Landscape

The advice of Sir John Winthrop Hackett in selecting the Crawley site for The University of Western Australia in 1913 was that campus design should be based on convenient, wide and spacious lines and that the riverfront provided one of the rarest attractions offered any of the universities in Australia.

Harold Desbrowe-Annear won the 1914 competition for 'laying out the Crawley site for University purposes'; however it was the 1927 Wilkinson plan which has primarily influenced the development of the campus.

Despite considerable development on campus, the planning approach of 'buildings in a park' still prevails and the campus is defined with equal importance given to the buildings and the landscape. Several landscape places have been listed by the National Trust, and the entire campus was adopted into the National Estate in 1980 by the Australian Heritage Commission. As well, the University received the inaugural WA Civic Design Award in 1986 and there are many formal spaces listed on the State Heritage Register and Municipal Heritage Inventories. While many of the landscape qualities of the campus are accepted today, ideas such as creating a cathedral of pine trees (Somerville Auditorium) were quite radical for their time and not part of the original planning. The Sunken Garden was created out of the opportunity to find a use for an excavation site, and the Tropical Grove was another unplanned accident – a screen of vegetation to conceal gardeners' huts.

The quality of the landscape differs greatly across the campus, from the very formal north to the less developed south, and with imported trees complementing European-style architecture and native trees on the campus perimeter. The University has been developed around the provision of generous open spaces and intimate courtyards, often with colonnades and cloisters. The landscape is characterised by generous tree canopies, large fig trees and eucalypts, magnificent specimens of European trees, remnant indigenous trees, expansive open green spaces, semi-secluded courtyards, pedestrian areas, river views and abundant and exotic vegetation.

As the campus expands westward towards Broadway, there is an opportunity to integrate the campus landscape approach. The expanded University will include a more diverse style of development where precincts will be characterised by a mix of accommodation, research, retail and service facilities. This urban neighbourhood style of mixed use development will add positively to the economic and social vibrancy of the community and will contribute to environmental sustainability through increased land use efficiency and a reduced carbon footprint.

Green Space Plan