Mediating Pressure, Facilitating Exchange: 3 Architectural Projects in Pressured Urban Environments

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

Ross Brewin
M. Arch

School of Architecture and Design
Design and Social Context Portfolio
RMIT University

June 2007
Declaration;

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone, the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award, the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

......................................................................................................

Ross Brewin
June 2007
Contents

Preface 4
Introduction - Mediating pressure, Facilitating exchange 5

Case Study of a Pressured Urban Environment: Robina - Part 1 7
Legislative Context 8
Vested Governmental Interest 9
Town Centre - Private Development 10
‘Robina Town Centre’ (Shopping Centre) 11
Urban Floodplain Development Context 12
Current Floodplain Development Example 14
Council ‘Green Heart’ Proposal 15
Social Context 16
Robina Project Site 18

The Projects 20

Broadmeadows Town Centre 22
A Dispersed Town Centre 23
Ownership Structure 24
Curatorial Strategy - ‘Seeding’ Development 25
Current Constitution + Future Pressure 26
Curatorial Strategy - Future Development 27
Existing Community Infrastructure 28
Regional and Local Retail Networks 34
Active Edges 35
Architectural Insertion 36
Spatial Instrumentation 42
Broadmeadows After word 48

Carrara Landscape Edge 49
A pressured Urban Landscape 50
Curatorial Strategy - Alternative Development Model 51
Constraint and Opportunity 52
Emerald Lakes - Current Development Model 53
Active Interface Potential 55
‘Carrara Lakes’ Proposal 57
The Hills 60

Spatial Instrumentation 64
Carrara After word 67

Robina Part 2: Town Centre Edge 68
A Dispersed Town Centre + Pressured Urban Landscape 69
Curatorial Strategy - Broad 70
Curatorial Strategy - Stage 1 71
Assumed Development Constraint and Opportunity 72
Architectural Insertion 73
Civic Development - Overview 74
Civic Development - Arrangement 76
Civic Development - Spatial Instrumentation 78
Parkland Interface - Overview 82
Parkland Interface - Arrangement + Spatial Instrumentation 84
Conclusion + After word 88

Bibliography 92
Preface

This document is the result of design based research undertaken in intensive design studio mode over three semesters within the Urban Architecture Laboratory at RMIT University.

The studio programme for the first two semesters was directed by two supervisors Shane Murray and Nigel Bertram, with the final semester involving the application of the strategies and themes developed in the previous two semester’s work in a project defined by the candidate.

This final project is an investigation of the particular changing urban context of Robina, Gold Coast in the rapidly growing south east Queensland region of Australia. Robina is initially presented as a case study of the context with which this research is concerned, namely developmentally pressured urban environments. The case study raises issues typical of and relevant to, the previous two projects and in a more general sense, the contemporary Australian city.

Strategies for action in the form of an architectural proposal in Robina were formed and clarified through two research projects situated in related pressured urban environments. These projects were carried out in Broadmeadows in Melbourne, Victoria and in Carrara located just north of Robina in Gold Coast City, Queensland.

Broadmeadows and Carrara, whilst becoming detailed testing grounds for the issues identified at Robina, should be viewed as part of a suite of three projects. In this sense, the three projects in this thesis, while operating at differing scales and complexity, have an even focus with regards to the consideration of architecture within the context of developmentally pressured urban environments.
How can the potential for ‘real’ public domain be maximised in changing, pressured urban environments?

The broad aim of this Masters thesis is to demonstrate design strategies and outcomes that provide alternative ways of considering the futures of areas under high developmental pressure. These areas are where the potential detrimental effects of unmediated, rapid change and development are at their most immediate and in need of consideration.

Urban environments are complex physical manifestations of economic, environmental, social, cultural and political pressures represented by the often competing desires of public and private interest groups. Given the enormity of scale and complexity of these pressures, it is problematic to think of architecture as something that can design everything (perhaps as seen in traditional master planning) and in doing so, solve the problem. What may be more constructive is the consideration of architecture having the potential to be involved strategically in these issues, over a number of scales to work towards positive outcomes for the public domain.

Dutch urbanists, Hajer and Reijndorp in their book *In Search of New Public Domain*, establish the preconditions for the design of new urban environments, specifically the ‘public domain’. They define ‘real’ public domain as “places where an exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs.” ‘Exchange’ is viewed as important for developing social intelligence and forming personal judgements in view of the betterment of society as a whole.

Hajer and Reijndorp contextualise their argument around the assumption that our cities will continue to become increasingly disparate in both spatial and social terms as a result of such things as the enormous demand for single family dwellings and increased societal mobility.

This assumption is certainly true of Australian cities where, in spite of a policy focus towards consolidation in and around existing centres and public transport nodes, green field development continues to be the prevalent form of housing provision and high levels of car dependency is still evident. This type development has continued to place pressure on the natural environment not only in peripheral locations but also in environmentally sensitive pockets within already saturated suburban areas.

The ‘lifestyle’ promotion of contemporary suburban development constructed and marketed as a commodity to aspire to and own has contributed to the continuing commercialisation and privatisation of public space. This is also evident in the way that in many locations, the commercial space of the private shopping centre has become the focus for much of the public life of the suburb. This homogenisation of public space as a frictionless consumer environment works directly against the importance of the public domain as where one might cross paths with someone different to themselves, potentially creating valuable social exchange.

In recent years, both Victorian and Queensland state governments have released policy guiding the future growth of key regions within their borders. Each attempts to address accommodating large population increases over relatively short time periods by proposing consolidation in and around existing urban centres. This consolidation is seen as part of a strategy to limit urban sprawl and curtail its associated negative social, environmental and potential economic impacts.

These targeted ‘Activity Centres’ become places of imminent transformation, points of pressure within the disaggregated field of the contemporary Australian city. Left un-mediated, developmental pressure in locations such as these is likely to create the same detrimental physical and social effects evident in the general prevailing homogeneity, commercialisation and piecemeal nature of current urban development.

In the projects presented in this thesis, arrangement, composition and experience are foregrounded over architectural detail and expression. The projects explore such things as creating positive adjacencies, ensuring connectivity and the distribution of scale as means through which this mediation process might be carried out towards maximising the potential for ‘real’ public domain.

Robina, located in the fastest growing urban region in Australia is an example of a place where issues of homogeneity, dispersal, commercialisation of public space and environmental sensitivity are all evident. It’s legislative ‘major activity centre’ status, proximity to future council initiated public parkland and the fact of the town centre being a private development forms a curious set of developmental pressures. With this, Robina can be viewed as a case study that contains a number of issues typical of, and relevant to, other contemporary, pressured urban environments.

---

Examples of 'real' public domain from In Search of New Public Domain
Case Study of a Pressured Urban Environment: Robina - Part 1
Robina is situated in the South East Queensland region of Australia. The Queensland Government’s *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005-2026* outlines a strategic growth management plan for what is Australia’s fastest growing urban region. Similar to other reports of this kind, such as the Victorian Government’s *Melbourne 2030* Report, the underlying premise of the document is to outline the strategic consolidation around existing urban centres towards creating a more compact urban form.

The key concern raised in the report is that left unmanaged, the current linear urban growth from the Northern most town of Noosa, down to Tweed on the border of New South Wales will continue and eventually join, creating what is being commonly referred to as the 200km city.

This kind of continued sprawling low density urban development is with good reason, being viewed as unsustainable due to its negative environmental, social and economic repercussions.
Vested Governmental Interest

With an estimated projected population growth of over 50 percent by 2026, Gold Coast City, located in the Southern part of the South East Queensland region has a growth rate that is nationally, second only to Brisbane. Robina, located just off the Pacific Highway, the major North-South arterial route between Brisbane and the New South Wales / Queensland border, is identified as a ‘Major Activity Centre’, a strategic point for the concentration of growth for the Southern part of Gold Coast City. Consequently, state and local Government’s have invested in a significant amount of infrastructure in Robina in an attempt to position it advantageously for the future.

Public transport plays a key role in this with the rail link from Brisbane currently terminating in Robina, to be extended further South towards the New South Wales border and the bus interchange at Robina station about to be expanded to become a regional transport hub.

Council has also commenced construction of the new Gold Coast Titans rugby league stadium just north of the station which will have a seating capacity of 25,000 when completed. Low provision of parking in the development is designed to encourage use of public transport to and from the games.

Densification through the encouragement of mixed use development in and around public transport nodes, forms part of State and Local Governments strategy for urban consolidation. In this context, Robina is seen as having the potential to become a model for the future development of other such locations within South East Queensland.
Paradoxical to Robina’s identified strategic public importance is its nature as a private development. Born out of the Gold Coast property boom of the early 1980’s, Robina was in its conception, Australia’s largest privately owned, master planned residential community. The development company, Robina Land Corporation is regarded as being among the first to introduce this type of developmental model to Australia, one that has now become commonplace in many parts of the country.

The development was conceived as an “idyllic living environment set around a series of lush parks and wide clean waterways and combining elements such as a thriving key regional centre, significant business base, major transportation facilities and leading educational, health, recreational, entertainment and cultural infrastructure”. However, the yet to be completed development, over the last 25 or so years has in fact been built in a number of dispersed pockets which perceptively ‘float’ around an enormous shopping centre, referring to itself as the ‘Robina Town Centre’.

‘Robina Town Centre’ (Shopping Centre)

Typical of many other locations in our contemporary urban environment, the commercial space of the private shopping centre has become the focus for much of the public life of the suburb.

The Robina Shopping Centre mimics traditional public space typologies. The vaulted, industrial shed-like mall containing two supermarket chains is named ‘Food Markets’ while the irregularly shaped plan of the eastern wing containing one-off specialty stores forms what is called ‘Bazaar Street’. ‘Arbour lane’ is the title given to the treeless, semi-outdoor mall space of the western wing. Each wing branches off a circular open space in the middle of the shopping centre called the ‘Town Square’ complete with cafe, tower and fountain. The ‘High Street Terraces’ and ‘Promenade’ facing over the artificial lake complete the ensemble of manufactured, sanitised and essentially homogenous spaces that are void of the diversity and intensity that the real models of what they’re named after traditionally facilitate.
Urban Floodplain Development Context

Robina is located within what is Australia’s largest urban floodplain, edging the Southern tip of its ‘heart’, referred to as the Guragunbah area. Wedged between the coastal high rise strip and canal estate developments to the east and the suburban edge of the hinterland to the west, the Guragunbah area represents the last remaining undeveloped remnant of the Nerang River floodplain system.

Primarily functioning as a water storage area during times of flooding, and as a location for major overland water flow paths, this area, also sparsely populated with a number of agricultural, commercial, recreational and educational land uses is currently under pressure from developers wishing to capitalise on the ever increasing demand for housing in the Gold Coast.

Historically, development in the Gold Coast has been carried out in an opportunistic manner with little regard for the both sensitive and threatening natural environment in which it is situated.

Originally, the city developed as a ‘strip’ along the ocean, largely in response to the demand from holiday makers for direct access to the beach. Built so close to the ocean, its fragile coastal dune system has been rapidly eroded and replaced with the iconic row of tall buildings seen today. The irony being that the shadows of which, render the beach almost uninhabitable after midday.
The ideal of direct access to the ocean displayed in the rapid development along the coast, evolved within the floodplain itself where opportunistic developers offered the much sought after water frontage by directly modifying the natural floodplain in the form of canal estate development.

This type of development has been the primary means of low density housing provision for the greater Gold Coast area over the last 40 years. The result of which has been the creation of an urban environment characterised by internalised housing enclaves set around poorly connected, under utilised and often stagnant water networks. Many of the canal developments have also, problematically been built below current flood level standards.

These issues along with the limited remaining land availability, has lead to the evolution of the current ‘lake and island’ type model for development in and around the Guragonbah area.
The lake or lakes of these new types of development are connected back to existing water flow paths and large enough to be effective means of dealing with inundation. The cut from their excavation is used as fill to create islands, built up high enough to meet the current level requirements for the one in one hundred year flood event.

A current example of where the perceived constraint of the floodplain is turned into developmental opportunity is the recently approved Breakwater Road development, located just north-west of Robina. The proposal is in fact to create a series of connected residential islands and water bodies set within a rehabilitated wetland environment.

Of note here, is the presence of the council in the negotiation for the private development to actively provide public open space. Council appears to be recognising that while there is an inevitability about the private development of certain remaining parts of the floodplain, the area is also a valuable open space and environmental resource for the rapidly growing city.
Council ‘Green Heart’ Proposal

The Gold Coast City Council has recently released a concept plan called the Green Heart project that proposes the development of much of the Guragunbah area into public parkland. The document outlines the Council’s vision to create large, connected pockets of public open space which thread their way between existing and future development.

Two main parkland ‘cores’ are proposed where a more intense level of activity is to be concentrated. The northern core, which includes a wetland conservation area is proposed as an ‘Environment and Recreation Core’ and the southern core, directly north of the Robina town centre is nominated as an ‘Urban Parkland Core’. The Urban Parkland Core is seen as being developed into the premier ‘central park’ of the Gold Coast and is to involve a number of community, sporting and environmental initiatives. The proximity of the parkland further ‘loads up’ the strategic public importance of Robina, viewed as a ‘gateway’ into this urban parkland core.
Social Context

The concept of a central park comes from the council’s desire to create a meaningful public space for the increasing number of permanent residents within the city.

However, it is estimated that on average, there are 77,600 visitors within the Gold Coast region each day. This, combined with the seasonal influx of service industry workers means that there is also a large transient population present in and around the city.

Implicit in the ‘Green Heart’ proposal, is the potential for the development of the parklands to accommodate a mix of permanent and transient groups of people and to facilitate positive exchange between them.

Within an increasingly competitive national and international tourism market, the provision of new forms of holiday experience is vital to the success of the industry and its dependant economy. The current popularity of ecotourism presents an attractive opportunity to capitalise on the existing environmental amenity of the Guragunbah area.

Mediating the area’s environmental sensitivity, developmental opportunity and tourism potential becomes an important curatorial challenge to ensure a mutually beneficial outcome.
In line with the **SE Queensland Regional Plan**, the **Gold Coast City Planning Scheme** recognises that along with rapid population growth comes the need for provision of a greater diversity of housing types to meet changing demographic trends and variable economic conditions. Currently, as stated in the planning scheme, the Gold Coast has a somewhat static housing stock primarily comprising of high rise apartments along the coast and detached single dwellings in the surrounding suburbs. Affordable housing is something that is almost non-existent.

Caravan parks have become sites of ‘de facto’ affordable housing such as those located in the north of the Guragunbah area fronting the Nerang River. However, increases in land taxes in line with the escalation of land values in such desirable locations, is starting to place pressure on Caravan parks to relocate.

To ensure the fostering of social diversity in line with council’s aims, attention needs to be paid to the provision of affordable housing. The Green Heart proposal suggests providing within it, examples of sustainable housing types that might be used a benchmark for the future development of the city. Whist essentially included in view of furthering the environmental credentials of the project, there is potential for affordable housing to be included towards also creating a social sustainability.
Robina Project Site

An area at the edge of the Robina town centre was identified as being particularly pressured. Here, the vested development interests of Local and State Government infrastructure, private Robina Land Corporation development and future local government and private floodplain development come together.

In view of Robina becoming a ‘Major Activity Centre’ in the fastest growing urban region of Australia, how might its strategic public importance be mediated with the privatised context of the town centre and the potential for real public domain be maximised?

This area became the site for further investigation in the final project.
GOLD COAST CITY COUNCIL 'GREEN HEART' SOUTHERN PRECINCT PROJECT SITE
APPROVED FUTURE 'BREAKWATER ROAD' PRIVATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

PACIFIC HWY
FUTURE ROAD EXTENSION
HINTERLAND EDGE SUBURBS

CANAL SUBURBS

WETLAND MIXED USE SUBURBS

WETLAND

NERANG RIVER

MUD ERA BEACH RAILWAY

FUTURE RAIL EXTENSION - ROBINA LAND CORPORATION OWNED LAND - 'ROBINA TOWN CENTRE'

FUTURE PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT - ROBINA LAND CORPORATION

PUBLIC LAND - HOSPITAL STATION - FUTURE BUS INTERCHANGE - FUTURE STADIUM - PARKLAND

'SPAGHETTI' FORM SUBURBS

ROBINA LAND CORPORATION 'WETLAND MIXED USE' SUBURBS

WETLAND

'SPAGHETTI' FORM SUBURBS

NERANG RIVER
The Projects

Two other projects were undertaken in areas of high developmental pressure, the outcomes of which informed strategic approaches and techniques appropriate to the situation at Robina.

Broadmeadows town centre civic proposal.

Arising from its legislative status as a ‘Principal Activity Centre’, the Broadmeadows town centre, located approximately 40 minutes drive north of Melbourne’s CBD has come under significant developmental pressure from a variety of public and private interests.

The research project here, investigated how to mediate the pressures associated with the transition from its currently dispersed suburban civic field, into a future, dense civic centre. Particular attention was paid to how the physical constitution of the proposal could facilitate social exchange, creating a future, vibrant and diverse public domain.

Carrara landscape edge proposal.

Carrara, located just North of Robina in the Nerang River urban floodplain, is part of an area with an inherent environmental sensitivity under developmental pressure from demands associated with rapid population growth and an underlying tourism driven economy.

The project here, investigated how to mediate the pressure for housing, tourism and recreation, and in particular, the exchange potential of bringing these into close proximity with one another.
Robina town centre edge proposal.

The architectural response in this location, investigates the ‘pulling together’ of the surrounding disparate development proposals, in view of creating a vibrant and diverse, new public domain at the edge of the town centre.

Both the civic and landscape concerns of the Broadmeadows and Carrara projects respectively, were further investigated here.
BROADMEADOWS Town Centre
A Dispersed Town Centre

Broadmeadows town centre, like Robina is currently characterised by a dispersed field of civic and retail buildings set in a sea of parking. The town centre is dominated by a large, privately owned shopping centre, tellingly referring to itself as the ‘Broadmeadows Town Centre’. Also, like the Robina town centre and typical of many other locations in our contemporary metropolis, the commercial space of the private shopping centre has become the focus of the civic realm.
Ownership Structure

The Hume City council is in a unique position of owning a large parcel of land adjacent to the shopping centre. Here, the recently opened, Global Learning Centre community facility and new council offices, currently under construction are the first signs of the future civic development of the town centre. They are indicators of a pro-active council, conscious of the important public role of the town centre beyond that of the shopping centre.

The instigation and subsequent outcomes of a recent national architectural competition called ‘Proposition 3047’ held in partnership with architecture journal, Architectural Review Australia, highlighted the council’s willingness to seek alternative developmental strategies for the future of the town centre. The involvement of the other stakeholders in the competition process including the neighbouring shopping centre development company, demonstrates a willingness of the various public and private interest groups to embrace a certain level of negotiation towards the future development of the town centre.

With this premise, how might the town centre be strategically developed in a way that mediates the desires of these interest groups in a mutually beneficial manner that is productive towards the creation of a vital, diverse public domain?
Curatorial Strategy - ‘Seeding’ Development

An immediate strategy for dealing with the dispersed nature of the town centre and its identified ownership structure was made through the curation of the car parking. A proposal to build a multi-deck car park on the former council office site between the new offices and the old town hall aims at freeing up other space in the town centre for development.

The consolidation of the parking into the middle of the civic half of the site aims specifically at creating ‘leverage’ for the negotiation towards freeing up the space between the council owned parcel of land and the active retail edge of the shopping centre. This space, currently owned by the shopping centre, with its proximity to the new council offices, is seen as the potential location for a development that could tie together the public and private zones of the site and positively mediate the differing desires of the council and the shopping centre developers.

The new car park would provide additional parking spaces for the shopping centre. This, along with the incentive of future development in the council owned parcel of land freed up from the parking consolidation, would allow the council to negotiate for the new development to play host to a number of community facilities.

The proposed mixed use development here, would essentially be in the form new retail tenancies for the shopping centre into which the council would ‘seed’ various community programs. A number affordable housing typologies such as shop-houses and apartments would be ‘grafted’ onto the tenancies to begin to grow a residential population within the town centre.

The aim of this initial development is to be sensitive towards, and responsive to the current physical, cultural and social constitution of the area, acting as a ‘seed’ providing important community infrastructure in preparation for the future large scale development of the town centre.
Broadmeadows Town Centre master plan vision.

The current general perception of Broadmeadows as a characterless edge suburb is born out of its difficult history as a housing commission development begun in the 1950’s. Next to no community infrastructure formed part of its initial development, which combined with the socio-economic disadvantage generally associated with housing commission areas, created a range of social and physical problems. These problems are still evident today, with the area largely comprising of the remaining poor quality public housing stock.

In recent times, the surrounding areas have become home to large communities of Turkish, Lebanese and Pacific Island origin, creating a rich, diverse cultural and social field in which the public realm of the town centre lies.

The Victorian State Government’s Melbourne 2030 Planning report, released in 2002, identifies Broadmeadows as one of 25 ‘Principal Activity Centre’s’ where development is to be concentrated in view of promoting polycentric urban growth to accommodate a projected population increase of 1 million people by the year 2030.

The current master plan for the town centre proposes a large scale imposition of fairly generic, commercial built form which fails to address how the dispersed and diverse physical, cultural and social field of Broadmeadows, will make the transition into a regional activity centre.

How might the initial development of the town centre not only socially and culturally prepare for the inevitable growth of the area, but also prepare for the likely physical scale of the future development?
Curatorial Strategy - Future Development

The finer scale, localised urban form of the proposed ‘seeding’ development, including the design of a public plaza in front of the Global Learning Centre is strategised so as to become embedded into the site, notionally ‘carving out’ the proposed mass of the future development. This ensures northern aspect and space amenity to the existing and new public buildings and spaces is protected, particularly the north facing council offices and Global Learning Centre.

The current 6 storey height limit for the town centre provisionally proposed by the council would need to be increased in the surrounding development to ensure the economic viability of such a low scale initial development.

The project is aimed at being inclusive of the dimension of time. The urban environment is encouraged to grow and evolve rather than be imposed, towards developing a localised urban character and vital and diverse public domain.
Existing Community Infrastructure

When considering the appropriate strategic action in the town centre, an examination of the remaining community infrastructures that formed part of the development of the surrounding suburbs became a useful means of measuring or registering the current cultural, social and economic climate of the area.

The two most valuable points of examination in relation to the town centre were found the commercial nodes of Olsen Place, located in the heart of the former Housing Commission Victoria development and further north at Dobell Place. These two places, of similar physical typology have become important de facto community facilities for the areas to the east which have been disconnected from the main Broadmeadows town centre by the infrastructural corridor of Pascoe Vale Road and adjacent rail line.

These two vital community infrastructures became important research foci for the formulation of the architectural insertion into the Broadmeadows town centre and the subsequent development of the proposal at Robina.
Olsen Place

Olsen Place, the first community infrastructure to be built, some 10 or so years after the initial housing commission development, has the form of a concentrated high street which over time, has developed a dual commercial and civic role for the surrounding community. It contains such programs as the local Office of Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Centre, Assyrian and Islamic women’s societies, along with culturally specific retail catering for the large Middle Eastern immigrant population in the area. The central space between the shop-front rows provides an important public space for informal social exchange, something not evident in the nearby semi-abandoned single fronted row shops.

Examples of de facto community programs and the shifting cultural constitution of the area.
Whilst retaining an identity as a group, the shop rows display a developed physical character of flexibility and adaptability. This can be seen in the elasticity of the tenancy lengths from front to back, varied frontage divisions and activated sides and rear laneways. The shop rows are anchored by physical ‘bookends’ that take advantage of their multiple frontages. Many of the second levels of the tenancies are residences, becoming some of the few examples of medium density housing typologies within the largely homogenous housing stock of the area.

Present day Olsen Place. North eastern mixed use ‘bookend’.
Dobell Place

Built later and part of a larger ensemble, Dobell Place is seen as development on the Olsen Place model. While still displaying a similar accreted physical character, there is a greater sense of structure and designed intent to its physical constitution. A canopy of consistent height and width binds the tenancies together with the central space being narrower, modulated and planted out to create a more intimate setting. People are drawn through this space by the location of two larger scale, active retail ‘magnets’ and car parking at either end.
The northern of the two retail ‘magnets’, situated on the corner of the main arterial street is an example of a mixed use building where smaller tenancies ‘feed off’ the larger entity that is the supermarket. A halal pizza shop, a Turkish bakery and a fast food outlet each claim a corner of the building dominated by the supermarket. Perched above these retail tenancies is a pool hall which creates a point of entertainment and an informal meeting place.
The public space between the rows of shops in both Dobell and Olsen Places facilitates the occurrence of both everyday and spontaneous social exchange, pointing to their importance as examples of vital public domain.

The vibrancy and vitality of these two places stands in contrast to the old Town Hall which lies semi-abandoned in the Broadmeadows town centre. This is perhaps indicative of the fact that one central formal community meeting place is no longer needed within the diverse cultural field of the area. This along with the nearby town park, with its poor condition questioning the necessity of a large formal, grassed open space, are perhaps suggestive of the appropriateness of the finer, more intimate and culturally rich public domain spaces evidenced at Olsen and Dobell Places.
Regional and Local Retail Networks

Both Olsen and Dobell Place can be seen as having important local community infrastructural roles within the fractured and dispersed field of the surrounding Broadmeadows suburbs. Does then the town centre also have an important local community infrastructural role to play?

The sheer size and scale of the “Broadmeadows Town Centre” shopping centre clearly identifies it as having a regional pull. Very much attached to transport routes of rail and road and competing with the surrounding regional shopping centres including the airport for market share, this ‘pull’ is difficult to map out other than perhaps in sale figures and car park usage.

What is easier and more identifiable is the way in which the shopping centre shows signs of operating on a more localised level in its provision of goods and services for the population in the immediate surrounds of the suburb of Jacana. This is evidenced in the active ‘24 hour’ southern edge of the shopping centre which caters for the quick, daily, ‘in and out’ type retail that doesn’t necessarily require full entry into the shopping centre.
Active Edges

An informal pedestrian ‘ramble’ can be observed following the fall of the site across the zone between the active edges of the civic and retail parts of the town centre. From the active bus interchange edge of the train station, people wander across the road to the area in front of the Global Learning Centre (which houses well used library and internet facilities), across the road adjacent to the future council offices and existing bus stops and through the car park to the active ‘24 hour’ edge of the shopping centre. From here, people enter the shopping centre or continue through to the nearby TAFE institution.
Architectural Insertion

The identified local ‘pull’ of the shopping centre and the observed ‘ramble’ currently occurring across the site were seen as opportunities for the initial development to immediately ‘feed off’ and subsequently augment.

Sampling the Olsen and Dobell Place models as local examples of vital community infrastructures that have been able to adapt and change over time, provided an appropriate physical framework from which to develop the scheme.

The containment and overlapping of commercial and community facilities along with the presence of alternative residential typologies also found within Olsen and Dobell Place, provided an appropriate programmatic model for the development in view of facilitating similarly successful public domain space.
Ground Level

A number of retail tenancies are provided on the ground floor level. Their differing scale and orientation aims to attract a diversity of retail and business types along with creating a variety of frontages to the development (indicated with arrows).

The ‘bookend’ opposite the new council offices is programmed with a community arts centre which, once established may grow and relocate into the nearby old town hall. At the other end of the tenancy rows adjacent to the active shopping centre edge, one of the tenancies has been programmed with a council run laundromat and internet cafe. Whilst providing an informal ‘hang out’ place and facilities for the new residents of the town centre, this could also be the location for such things as community notice boards.

The other bookends are seen as being cheap rental commercial buildings to attract small business into the town centre.

The terraced central space is set up to accommodate a weekly international food market which like the arts centre, once established may grow and relocate adjacent to the old town hall.
First Level

Above the arts centre is a small recreation hall with an attached five-a-side soccer court that would perhaps play host to a local youth league. The court would double as a ‘run-around’ space for the adjacent childcare facility.

Above the retail tenancies are located a variety of housing types that cater for a number of different household configurations. This is in line with the legislative desire to attract a diversity of residents into activity centres and is responsive to current demographic changes that indicate a diversification of household structure and size.
Second Level

An administrative office space is provided above the recreation hall which may contain such things as youth counselling services and other such community, social programmes.
Third Level

Drawn from the Dobell Place model as well as one of the key design features of the new council offices by Lyons Architects, the mixed used development is ‘tied together’ and reduced to a more intimate, human scale with a continuous canopy element. The canopy ‘wraps’ around the tenancies effectively separating it’s public and private zones whilst providing shelter, including for a series of bus stops adjacent to the community bookend.

The ‘seed’ development is a vital part of the initial curation of the site which includes the multi-storey car park behind the council offices and the public plaza in front of the Global Learning Centre.
Spatial Instrumentation

A number of spatial instruments were deployed in the designing of the initial development in view of ensuring visual and spatial amenity whilst facilitating potential social interaction between the various groups of people who might use the town centre.

CONNECTING

The capitalisation on the existing ‘ramble’ across the site creates a series of connected public spaces that aim to augment the existing pedestrian activity of the site.

Forming part of the initial development, the design of a civic plaza currently being proposed in front of the Global Learning Centre and future council offices becomes an important means of ensuring the preservation of amenity to both buildings as well as providing a connecting space that negotiates the level changes across the site.

The ‘pulling together’ of the site through this set of connected spaces seeks to maximise the possibility for exchange between the different user groups of the town centre.
FRAMING

The location of the Information ‘wedge’ building on the corner of ‘Main St’ and Pascoe Vale Road, creates a visual framing of the east facade of the future council building when crossing the road from the train station. The building mass contributes to the framing of the space of the civic plaza itself in which the different user groups of the town centre might cross paths.

This strategy is also deployed in the framed space between the shop rows of the ‘seed’ element where alignment with the entry’s of both the new council offices and the existing shopping centre mall seeks to maximise the possibility of exchange.
COMPRESSING

Locating the rows of shops immediately adjacent to the shopping centre seeks to further intensify its already busy ‘local’ edge, perhaps forming a compressed lane-way type condition where people are brought into close proximity with one another.

BOOKENDING / EDGE ACTIVATION

Drawing from observations of Olsen and Dobell Place, the ends of the rows of shops are specifically designed with multiple frontages and levels, with the rows of other tenancies filling the space between these ‘bookends’.

The location of the seeded community facilities would ideally be located in these edges of the buildings to maximise exposure and potential public interactivity.

BINDING

A common, binding canopy element is incorporated across the site. Functioning at various points as shelter, seating, screen and signage, the canopy aims to provide an identifiable common architectural element between the different buildings whilst facilitating common social activities such as meeting, viewing, waiting and sheltering.
The first stage showing the initial ‘seed’ development along with the multi-storey carpark behind the council offices and the civic plaza in front of the Global Learning Centre.
The initial ‘seeding’ development embedded into the mass of the likely future development.
Broadmeadows

After word

The civic investigation of the Broadmeadows Town Centre project is seen as strategically important to the issues identified in the Robina town centre. Like Broadmeadows, Robina has significant public and private developmental pressure placed upon it, arising from its Activity Centre status. The town centres display similar dispersed physical constitutions along with containing the contemporary urban phenomenon of the private shopping centre as being the primary focal point for its public life.

Despite the fact that Broadmeadows is a lower socio-economic area in an older and perhaps more disadvantaged context, the potential for seeding community infrastructures in view of future changes in inhabitation investigated the project here, may be used to think about the staged curation of program at the pressured Robina site.

The architectural instrumentation used in the Broadmeadows project in view of creating a new public domain as a complementary alternative to the privatised space of the shopping centre, is also applicable to the situation at Robina.

The need for alternative and affordable housing types is something also common to both situations. In Broadmeadows, it is more out of necessity to maintain the current social and cultural base of the area, whereas in the Gold Coast it is important to begin to increase the social diversity of the city.

With Broadmeadows providing the testing ground for the town centre component, the landscape component of the Robina site was explored through an investigation into the Guragunbah floodplain area, culminating in a project carried out in Carrara.
A Pressured Urban Landscape

Found in the centre of the Guragunbah floodplain area, the southern edge of the suburb of Carrara is an area comprising largely of open space with low lying vegetation adjoining a denser, wetland conservation area. Whilst being the identified location of the proposed ‘Environment and Recreation Core’ in council’s Green Heart report, the site is in fact currently privately owned by the same developers as a nearby lake type development called Emerald Lakes.

How can the strategic curation of development on this contested site mediate the desires of both public and private interest groups to capitalise on this valuable environmental asset and potential public amenity? How might active public domain space be levered into the development that is seen as a benefit to the developer while potentially seeding council’s future vision for the floodplain and more broadly, Gold Coast City?
Curatorial Strategy - Alternative Development Model

The project at Carrara strategically modifies the current floodplain residential developmental typology in view of offering an alternative model that aims to positively mediate the pressure for housing, tourism and recreation within an environmentally fragile landscape. It aims to create an urban environment that brings into close proximity, a number of different interests and social groups in view of facilitating exchange.

The project is effectively a lake type development, comprising of three residential hills through which a series of alternative, programmed spatial typologies are threaded, forming an active public landscape interface to the wetland conservation area.

The project at Carrara is seen as a detailed testing ground for a general investigation into the potential for the future development of the Guragunbah floodplain area in which the thesis site north of Robina is situated.
Prior to the release of the Green Heart project, the current Gold Coast Planning Scheme laid out a future vision for the Guragunbah area. It aimed to maintain the current open ‘breathing space’ for the city that the floodplain provides, whilst promoting a limited mix of future residential and tourist development.

Certain areas are identified as being particularly suitable for development with some having since been subject to development proposal approval. Two key undeveloped areas remain; the area north of the Robina town centre that forms part of the final project site and the wetland area of Carrara, the detailed testing ground for this.

In response to the constraint that the hydrology of the Guragunbah area places on future development, the area is not divided into formal planning precincts for developmental control purposes. The entire floodplain is effectively treated as a single land unit. The council states that because of the potential for new developments to propose the altering and shifting of existing water flows it is not practical to denote precise boundaries to areas suitable for development.

This planning freedom has the potential to offer flexibility for creative, alternative design and land use solutions. It also seemingly creates a scenario where developers and council must enter a certain level of negotiation to achieve an appropriate and equally beneficial solution for development.
Current Development Model - Emerald Lakes

With 4 stages already completed in what will be an 8 stage development, Emerald Lakes, located in the north eastern corner of the floodplain is the most recent development where this negotiation can be observed.

Typical of the current cut and fill, ‘lake and island’ developmental model, Emerald Lakes comprises primarily of a series of residential islands set in and around a 37 hectare human-made lake. Located on an existing core floodway, the lake functions as a way of dealing with inundation and is a clearly an example of where a development can propose a large scale alteration to the existing water flow across the floodplain.
The cut from the lake excavation is used as fill to make the islands and the other earthworks required to achieve the floor level clearance needed for the one in one hundred year flood event. In the context of the Gold Coast where the council is attempting to promote higher urban density, the development is comprised of a group of individual residential clusters that all add up to an overall low density across the 210 hectares of the site.

The cluster that is doing the majority of the work density wise is the hill which holds around 80% of Emerald Lake’s dwellings along with a mix of commercial and community facilities. A noteworthy aspect of the hill is the number of different types of residences available from one bedroom apartments through to multi-bedroom family houses. This however, by no means suggests that Emerald Lakes offers anything in the way of affordable housing.
Active Interface Potential

A key selling point used in the marketing of the development is the notion that the site has been ‘opened up for public use’. This is a requirement set by council in the development approval process and is seemingly where council has attempted to fulfill its desire to ensure publicly accessible land within the floodplain. The result however is still of an overriding sense of exclusivity in that the development feels like any other master planned gated estate.

However, one area can be identified as somewhat latent with potential, where the private desires of the development company and the public, community desires of the council could be positively mediated. This zone currently acts as a ‘buffer’ between the lake and the adjacent caravan parks that front the Nerang River. These caravan parks, where the only real ‘low cost housing’ can be found in the Gold Coast also have a certain level of public permeability. This sets up the potential for an active interface condition that not only physically bridges to create accessibility between the lake and the river, but also socially bridges, potentially facilitating the positive exchange between a broader cross section of the population of the city.
In view of creating active landscape interface conditions that mediate the pressure for housing, tourism and recreation, this identified negotiated zone becomes a potential speculative model for considering how the other pressured parts of the floodplain such as at Carrara might be strategically developed.

Speculative overlay drawing using the Emerald Lakes development model, revealing the potential for an active landscape interface condition between new housing and the existing wetland conservation area.
‘Carrara Lakes’ Proposal

The current mode of development in the floodplain confirms the viability of creating a lake to deal with inundation when building on a floodway. A new lake in this location could be directly connected to the Nerang River via existing waterways to maintain both water quality and small boat access. The study of the nearby Emerald Lakes development revealed the ability of hills made from the cut from the lake excavation to facilitate a dense, mixed use housing development.

Sampled directly from the Emerald Lakes model, 3 hills were positioned start to form up the edge to the wetland conservation area, taking advantage of views to both the Surfers Paradise skyline to the east and the conservation area and undulating hinterland to the west. The 3 hills, if developed in a similar way to Emerald Lakes could provide over double the amount of dwellings on their relatively small footprints as the entire 210 hectare Emerald lakes development.
The ‘backs’ of the hills are then used as strategic areas where alternative spatial types and program could be grafted to provide shared public space and facilities for both permanent residents and the more transient populations of the city, such as tourists, seasonal service industry workers and campervan dwelling grey nomads. The permanent residents being not only those that live on the hills, but also those from surrounding areas that might use the site as a destination, a kind of ‘Central Park’.
Seasonally, the artificial lake of the development and the natural water body of the wetland, may combine to form one large lake, a unique event perhaps to be embraced rather than feared.
HILL 1

The back of Hill 1 is of a ‘landform’ typology where landscape and building fold over one another to create an undulating parkland with views over the wetland and hinterland beyond. Seen as a tourist gateway into the wetlands, it would contain parking and information centre facilities along with providing a community garden and recreation space for the residents of the other side of the hill. A nursery for rehabilitating the wetland could also double as a water treatment facility for the housing.

Hill 1 precedent - Secluded landscaped hill behind suburban housing.
HILL 2

The back of Hill 2 is formed by a north facing ‘retaining bar’ of mixed program. It would provide multi level car parking, boat parking and launching facilities, a hotel, a local commercial strip and an event or festival space that could accommodate a weekly seafood market as a regular use.
HILL 3

The back of Hill 3 is effectively a terraced caravan park for long, medium and short term users. A common building in the form of a multi-use community facility provides a physical and potential social link between the caravan park and the program bar of Hill 2. Houseboat lots on the canal formed between the caravan park and the boardwalk are included as a part of a potential future strategy to include affordable housing typologies in the wider floodplain area.
Spatial Instrumentation

Like at Broadmeadows, a number of spatial instruments were deployed in the configuration of the development in view of ensuring visual and spatial amenity whilst facilitating potential social interaction between the various groups of people who would use the site.

COUPLING

The deliberate coupling of the privately developed residential 'fronts' of the hills with the programmed, public backs of the hills aims to bring into close proximity the permanent residents of the hills with the transient populations visiting and using the site.

THREADING

The flipping of the orientation of the hills aims to create a sense of the public space being ‘threaded’ through the hills, creating a kind of public infrastructural spine that supports the interface conditions to both the natural wetlands and the artificial lake.
COMPRESSING

The crossing points occurring at the 'hinge points' between the hills become compressed moments where the potential for exchange between the various user groups of the site is at its most intense.
CONNECTING

The hills are connected by a common road that meanders up and down the slopes between the two sides of the hills framing vistas from the car across the surrounding floodplain landscape. The first two hills also provide a ‘turn out’ at their highest point to create car lookout.

A board walk provides a minimal environmental impact, pedestrian and cycle access route around the development and landscape beyond. Boat access is also considered via the fore mentioned Nerang River connection. The overall strategic plan for the project also includes the provision of a boat parking site adjacent to the Carrara markets on an abandoned commercial site.

Physical connection to the broader context via road, water and pathway is seen and critical in the desire for the site to become an accessible place for both permanent and transient populations of the city.
Carrara
After word

In the strategic development of the project, it was envisioned that Hill 1 would be the first to be developed, perhaps in a similar manner to the Emerald Lakes hill, with its identified positive housing variation and density. The other two hills could potentially become responsive, future development sites. The housing on these could respond not only to their orientation and the programming of their ‘backs’ but also to the inevitable changing demographic trends within the growing city. Ideally, they would incorporate affordable housing to begin to diversify the social constitution of the area.

The sampled model of the Emerald Lakes hill has inherent limitations in its prescribed form and lack of provision of affordable housing, however the focus for the project was to investigate the potential for new developmental models that could form productive relationships between this kind of current private housing development and public space.

Negotiation to include more affordable and perhaps more responsive housing, sensitive to future demographic and cultural shifts, would require a greater commitment from both state and local governments in partnership with the private sector.

The scheme draws from the recent Dutch mode of inhabiting flood prone urban landscapes, not only at a pragmatic level in terms of the idea of living on water, but also at a spatial, experiential level.

Whilst doing this, the project does however, attempt to respond to the very particularities of the urban environment specific to the Gold Coast such as the love / hate relationship between the permanent and transient populations of the city, the demand for greater urban density and housing variation and the desire for alternative non commercialised public spaces, that aren’t the beach.

The resulting project aims to create an active landscape interface that whilst forming an edge to a fragile environmental system, brings into close proximity a number of different interests and social groups, in view of facilitating exchange.

These are issues that are also of fundamental importance to the Robina project, particularly in the area north of the town centre at the interface with the future urban parkland.
A Dispersed Town Centre + Pressured Urban Landscape.

As discussed previously, a number of public and private interests in and around Robina combine to create developmental pressure on the area of floodplain north of the town centre.
Curatorial Strategy - Broad

A broad future development strategy was devised for the area, identifying three potential interface conditions between the future urban parkland proposed by the Gold Coast Council and the existing surrounding urban environment. These interface conditions and their attached development zones are seen as strategic locations in which the mediation between the public and private interests of the floodplain could be carried out to positive effect.

The attached development zones ‘key into’ the surrounding urban fabric in view of providing locations where alternative and affordable housing could be situated and to create potential economic leverage for the establishment of the parklands and associated facilities. Vegetation buffers as part of a wetland rehabilitation program are also included as part of the strategy to ensure the positive amenity to the parklands.

The overall effect, in a physical sense is the forming up of a ‘frame’ to the future urban parkland, providing a series of alternative spatial conditions that act as interfaces between the open space and the surrounding development.
Curatorial Strategy - Stage 1

Seen as part of the broader curatorial strategy for the surrounding area, a response in the form of a proposal at the immediately pressured urban environment at the edge of the Robina town centre forms the detailed component of the project.

Initially, the various identified future development plans in and around this location were accepted as a way of forming a number of real constraints from which to make an architectural response.
The Robina Land Corporation (RLC) development proposal surrounding the new stadium, like the Broadmeadows master plan, proposes a visually homogenous, large scale insertion of built form. In keeping with the current pattern of development in and around the Robina town centre, the proposal appears to be creating another isolated, island development pocket that perceivably floats around the existing shopping centre. It appears to have been designed in isolation from the proposed future development of the urban parkland, and in particular, the council’s desire for the site to form a kind of ‘gateway’ from the rail and bus station into the parklands beyond.

However, what is positive about the development proposal is the increased density that it would contribute towards creating around the station in keeping with the council’s desire for consolidation and densification around existing public transport nodes.

Similarly, the nearby low density Breakwater Road private housing development that incorporates public open space as part of the proposal is currently isolated from the future parkland. The Green Heart master plan doesn’t take advantage of the possible shared amenity between it and the housing development. The proposed Ghilgai Road extension is also at risk of being carried out in isolation of the future development of the parkland.

With these observations, an opportunity was presented to reconsider the roles of these currently disparate developments and propose how they might be ‘pulled together’ and architecturally mediated in view of facilitating the potential positive dynamics between them.

**Assumed Development Constraint and Opportunity**

[Diagram showing existing figure ground with assumed development proposals.]
The project proposes the insertion of a connecting, infrastructural spine that threads its way along public land between the existing rail line and proposed RLC development, behind the new stadium, over the creek and out into the future parkland beyond.

Along the spine are a series of nodal points becoming locations for a number of “bookend” public buildings that allow for a certain amount of private development to take up the space between.

The spine holds two complementary urban conditions that draw upon previous investigations at Broadmeadows and Carrara. One, a civic, dense, mixed use development set around public transport infrastructure and the other, a programmed landscape edge condition forming an active interface to the parkland beyond.
Civic Development - Overview

The civic development component of the proposal seeks to create a new civic, public domain for Robina; one that unlike the current shopping centre might offer a diversity of experience and create the potential for meaningful exchange.

The project proposes a modification to the western edge of the Robina Land Corporation development and feeds off the increased density it will provide around the train and bus station and the stadium. It is envisioned that the design of the rest of the proposed RLC development (shown as indicative mass in the drawings) would then be re-worked and modified in response to the ‘spine’ and the amenity it would provide for its future residents.

The spatial configuration of the proposal seeks to facilitate the potential exchange dynamic of the regular influx of visitors to the stadium, market and parkland with the day to day users from the surrounding, developing area.
NEW COUNCIL OFFICES
EXISTING ROBINA STATION
EXISTING PARKLAND
NEW BUS INTERCHANGE
DECK
NEW STADIUM
INDICATIVE MASS OF THE PROPOSED ROBINA LAND CORPORATION DEVELOPMENT
- With 'big screen'.
MARKET / EVENT CANOPY
- Includes utility building
- The street edge to be used on game day for food, shirt and game program sales.
PARKING
- For stadium, station and ‘main street’ use.
TENANCIES
- Commercial + Retail
+ Shop-housing
PARKING
- For stadium, ‘main street’ and parkland use.
MODIFIED EDGE OF ROBINA LAND CORPORATION DEVELOPMENT
- The development is bookended by two sets of affordable housing apartment blocks and public facilities with the RLC being able to develop the shop houses in between.
TERRACED PLAZA
BOARDWALK
- Connection to existing parkland.
PUB
PUBLIC POOL
MOTEL
NURSEY
- Commercial front for the wetland rehabilitation.
PARKING
- For stadium, ‘main street’ and parkland use.
TERRACED PLAZA
BOARDWALK
- Connection to existing parkland.
PUB
PUBLIC POOL
MOTEL
NURSEY
- Commercial front for the wetland rehabilitation.
PARKING
- For stadium, ‘main street’ and parkland use.
Civic development - Arrangement

Modelled on a traditional ‘high street’, and utilising some of the outcomes of the investigations at Broadmeadows, an informal pedestrian ‘ramble’ is set up between the key public transport nodes of the combined train station and bus interchange at the southern end and the proposed new ferry terminal and land bridge included as part of the scheme at the northern end.

The two main car parking zones are also placed at either end of this ‘ramble’ and deliberately keep parking provision to a minimum in response to the council’s desire to encourage the use of public transport. Public boat parking is also included as a way of encouraging the use of the extensive waterway infrastructure created in and around the floodplain.

Located where the bridge lands on the northern side of the creek are a mix of commercial and community facilities including a public swimming pool, a motel that might be used by both visiting rugby fans and parkland tourists and a commercial front door to the wetland rehabilitation program to be put in place as part of establishing the urban parkland. This part of the proposal effectively forms an extension to the main street and connects the civic development to the parkland interface.
Civic Development - Spatial Instrumentation

Having been investigated as part of the Broadmeadows and Carrara schemes, several spatial instruments were deployed in the design of the new civic development in view of facilitating new public domain at the edge of the Robina town centre.

CONNECTING

Activated at either end by public transport and car parking facilities, a ‘main street’ is formed by a series of rows of mixed use tenancies, creating a pedestrian gateway to the stadium and the public parkland beyond.
COMPRESSING

The connecting 'main street' is threaded in-between the rail line and the new stadium and RLC development, creating a tight, dense, spatial condition that potentially brings into close proximity a number of different interests and user groups.
BOOKENDING

At the southern end of the street it is proposed that the new Gold Coast City Council offices would be located acting as a bookend and as a hinge point between the elevated bus interchange plaza, rail overpass from the car park and the main street at ground level.

At the northern end, the south-west corner of the stadium is incorporated as part of the design of a public plaza that also includes the connecting land bridge, ferry terminal and pub. An information ‘wedge’ building incorporating a visitors information centre and ‘big screen’ to be viewed from the land bridge and pub forms the bookend to the mixed use row of tenancies on the western side of the street.

FRAMING

The pedestrian ‘ramble’ that notionally begins at the train station along the public plaza (proposed as part of the soon to be constructed bus interchange), passes through an opening under the new council offices that frames a view of the stadium beyond and cascades down a terraced area in front of a row of tenancies, into the main street.

View from the ‘top’ of the spine at the bus interchange through the new council office ‘bookend’ towards the stadium beyond.

View back to the bus interchange plaza cascading down from the new council offices.
Similarly to Broadmeadows, a common binding canopy element is incorporated across the site that aims to create a consistent architectural element that facilitates common social activities such as meeting, viewing, waiting and sheltering.

This continues past more rows of tenancies to an area surrounding the south western entry of the stadium, comprising of a market place, public plaza and land bridge.

The pub, seen as an important complementary public program to the rugby league stadium, inhabits a building designed in combination with the Information wedge and market to form up the space of the plaza, whilst framing a view of the land bridge from the south western corner of the stadium.

This plaza is seen as a key public space that facilitates the potential exchange between the different user groups such as tourists, rugby goers, and local residents. The bridge itself forms the key connecting element to the public parkland interface facilities beyond.
Sitting as a zone between the future stadium and Breakwater Road developments and the proposed urban parkland, the landscape ‘edge’ condition of the project draws on the investigations carried out in Carrara, combining programmatic elements from the backs of the three hills. It provides a field of environmental, commercial, residential, recreational and tourism infrastructure that aims to ‘seed’ the future inhabitation of the Guragunbah area as envisaged by the Gold Coast Council.

In keeping with current floodplain developmental models, the land is to be built up with fill from the parkland lake excavation to achieve the necessary flood level clearance. Connection to the broader region is enabled via the proposed Ghilgai Road extension and utilisation of the existing waterway infrastructure. A new canal is formed to the north to connect the proposed recreational waterway network of the future parkland with the flowing water supply of Mudgeeraba Creek.

A water and pathway connection to the Breakwater Road development which is likely to be completed prior to the parkland will provide immediate access to the lake and wetland amenity of the council negotiated public open space. In the future, when the ‘green heart’ has been established, the open space of Breakwater Road would be part of the overall connected network of urban parkland, benefiting residents and visitors alike.

Also, like at Carrara, the potential for exchange between permanent and transient populations of the city is facilitated through bringing into close proximity, a number of different user groups.
CAMPING
- MUDGEERABA CREEK
- SHORT STAY ACCOMMODATION UNITS - With boat store and individual jetties.

CARAVAN PARK subdivisions
- Range of permanent to short term occupancies.

COMMUNITY BUILDING
- General use for caravan park residents, visitors and for use during events.
- Attached community garden.

STORMWATER WETLAND AND NURSERY
- Attached to the research and wetland rehabilitation functions of the environmental centre.
- A boardwalk allow for public access.

EVENT SPACE
- Grass slope for outdoor cinema (with inflatable screen).

ENTRY ROAD
- Positioned to take advantage of the visual amenity provided by wetland and parkland with the horizontal scale of the Environmental centre forming a focal point in the landscape.
- A row of short term parking provides a car lookout.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTRE
- Laboratories
- Offices
- Groundskeeping facilities
- Conference facilities
- Discovery centre
- Cafe
- Outdoor cinema box office

FUTURE URBAN PARKLAND

BOAT RENTAL

BOARDWALK
- Connected to new neighbouring Breakwater road development.

STORMWATER WETLAND AND NURSERY
- Attached to the research and wetland rehabilitation functions of the environmental centre.
- A boardwalk allow for public access.

FUTURE URBAN PARKLAND

COMMUNITY BUILDING
- General use for caravan park residents, visitors and for use during events.
- Attached community garden.

CARAVAN PARK subdivisions
- Range of permanent to short term occupancies.

CARAVAN PARK subdivisions
- Range of permanent to short term occupancies.

ENTRY ROAD
- Positioned to take advantage of the visual amenity provided by wetland and parkland with the horizontal scale of the Environmental centre forming a focal point in the landscape.
- A row of short term parking provides a car lookout.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTRE
- Laboratories
- Offices
- Groundskeeping facilities
- Conference facilities
- Discovery centre
- Cafe
- Outdoor cinema box office

FUTURE URBAN PARKLAND

BOAT RENTAL

BOARDWALK
- Connected to new neighbouring Breakwater road development.

STORMWATER WETLAND AND NURSERY
- Attached to the research and wetland rehabilitation functions of the environmental centre.
- A boardwalk allow for public access.

FUTURE URBAN PARKLAND

COMMUNITY BUILDING
- General use for caravan park residents, visitors and for use during events.
- Attached community garden.

CARAVAN PARK subdivisions
- Range of permanent to short term occupancies.

ENTRY ROAD
- Positioned to take advantage of the visual amenity provided by wetland and parkland with the horizontal scale of the Environmental centre forming a focal point in the landscape.
- A row of short term parking provides a car lookout.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTRE
- Laboratories
- Offices
- Groundskeeping facilities
- Conference facilities
- Discovery centre
- Cafe
- Outdoor cinema box office

FUTURE URBAN PARKLAND

BOAT RENTAL

BOARDWALK
- Connected to new neighbouring Breakwater road development.

STORMWATER WETLAND AND NURSERY
- Attached to the research and wetland rehabilitation functions of the environmental centre.
- A boardwalk allow for public access.
Parkland Interface - Arrangement + Spatial Instrumentation

Formed by the infrastructural ‘spine’ notionally wrapping back on itself, the main ‘magnet’ or destination of the parkland interface is a proposed Environmental Research and Education Centre.

The southern part of the centre functions as a support building for the establishment of the parklands. It is attached to a stormwater wetland and nursery where plants are grown for the rehabilitation and landscaping of the future parklands. A long north facing wing overlooking the future parkland houses offices and the conference facilities, with the more controlled environment of the laboratories facing south into the central courtyard.

The main public space of the building occurs in the eastern wing of the building. A ‘grand’ canopy hovers over the entry which leads the visitor into the reception and the educative ‘discovery’ centre. A cafe and restaurant that could also be used by those staying at the caravan park is located in the apex of the triangular shaped building taking advantage of views over the adjacent outdoor public space and the future parkland beyond.

Programmatically, the key precedent for this building is Lyons Architects’ Queenscliffe Centre completed in 2005 which combines laboratories and offices with conference and education facilities adjacent to a wetland environment.
The arrangement of the different programmes in the parkland interface component of the project, focus in on a common, shared area that would be used for several different functions, bringing into close proximity a number of different user groups in view of facilitating social exchange.

Wedged between the Environmental Centre and the caravan park, the space would function as a general recreation area for parkland visitors and caravan park occupants along with creating a space for events such as concerts and a more regularly occurring outdoor cinema.
The building would also contain an information booth and boat hire facility for parkland recreation and become the key entry point to the boardwalks and pathways leading out into the landscape.
Conclusion
Strategies for mediating pressured urban environments in view of facilitating exchange.

The design research projects presented in this thesis, investigate the role of architecture in the mediation of the pressures that shape our urban environment.

The outcomes of the investigations, propose alternative models for considering the futures of areas of immanent transformation where the issues associated with rapid change brought about by developmental pressure are at their most immediate and in need of consideration.

The projects explore ways of mediating the often competing desires of various public and private interest groups in such areas, in view of fostering the potential positive dynamics and frictions that may occur between them.

The research brought to the fore three key design strategies of adjacency curation, ‘seeding’ and spatial instrumentation. These strategies were used as the means through which architectural mediation is carried out over a number of scales towards creating vital urban environments that facilitate diversity and exchange.

Adjacency Curation Strategy
Adjacency curation was used as an organisational strategy which involved the negotiation of the various broad scale legislative and developmental pressures with the existing local conditions of the site. The strategy was used to orchestrate and ‘set up’ the potential positive exchange dynamics of adjacency of the various current and future programmes in and around these pressured locations. The overall aim of this strategy was to create situations that bring into close proximity a number of different user groups, facilitating the possibility for exchange.

Broadmeadows, recently finding itself under developmental pressure arising from its status as a ‘Principal Activity Centre’, has become a contested ground between the two major land owners; a pro-active council that recognises the civic potential of the town centre’s future transformation and a development company keen to capitalise on the economic benefits associated with this.

With the desires of each of the major land holders in mind, a strategic ‘re-shuffle’ of parts of the site aimed at freeing up space for an initial development that contains a mix of commercial, retail, community and residential usages. The configuration of the development drew from the successful public domain examples of Olsen and Dobell Place where these different programmes co-exist in a positive and dynamic way, albeit somewhat accidentally.

Like Broadmeadows, the specific location of the site in Carrara is a contested ground between two major stakeholders. The Gold Coast Council, also a pro-active council that recognises the public open space and tourism potential of the area and the private housing development company that currently owns the land.

Following from an investigation into the potential beneficial public domain outcomes of mediating the desires of the major stakeholders in the Broadmeadows town centre, a project was formulated that offers an alternative model for considering the relationship between private housing development and the provision of public space.

The curation of housing, public open space and landscape as an entwined system aimed to bring into close proximity a number of previously disparate programmes and user groups towards facilitating exchange.

Rather than having to actually design the housing, the strategic ‘sampling’ of a recent positive model of mixed typology housing was used as a way of accepting a certain level of developmental orthodoxy. This created a focus on the importance of the alternative adjacency of the parts.
In Robina, research into the greater Guragunbah area made through the Carrara project, informed a future development strategy for the greater area of floodplain north of Robina. The proposal aimed at orchestrating the inevitable long term pressure for housing, recreation and tourism within this environmentally sensitive area. It created a series of scenarios that similarly to the Carrara project might reconsider the adjacency of housing, public open space and landscape.

A more focussed adjacency curation was then carried out in the particularly pressured area at the edge of the town centre in an attempt to ‘bring together’ the disparate development proposals evident there. This strategic ‘pulling together’ aimed at bringing into close proximity the different future users of the area to create the potential for positive social exchange.

Adjacency curation is seen as an important strategy for mediating developmental pressure in view of ‘setting up’ conditions in which ‘real’ public domain could develop.

‘Seeding’ Strategy

The idea of ‘seeding’ became an important metaphor in considering the strategic role of the three projects in the futures of the individual pressured locations in which they are situated. Each of the projects are speculations that attempt to bridge broad legislative and developmental desire with the reality of the specific local conditions that currently exist by proposing an appropriate ‘first move’ towards their future.

In each case, the idea of seeding attempted to address how the urban environment and public domain would physically grow and develop over time rather than be something that is imposed in the manner of the generic master plan.

The project at Broadmeadows explored the potential of engaging with existing local and regional networks when considering how to seed the transformation of a currently dispersed civic field into a dense, mixed use activity centre. The research involved investigating successful examples of locally specific public domain space and utilised these in formulating an appropriate initial development for the town centre.

The proposed mixed use seeding development was conceived as a joint venture between developer and council, something that was immediately responsive to the current social, cultural and economic forces of the area. Through negotiation, the development would be of benefit to both parties in the preparation of the town centre for its future. The proposal was less a piece of architecture in the traditional sense and more a kind of preparatory infrastructure for the town centre. It is envisaged that like the Olsen and Dobell models, the insertion would develop its architectural expression over time.

Re-distribution of the scale of building mass as proposed in the master-plan across the site also became part of the seeding strategy. This was aimed at ensuring space and light amenity to the key public buildings and spaces of the town centre once the inevitable future large scale development takes place.

In Carrara, the study and critique of existing development models informed the formulation of an alternative model for housing development in and around the sensitive floodplain environment. The physical manifestation of the negotiation between council and the developer in a recent housing development approval was examined, teasing out its latent positive public domain potential. This potential was then tested in the project which aimed at seeding a new form of inhabitation of the floodplain, one that creates a positive interaction between housing, tourism and the environment.

This was then explored on a broader scale in the Robina project where, while addressing the immediate pressures at the edge of the town centre, it was conceived as being the first stage from which a strategic, curated development of the surrounding area or perhaps even the surrounding region could grow.

The proposed interface condition between the Robina town centre and the future urban parkland contained Carrara Landscape Edge and Robina Town Centre Edge proposals.
an entwined collection of environmental, residential, tourism and recreational programs and was a continuation of the floodplain inhabitation seeding idea from Carrara.

The infrastructural ‘spine’ that was inserted between several currently disparate development proposals and into this interface condition, like the seeding development at Broadmeadows, contains a mix of commercial, retail, community and residential programmes. The insertion of this element aimed at creating a framework from which a new, alternative public domain for the town centre could grow.

The ‘seeding’ strategy accepts the fact that not everything can or indeed should be designed and that successful public domain is something that grows, develops and changes over time. It is a strategy that once the adjacencies are ‘set up’ aims to put in place the physical and programmatic impetus for the growth and development of diverse and vital public domain.

**Spatial Instrumentation Strategy**

Through the use of a set of design ‘tools’ prompted by Hajer and Reijndorp, spatial instrumentation was strategically deployed in order to activate and augment the orchestrated adjacencies and seeding strategies. As demonstrated in the projects, connection, compression and framing are examples of design instruments that aim to create spatial conditions that physically facilitate the social exchange between different user groups.

This spatial strategy focuses on the importance of the urban ‘experience’ rather than the architectural expression or detail.

**After word**

Whilst being primarily concerned with the public domain, the research also engages with another important issue seen as complementary to this, regarding housing.

Both the provision of affordable housing and housing responsive to changing environmental, demographic and cultural trends is vital to the environmental and social sustainability of our cities. The projects presented in this thesis strategically allow for the inclusion of these alternative housing types. This would require a reconsideration of the status quo from the housing industry, government and architecture itself in order to bring to fruition.

There is a clearly a limitation created by the reliance upon the willingness of the various stakeholders in the built environment to consider alternative development models towards an end common goal. It is the strategic potential of this ‘willingness’ in regards to the public domain that is of interest within the research presented in this thesis.

Speculative architectural models like the ones presented in this research, are important testing grounds for alternative ways of considering the future of pressured parts of our built environment. They are speculations that whilst accepting a certain level of the current orthodoxy in development, seek out ‘gaps’ and opportunities that offer possible positive outcomes for the public domain.

The identified strategies that were brought to the fore through the research projects reveal ways that architecture can play a productive role within the complex field that is the contemporary urban environment.
Bibliography


Lemon, A, 1982, Broadmeadows, a forgotten history, City of Broadmeadows in conjunction with Hargreen, West Melbourne.


Murray, S & Bertram, N. 2006, Micro Macro City, : The Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Barton ACT.


The Brisbane Institute, 2004, ‘The 200km City, From Noosa to the Tweed’, The Brisbane Institute, Brisbane.

Legislation


WWW


Gold Coast City Council, 2002, Carrara-Merrimac
**Key Architectural Precedent Projects**

Durbach Block Architects  
- Brickpit Ring, Sydney, Australia.

Estudio Carme Pinos  
- Urban park and bridge in Petrer, Alicante, Spain.

Estudio Teddy Cruz  
- Casa Familiar, Affordable housing, San Ysidro, California.

Kirsten Thompson Architects  
- Cranbourne Visitor Centre, Melbourne, Australia.

Lyons Architects  
- Queenscliffe Centre, Victoria, Australia.  
- Hume City Council Offices, Melbourne, Australia.

OMA  
- New City Centre Masterplan, Almere, Holland

Viaplana & Pinon  
- Centre d’Art Santa Monica, Barcelona, Spain.

West 8  
- Borneo Sporenburg Masterplan, Amsterdam, Holland


*Exhibition at Ecclesley’s, Melbourne*