

Reclaiming the river: What's to come for Parramatta's riverfront

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OCT 30, 2018



Plans are underway to establish new outdoor entertainment areas. Photo: iStock

Parramatta locals are reclaiming their river, and it's an exciting time for the riverfront. Plans are under way to establish new outdoor entertainment areas, walking and cycling paths and strategies to make the Parramatta River swimmable again.

One key project is the "Escarpment Boardwalk", which runs along the river and allows cyclists and pedestrians to access the CBD foreshore. The boardwalk will halve travel distance, avoid several road crossings and improve traffic flow by reducing the volume of pedestrians and cyclists using one of Parramatta's busy main streets.

The boardwalk is part of the overall Parramatta City River Strategy, which has a heavy focus on improving the quality of Parramatta River. This focus is one deemed urgent, considering the amount of building in the area: high-density housing is predicted to rise by 64 per cent by 2025.

The Parramatta River Masterplan – released on October 18 – outlines several initiatives to clean up and improve the water system by 2025. The aim is to make the river more liveable and swimmable with three new swimming spots proposed, adding to the existing four.



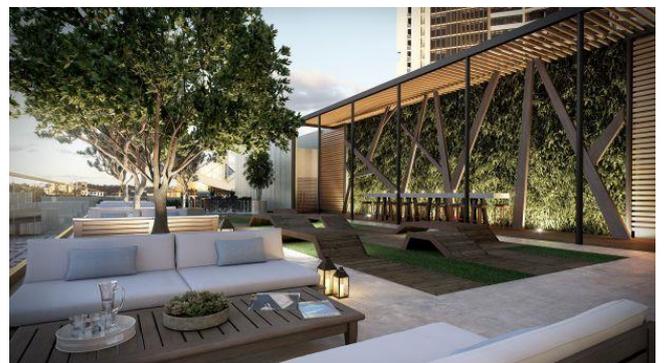
The aim is to make the river more liveable and swimmable. Photo: iStock

The Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) is an organisation of local councils, state agencies and community representatives working together to improve the health of the catchment area. Group chair Mark Drury says a community survey in 2016 found 54 per cent of respondents said they would prefer to swim in the Parramatta River if it was safe.

"We've got a plan to have additional parts of the river swimmable by 2025," Drury says. "There are challenges in terms of water quality, and we are fortunate that the EPA (Environment Protection Authority) is getting involved in River Watch to help us obtain better data to allow for scientific modelling around what needs to be done."

Community engagement and consultation is key to keeping the focus on improving the riverfront. The annual Riverfest! celebrates the 13.7-kilometre tributary with cycling tours, a river cruise, bush and river foreshore clean-ups and art workshops – designed to educate locals and visitors about the area.

"Events such as Riverfest! continue to play a vital role in enabling us to obtain community input as we implement our plan to deliver a world-class river for all Sydneysiders to enjoy for generations," Drury says.



One Parramatta development that has the river as a key feature within its design is The Lennox.

With so much development occurring in Parramatta, it's also important for community and industry groups to work with property developers to address concerns about the river. Drury says he'd love to see embedded in plans greater commitments to water-sensitive urban design.

“We need more permeable surfaces otherwise water just runs straight off into the river, which is one of the major downfalls in terms of water quality,” he says. “At the moment, what we’re doing is largely educational but the next step is engaging in discussions about how we make water sensitive urban design a requirement for all buildings.”

One Parramatta development that has the river as a key feature within its design is The Lennox, scheduled for completion in mid-2020. The Lennox is based on the riverfront at 12 Phillip Street on a new 120-metre boardwalk. Andrew Young is director with the development’s manager, EQ Projects.



When finished, The Lennox will comprise 436 apartments over 39 levels.

“We appreciate the river both as a resource and as a source of public amenity and enjoyment,” Young says. “Within The Lennox, residents have great views up the river, so, while the building is located on the city fringes, the outlook includes a lot of open space and greenery.”

The Lennox also has connections with an early Parramatta. During the initial construction stages, part of a wall being demolished was found to be resting on the remnants of the nearby Lennox Bridge. These remnants now form part of the design.

“Having the original sandstone remnant integrated into our retail element highlights the relationship between the bridge and our development and makes us feel part of the community,” Young says.

When finished, The Lennox will comprise 436 apartments over 39 levels. Young adds having a direct connection with the riverfront is a crucial deciding factor for many of their purchasers. “The boardwalk we’ve built connects to the existing portals on the bridge so residents can walk or cycle through the portals and follow the river to eventually end up at the Parramatta ferry terminal,” he says.



The direct connection with the riverfront is a deciding factor for many buyers.