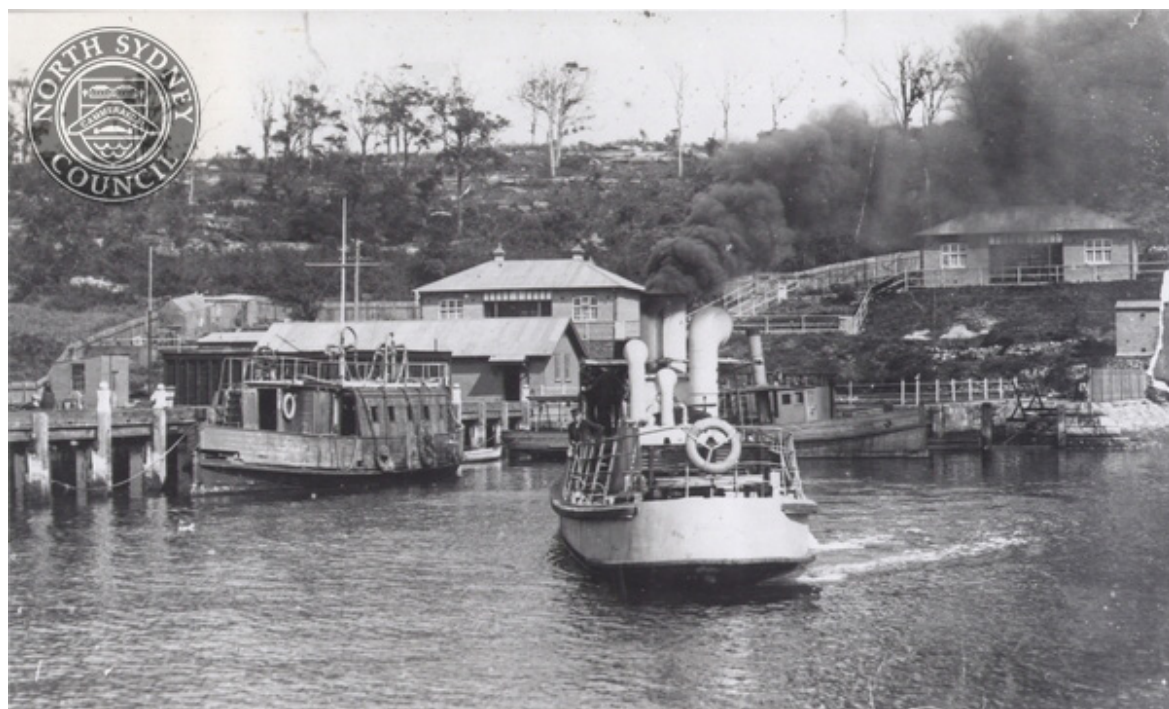


Figure 140: Quarantine launch depot, c1912, Source: Stanton Library Historical Services



Figure 141: Woodley's Shipyard and the bund, 1998. Source: Stanton Library Historical Services

5.1.2 Industrialisation and nature

Woodley’s Shed features in paintings of the time, solidifying the importance of the shed form within the local (and national) consciousness, as representative of the interplay of the natural harbour and the industrial harbour.

Wakelin and de Maistre were key figures in the emergence of abstraction in Australian art, with their work at Woodley’s indicative of the emergence of the style. Their paintings of the bay, capturing the industrialization of the harbour, typified by Woodley’s, and that relationship with the natural environment, are important in the social and cultural history of the area.

Notably, Wakelin’s painting—held in the Art Gallery of NSW—portrays Woodley’s Shed which still stands today. The form of the pitched roof, which is still visible from the Harbour Bridge, is noted in heritage reports as being a distinctive element that tells the history of the site.



Figure 142: Berry’s Bay, Sydney Harbour, 1920, Roy de Maistre. Source: Art Gallery of South Australia



Figure 143: Boat Shed, Berrys Bay, Sydney, Walter George Rendall. Source: Barsby Auctions



Figure 144: Berrys Bay, Sydney Harbour, undated, Percy Lindsay. Source: Mutual Art



Figure 145: Down the hills to Berry’s Bay, 1916, Roland Wakelin. Source: Art Gallery of NSW



Figure 146: Boats Berrys Bay, 1946, Roland Wakelin. Source: Mutual Art



Figure 147: Syncromy, Berry’s Bay, 1919, Roy de Maistre. Source: National Gallery of Victoria

5.1.3 Collaboration and research

The project pays tribute to Australia’s nautical heritage, drawing on extensive research into the history and traditional techniques of wooden boatbuilding. The design process has been enriched through consultation and collaboration with Rob Gordon and Graeme Woodley, both of whom have strong ties to the site’s boatbuilding legacy.

Rob Gordon

Rob is one of the last remaining timber boat craftsmen on Sydney Harbour, and was born into a family of boatbuilders. Rob’s father Bob Gordon was also a boat builder. The late Bob Gordon was just 16 years old when he launched his first hand built wooden boat. He went on to build around 30 classic craft over the next 67 years. Bob and his wife lived and built boats in an idyllic location, in a shack next to Woodley’s—where Rob spent his early childhood. In 1970 when it all closed down, his boatshed got turned into a car park and he moved to Lavender Bay and continued operation from there.

The design team met Rob on-site on 29 January 2025, where he shared personal memories of the area and insights into its boatbuilding history. On 3 March 2025, the team visited Rob’s workshop in Lavender Bay. During this visit, Rob shared his deep knowledge of boatbuilding techniques and construction details that will continue to be leveraged in the design as it is developed.

“Many people of my vintage will tell you how interesting the waterfront used to be and how boring it is these days. There were places of interest – there were boats being built, waterfront industrial stuff, all sorts of higgledy-piggledy one-man-shows about the place – and all of that’s just about gone. In the good old days there was always something changing, something going on in the waterfront, and these days it’s a very static place.”
-Bob Gordon (on an interview with Bettina Richter)



Figure 148: Rob and his father at Lavender Bay, 1987. Source: Rob Gordon



Figure 149: Bob Gordon boatbuilding aged 17, 1939. Source: Rob Gordon



Figure 150: Design team visit to Rob Gordon’s workshop

Graeme Woodley

The Woodley family first leased the land at Berrys Bay in 1908 from the NSW government to establish a boatyard. Over more than a century, the family undertook maritime activities on site, including the construction, repair, and maintenance of boats of all sizes. At its closure in 2011, the facility was one of the final remaining boatyards on Sydney Harbour, with the shed and iconic “WOODLEYS PTY LTD” sign featuring prominently as documented in this report.

Graeme Woodley met with the design team on site and shared stories and archival material from his 70+ years working on the site. The material he shared assisted the team in developing the principles that drove design development.



Figure 151: Design team consultation with Graeme Woodley – looking over old photos and documents relevant to the Woodley’s site

Wooden Boat Centre, Tasmania

Wooden Boat Centre is Australia’s only traditional craft workshop dedicated to wooden boat building. This community-owned, member-led organisation fosters awareness and appreciation of traditional wooden boat building methods by showcasing the craft at festivals and events.

In February 2025, the design team attended the semi-annual Australian Wooden Boat Festival and collaborated with members of the centre. During the event, the team engaged with several boat builders and suppliers, gaining valuable insights into the diverse construction methodologies used in Australian wooden boat building over the past century.



Figure 152: Design team visiting the Hobart Wooden Boat Festival and The Wooden Boat Centre

5.1.4 Recurring themes

Industrial waterfront – iconic shed form, materials, and sign

Berrys Bay has been part of the industrial heritage of Sydney for more than a century, with the form of the shed cutting a striking profile against the harbour and Balls Head, visible from around the Harbour.



Figure 153: Photo of Woodley's Shed, captured 15/10/2024

Boat building – legacy of craft and prevalence of boats

The legacy of boat building on site extends from First Nations use of nawis on Sydney Harbour to Woodley's, manifest through the presence of boats in various stages of repair/construction, both on land and in the water.



Figure 154: Archive, Bob Gordon's Boatbuilding, 1936-2005

Interplay between landscape and industry

The harbourfront has gone through immense transformation since 1788, with industrialisation replacing endemic vegetation; now, with disappearing industrial elements, the natural can reemerge, with a new hybridised outcome that tells of the changes.



Figure 155: Sub Base Platypus Renewal, North Sydney, 2019
Architect: Lahz Nimmo Architects + ASPECT Studios

Public connection to a living harbour

The Harbour teems with life and has provided a place for meeting, recreation, and connection with nature and Country; this site will provide a continuous public waterfront link from Carradah Park to Berrys Bay for the first time in more than 120 years

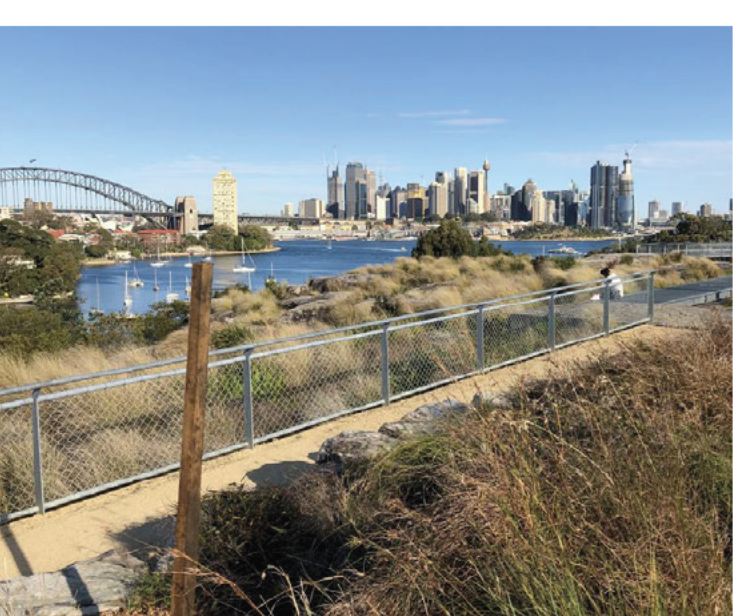


Figure 156: Carradah Park

5.1.5 Heritage frameworks

Several heritage reports have informed the design, including:

Woodley’s Shipyard site – Main Shed – Heritage Design Principles (GML, April 2025)

The report was broken into six categories:

- Character
 - » Ensure the semi-industrial, historic maritime uses of the place are understood by future users
 - » Shipbuilding/repairing function of the site should remain clear and legible in architectural form
 - » Read as a twenty-first century addition which reflects the historic maritime character of the place
 - » Adopt a contemporary approach, referencing the traditional forms and materials
- Scale
 - » Reflect the prevailing scale of the place
 - » Reference the heights of existing one-storey and two-storey sheds
- Form
 - » Employ simple gabled roofs for primary shed structures and skillion/flat roofs on secondary structures
 - » Double height and open plan should reference the character and volume of the Main Shed
 - » Boats and vessels were integral, interpret their forms in the design of new structures and interior
- Siting
 - » Sited in proximity to the shoreline, while allowing for the continuation of the pedestrian Foreshore Walk
 - » Respond to established setbacks to protect the coastal environment and integrity of seawall structures
 - » Significant views should be maintained and opportunities for new views explored
 - » Mount the Woodley’s Pty Ltd signage, located within prominent historic view lines
- Materials and Colour
 - » Interpret and reference the existing materials. Complement, rather than compete with or mimic
 - » Maritime structures were constructed with metal roofs and without wall cladding
 - » Interpret the materiality of boats in any new structure on site
- Detailing
 - » High standard of architectural and structural design with carefully considered detailing
 - » Simple and consistent detailing for the new community facilities

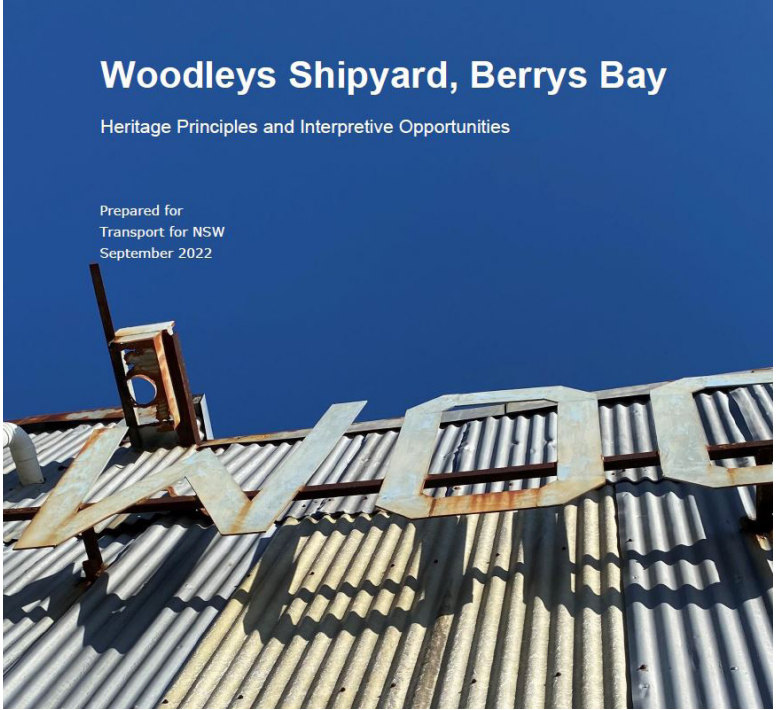
Woodley’s Shipyard, Berry’s Bay - Heritage Principles and Interpretive Opportunities (GML, September 2022)

This document reviews and confirms its previous heritage assessments, prepares design principles, and identifies interpretive opportunities for Woodley’s Shipyard,

- Any use and/or development proposed on the Woodley’s Shipyard site should acknowledge and respond to the heritage significance of the site as a whole and consider the contribution of the individual elements on the site to its significance
- The opportunity exists to provide an enhanced understanding of the history and heritage values of the site through retention and conservation of significant elements in appropriate curtilages, improvements to significant views, removal of lesser significant/ intrusive structures and on-site interpretation
- Any new structures on the shipyard site should reflect the scale and character of the significant elements on the site and retain public domain views of those retained elements
- The use of the site should include preparation of an Interpretation Plan that promotes and celebrates the history and significance of the shipyard in accessible locations throughout the site
- Implementation of the Interpretation Plan initiatives should be considered

Other reports

- Addendum: Woodley’s Shipyard site—Main Shed—Heritage Design Principles, GML (April 2025)
- Berrys Bay Precincts 1 and 2 Statement of Heritage Impact, AECOM (March 2024)
- Berrys Bay Detailed Design Memorandum, AECOM (July 2023)
- Woodley’s Boatshed – Woodley’s Boatshed Site Assessment, ARUP (April 2022)
- Western Harbour Tunnel - Berrys Bay Site Archaeological Research Design and Excavation Methodology, RPS (March 2022)
- Structural Assessment of Buildings at Berry’s Bay, Riddwood (March 2022)
- Woodley’s Shipyard Site, Berrys Bay – Conservation Management Plan, GML (February 2013)
- Waverton Peninsula Industrial Sites: BP, Caltex, Coal Loader – Conservation Management Plan, GML (May 2000)



5.2 Design development

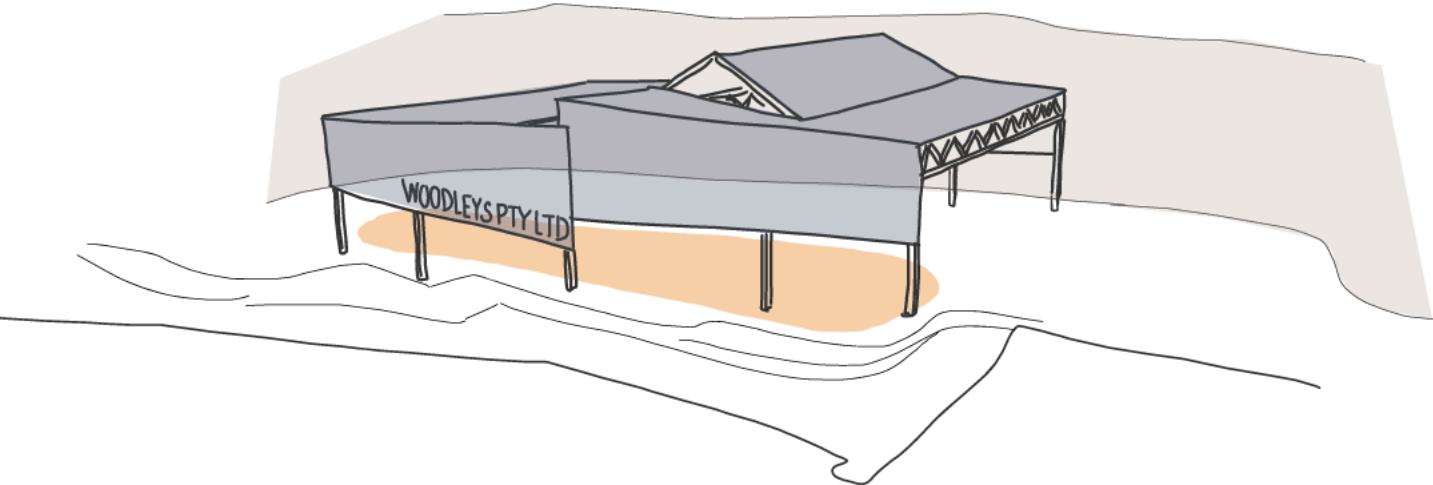
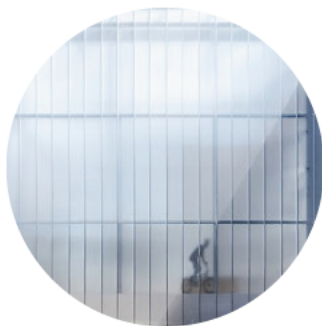
Woodley’s Shed – open-air community pavilion

The former Woodley’s Shed will be re-imagined as a new open-air community pavilion, meeting modern technical requirements while responding sensitively to the heritage values of the site—both physical and social. The new structure will serve as a modern facility that supports the evolving needs of the precinct, while paying homage to the history of the original Woodley’s Shed and its role in the working harbour.

The new structure is conceived as a ‘ghosted’ volume—industrial in character and referencing the distinctive pitched roof form of the original shed. The design reinstates the iconic Woodley’s signage and retains the shed’s presence as a key visual landmark. When viewed from a distance, including from across the bay or the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the new pavilion will echo the silhouette and materiality of the original structure. However, the proposed use of translucent polycarbonate cladding introduces a light-filled interior and allows subtle backlighting of the heritage signage.

As in the present, the new Woodley’s Shed will remain the dominant architectural element on the site. Its refined and contemporary form fuses past and present, offering a reinterpretation of the original that evokes its memory while adapting to the site’s new civic function.

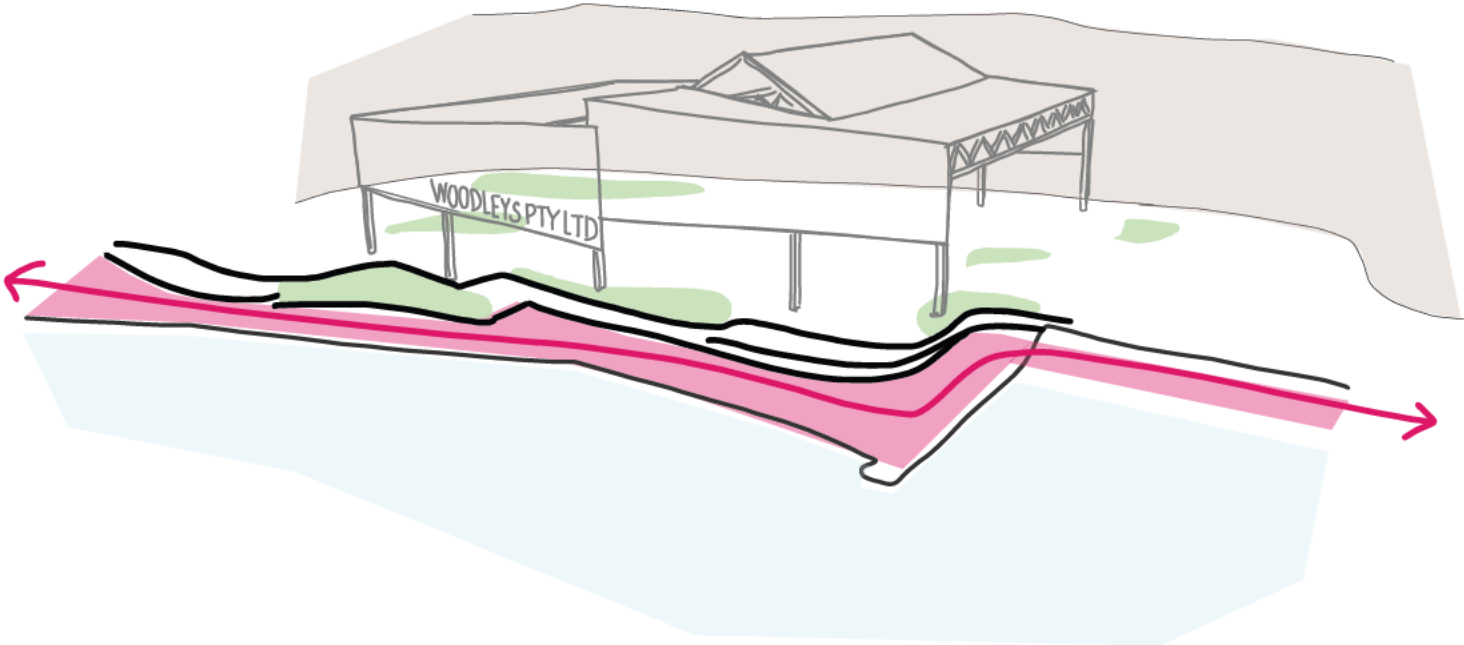
The design retains the original placement of the Woodley’s signage, interprets the characteristic gabled roof, and preserves the volume of the former structure as an abstracted, transparent envelope—honouring the site’s legacy while supporting its future use.



Continuous foreshore path

The new pavilion has been strategically set back from the original foreshore alignment, allowing for a widened and more accessible foreshore path. Curved edges of the path enable seamless pedestrian movement and a more organic visual outlook of the landscape. The terraced landscape design eliminates the need for handrails, thereby preserving uninterrupted views across the bay while also creating opportunities for informal seating.

Along the foreshore, a series of gathering spaces and planted zones foster relationship between the site’s industrial heritage and its natural context. The new layout enables a variety of both incidental and formalised gathering areas, accommodating flexible public use for small and large groups. This approach celebrates the return of the site to public use for the first time in over a century, reinforcing its value as a civic and cultural asset.

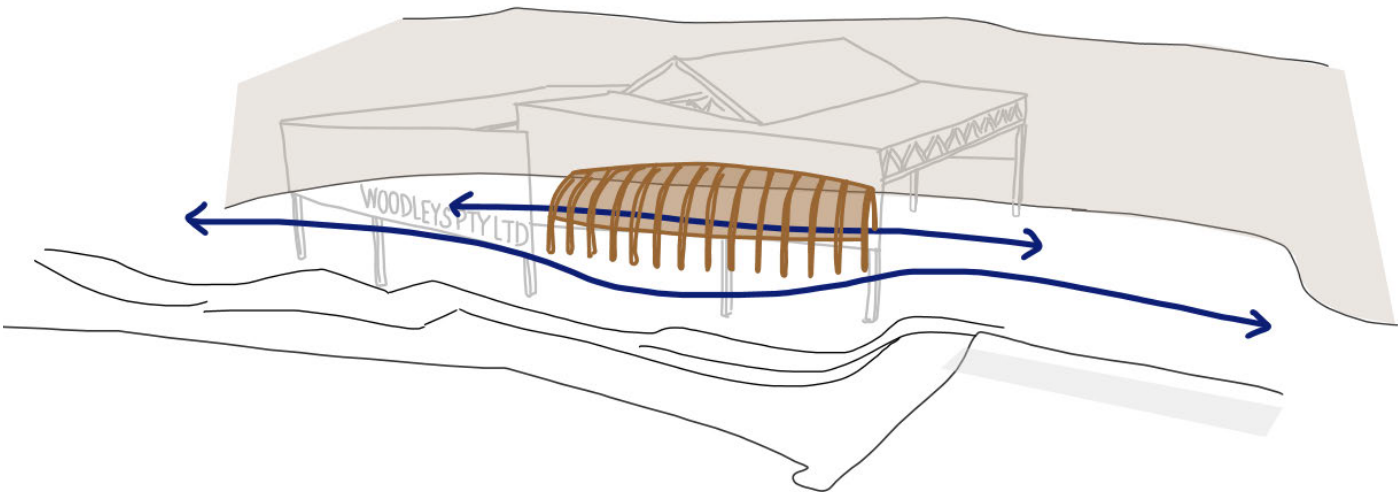


Events building – indoor community space

The indoor event space has been designed to reflect the craftsmanship that once defined the site as a boatbuilding workshop. The architectural form is evocative of a boat under construction or in repair, referencing the curved lines and ribbed structure seen in historic imagery and oral accounts of the former boatbuilding activities on site.

Rather than presenting a literal replication, the structure employs abstraction—delivering a space that is both symbolically resonant and functionally adaptable. The slender timber ribs provide a sense of openness and transparency toward the harbour, forming a distinctive colonnade that invites public access. This element can be interpreted both within a maritime context and as an abstraction of marine life—recalling the organic rhythm of whale ribs.

The use of timber not only anchors the design in tradition and craftsmanship but also supports sustainability objectives, positioning the project as a model for modular timber construction. The structural detailing has been carefully developed in collaboration with master boat builders, ensuring authenticity.



5.2.1 Woodley’s Shed - form interpretation

As outlined in the successive heritage reports produced about Woodley’s Shipyard, referenced in Section 5.1.5, the form of the existing boatshed is unique as a surviving example of the industrial maritime character that once dominated Sydney Harbour, as well as an iconic form when viewed from the surrounding foreshore and as far away as the Sydney Harbour Bridge. While the shed cannot be retained due to the structural condition and requirements of the new community facility, in accordance with the Heritage Design Principles established by GML, the design adopts a contemporary approach to the shed structure while referencing the traditional forms and materials and reflecting the scale and retaining the iconic gabled roof of the old shed.

The evolution of the design keeps the key elements that make the existing shed so distinctive, while adapting the form to meet the needs of a new gathering space for the community.

- 01 The form of the shed, as viewed from Carradah Park, cuts a striking contrast to the natural backdrop. The pitched roof marks the footprint of the oldest, original part of the shed, as captured in the photographs and paintings of the site produced in the early 20th century (Section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2).
- 02 The existing shed is the result of ad hoc additions over time, reflected in the various volumes, roof forms, and openings. The various elements appear as a single unit, though the granularity of the building is discernible.
- 03 Key elements that define the existing shed, including the gable roof form, front facade, and datum established by the various openings, have been identified and form a simplified kit of parts to shape the new facility.
- 04 The new community facility is elevated above the existing grade and leverages the key elements of the original shed while adopting a form suitable for the new facility. The northern portion of the shed rotates to align with the park, while the front southern portion of the front facade, which includes the “WOODLEYS PTY LTD” signage is retained along the shoreline. Datums from the original openings form the bottom of the cladding, balancing expansive views to the Harbour while providing shade. The final expression is a simplified interpretation that speaks to the industrial nature of the original shed and ghosts the iconic profile, allowing future generations to appreciate the heritage of the site in a modern way.

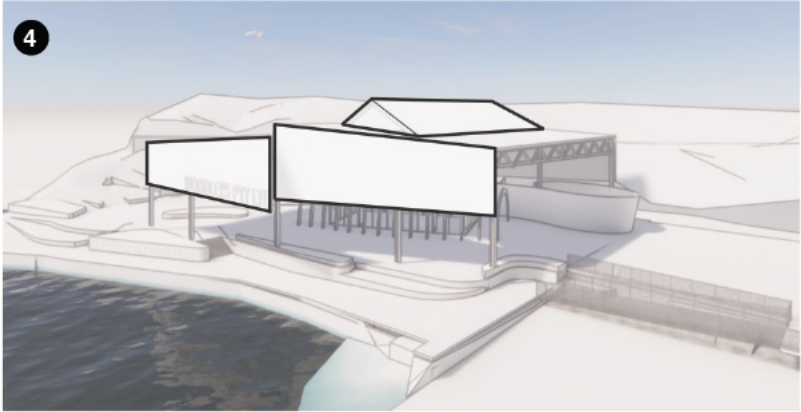
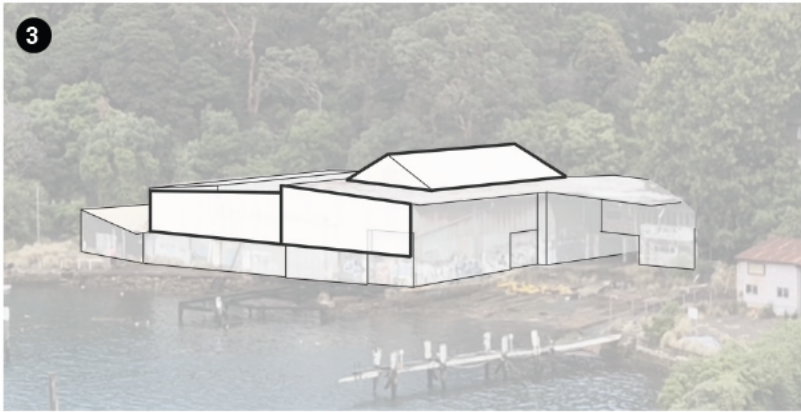
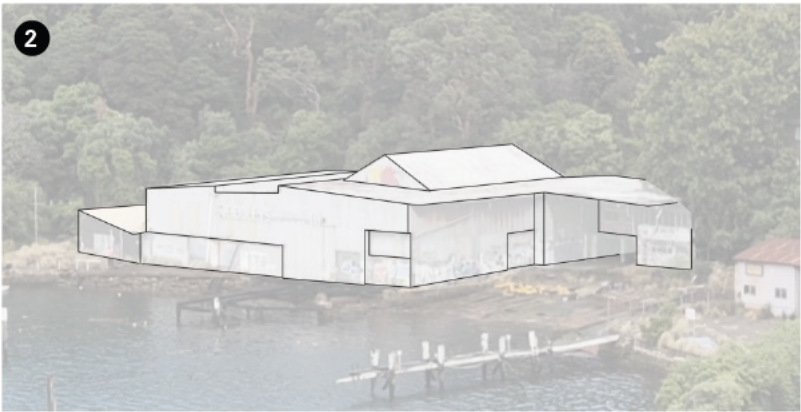


Figure 157: Form evolution of Woodley’s Shed



Figure 158: Artist's impression of Woodley's Shed (surrounding context shown indicatively)

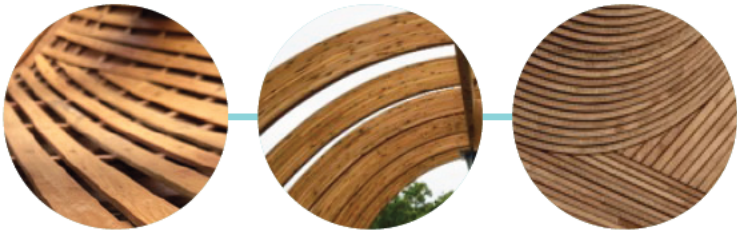
TIM THROSBY
MAY 2025

5.2.2 Materials

The material palette has been developed to reflect the industrial nature of the site, with a preference toward robust materials that are suited to the marine environment. Materials reference the legacy of the site and have been selected to differentiate between the structures while working together as part of the broader site narrative.

Community building

- form and material reflect timber boat building legacy on site
- lightness of form with integrated structural design, with glazing and operable wall to create indoor/outdoor condition



Shed facade

- from afar, material appears similar to corrugated iron cladding on shed, echoing heritage form
- translucent to allow light transmission, brightening the shed



Structural members

- primary structure of shed and smaller structural elements are robust, with finish suited to marine environment
- balustrades and structural elements match finishes and form found in Carradah Park

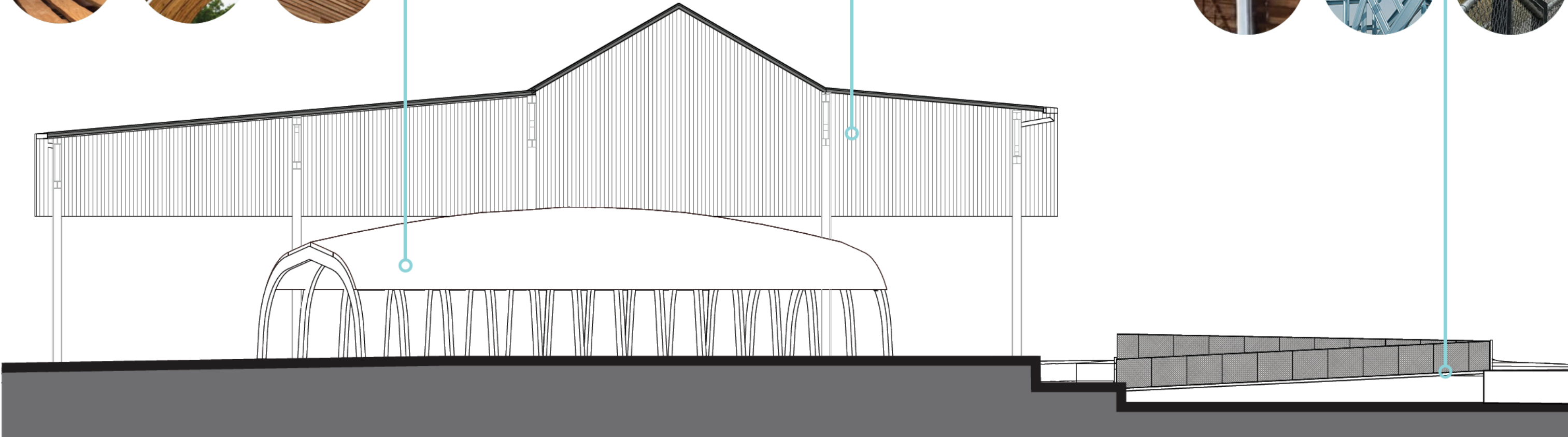


Figure 159: Woodley's Shed - section

5.2.3 Flexible gathering space

The indoor community events space has been designed for flexibility. The sizing of the space has been developed in consultation with NSC, with the proportions and adjacencies taking into account the aspirations of a space that can be used by an array of community groups for different purposes. This flexibility is demonstrated in potential venue configurations, noting that there are several permutations of how to set up the space. The final configuration and allocation of space will be confirmed by NSC. Some potential configurations include:

- 01 Seated banquet style for 80 people
- 02 Open “market style” configuration with adjacent covered outdoor space, linked by sliding walls
- 03 Formal lecture style setup with rows of chairs for approx. 100 people
- 04 Informal teaching setup with space for three classes of children seated on floor

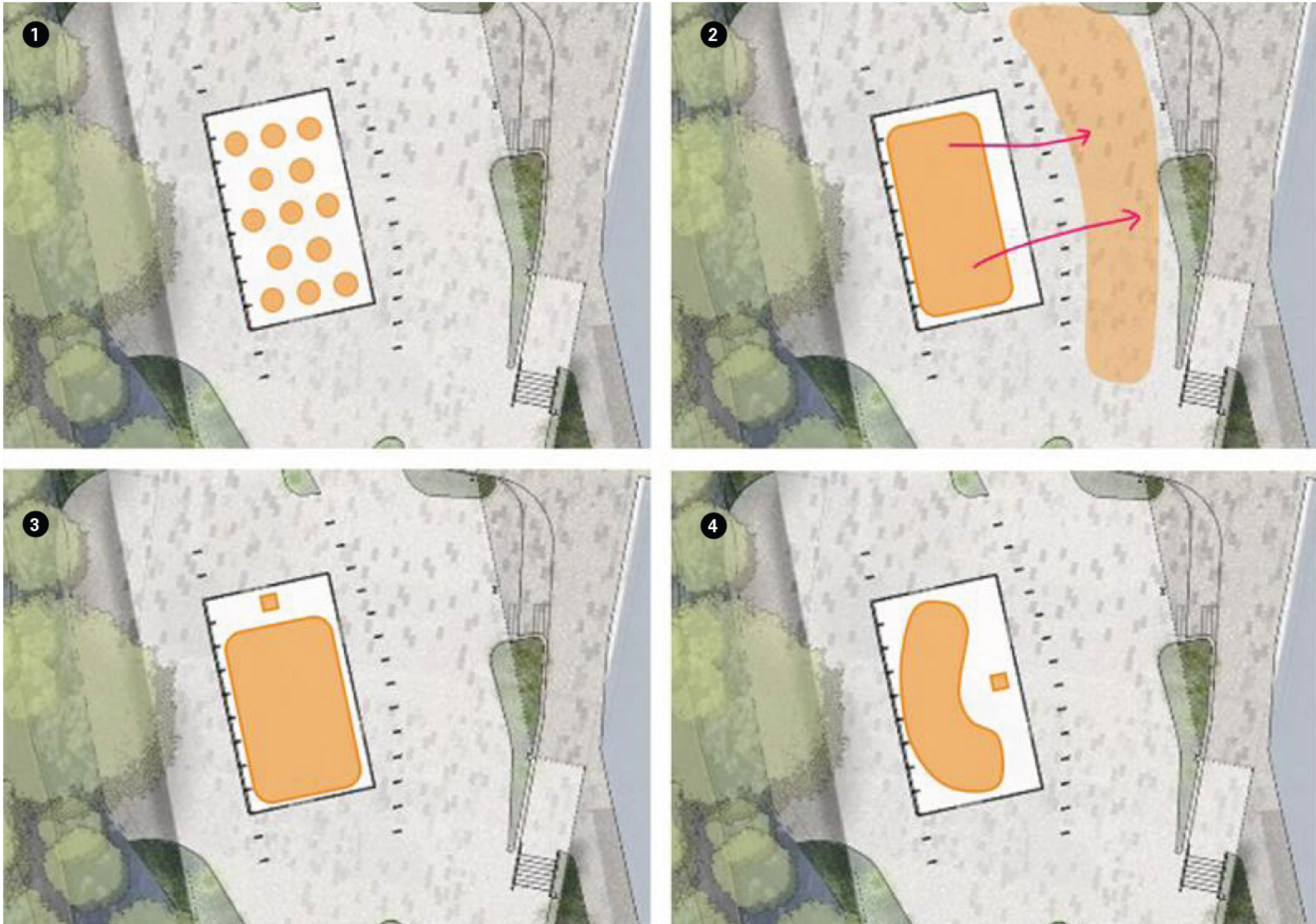




Figure 160: Diagram indicating potential venue configurations

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