



## Araluen Cultural Precinct

# Development Plan

### 2009-2015





## Araluen Cultural Precinct

- Araluen Arts Centre
- Museum of Central Australia
- Strehlow Research Centre
- Central Australian Aviation Museum
- Central Craft
- Arts NT

*Front Cover Images:* L - Araluen Arts Centre.  
M - "Arrernte Country", 1988, designed by Wenten Rubuntja, Slumped and Stained Glass, 440 cm x 380 cm, by Cedar Prest. Araluen Art Collection.  
R - Museum of Central Australia.

*Back Cover Image:* "Grand Circle Yeperenye Sculpture", 1991, by Dan Murphy, Metal, 1800 cm x 300 cm, Community Project with Arrernte Artists and Students from the Centre for Appropriate Technology.



## Introduction

The Development Plan for the Araluen Cultural Precinct takes a wide view of the Central Australian region and the town of Alice Springs. It has been designed to integrate with the Red Centre Way, Alice Springs CBD redevelopments, the Alice Springs Desert Park and the views and aspirations of its Arrernte custodians. It will help achieve government goals for arts development, Aboriginal employment, tourism and regional development and link closely to the social and economic aspirations of many community groups, arts and tourism related businesses.

It is designed to make a major contribution to achieving the goals of:

- *Moving Alice Ahead: Red Centre Way and Growing the Indigenous Arts and Cultural Industry* strategies
- Indigenous Arts Strategy, *Building Strong Arts Business*
- NT Tourism Industry Strategic Plan 2008 – 2012
- NT Indigenous Tourism Strategy
- *Closing the Gap* of Indigenous Disadvantage
- NRETAS Strategic Objectives



Above: Mervyn Rubuntja, "West MacDonnell Ranges", 2005, watercolour on board, 52.5 cm x 32.5 cm. Araluen Art Collection. Purchased from Desert Mob 2005.

## Background

The *Alice Springs Cultural Precinct* was built on the ancient land of the Arrernte people and established as an official entity in 1991, with a change of name to the *Araluen Cultural Precinct* in 2008. The earliest component, the *Central Australian Aviation Museum*, opened in 1979, followed by the *Araluen Arts Centre* and *Territory Craft* in 1984, the *Strehlow Research Centre* in 1991 and the *Museum of Central Australia* in 1997. Over time, much has changed in relation to arts, culture and tourism in Alice Springs and the Central Australian region, including:

- International recognition of Central Australian Aboriginal art has reached a very high level and the industry is very valuable to the NT economy.
- The population of Alice Springs has grown considerably and it has become more multicultural and sophisticated, with new waves of artistic endeavour and interest emerging.
- Growth of festivals and events such as Desert Mob, the Alice Desert Festival, the Wearable Arts Awards and the Alice Springs Beanie Festival has been incredible.
- Technology has dramatically changed the way we view the world, plan travel, use venues and seek information.
- Tourists expectations have changed dramatically from a passive “tick and flick” approach to a desire for deeper cultural and spiritual experiences.
- Community involvement has changed from a “membership” approach to a less formal involvement that includes submission of artworks into events like the Wearable Arts Awards and the Alice Springs Beanie Festival, involvement with specific events and functions, participation in markets, and attendances at events.
- Arts education has changed from a didactic transfer of facts and meaning to a participative, collaborative and networked approach.
- Indigenous employment and business development have emerged as very high priorities for the Region.
- A new generation of artists that are gaining inspiration from the desert has emerged. Aboriginal art centres in the region have multiplied from three in the early 1980’s to now more than forty in the Central Australian region.
- The Red Hot Arts Space has been established as an arts industry infrastructure and program support hub in Alice Springs.
- The number of arts organisations has increased significantly, along with the number of paid employees within these organisations.
- The need for authentic locally based and developed entertainment has never been stronger and its potential to tour around Australia has never been higher.
- Tourism is increasingly approached regionally, e.g. *The Red Centre Way*.
- The role/identity of museums and galleries has changed from one of “Hallowed Halls” to one of community engagement and participation.
- The *Strehlow Research Centre* and the *Araluen Arts Centre* have moved more towards becoming “keeping places”.
- Youth and music events have grown in the region.



*Above: The Alice Springs Beanie Festival exhibition on display in the Araluen Arts Centre galleries, 2008.*

## Outcomes and Strategies

### *This plan will deliver the following outcomes:*

- Support continued growth of the arts industry and arts and cultural tourism in the region to create economic and cultural benefits for the community.
- Support and present a wide range of events and programs in the areas of visual arts, performing arts and entertainment.
- Provide professional venues for arts practice and presentation and the provision of accommodation and studio space for visiting artists and entertainers to enrich community life and increase understanding of different cultures and views.
- Increase Aboriginal engagement.
- Deliver education and training that enhances and promotes tourist experiences, improves sustainability and increases Aboriginal employment regionally.
- Attract corporate, Commonwealth and philanthropic money.
- Develop major partnerships and integrate with the Town, the Red Centre Way, the Region and the Stuart Highway to create a more positive image for Alice Springs and the Region.
- Increased community involvement and engagement.
- Continue to develop the role of the Precinct as a keeping place.
- Make the Precinct shady and pleasant, linked and logical, renewing its tired aspects.
- Solar City targets and appropriate climate control.
- Provide adequate storage capacity for Collections.



*Above: Aboriginal Cultural Art Tours, 2009*

### ***The key strategies are:***

- Increase the representation of Aboriginal art from Central Australia in exhibitions and displays.
- Create opportunities for visitors and local people to interact with artists from Central Australia.
- Support local arts and entertainment initiatives, with an emphasis on growing festivals and events.
- Increase the representation of social history displays and interpretation.
- Better integrate and interpret the Precinct's historic areas, cultural elements and sacred sites.
- Develop education programs.
- Improve the look and feel of the Precinct.
- Reflect what is unique and quirky about Alice Springs.
- Develop and link with strong Aboriginal employment and training programs.
- Integrate activities with wider Northern Territory Government initiatives and visions, the Region, and the town of Alice Springs.
- Lower carbon emissions and the environmental impact of the Precinct's operations.
- Deliver public program and events which capture the imagination and aspirations of local people and visitors.

### ***In the longer term:***

- Develop a national identity and reputation for the display of Aboriginal art from Central Australia in appropriate facilities.
- Develop a regional presence through the Red Centre Way.
- Develop national links through art and story telling.
- Develop stronger relationships to the Town (Alice Springs).



*Above: Santa Teresa Arrente Men's Dance Group performing at the Araluen Cultural Precinct's 2009 NAIDOC Week celebrations.*



*Above:* Araluen Arts Centre.

# Proposed Developments

## Short term

- A new site plan for the Precinct leading to overall cohesion.
- Ongoing development of exhibitions and interpretative resources in regards to art works by Aboriginal artists in Central Australia, with a focus on those represented in the Araluen art collections.
- Continue to develop visual arts, theatre performances and social, cultural and artistic events and programs in the Araluen Arts Centre, the Museum of Central Australia, the Strehlow Research Centre and the Central Australian Aviation Museum, increasing program linkages.
- Solar air conditioning project for the Araluen Arts Centre.
- Installing interpretative displays within the solar power generator to promote the use and benefits of solar energy to the community.
- Return the Araluen Arts Centre rehearsal room to community use and access.
- Movement of some material from the Museum of Central Australia to the Alice Springs Desert Park for display.

## Medium term

- Position the Araluen Arts Centre and the Museum of Central Australia as a linked, key tourism attraction, incorporating interconnected displays to create a unique Aboriginal art and social history experience for visitors.

- Develop and facilitate an artist in residence program at the Araluen Arts Centre.
- Secure and enhance the Precinct grounds to encourage greater community use.
- Redesign and reposition the car park and front entrance of the Araluen Arts Centre to allow for the continued growth and development of Desert Mob, the Alice Springs Beanie Festival and other events, creating a forecourt to the building's entry.
- Develop an attractive and appealing coffee shop for use by Precinct visitors.

## Longer term

- Move the emphasis of the Museum of Central Australia towards interpretation of the social history of the region.
- Develop education programs that deliver clear social, economic and cultural outcomes for a wide variety of customer groups including schools.
- Secure an off site facility for the display and storage of Museum of Central Australia natural history collections.
- Development of a community arts and community access corridor at the eastern end of the Precinct.

All developments are designed to deliver maximum benefits at low cost by meshing strategically with the communities and businesses of the broader region and focusing on developing and selling an internationally compelling experience for visitors.

## Recent Developments

### ***Artists Accommodation***

The Araluen Homestead was refurbished in 2008 to make it suitable for use as accommodation for artists.

### ***Aboriginal employment and engagement***

An Arrernte Custodians Reference Group was formed for the Araluen Cultural Precinct in 2008. The Reference Group advises on matters related to Arrernte culture and the relationship of cultural protocols to the development and management of the Araluen Cultural Precinct, both strategically and on a day to day basis.

The Arrernte Custodians Reference Group, along with members of their families, work closely with Precinct staff to develop new initiatives to create employment and engagement opportunities for local Aboriginal people.

The Araluen Cultural Precinct actively promotes all mainstream employment opportunities to Aboriginal people, as appropriate and as they become available. The primary focus for increasing Aboriginal employment is in the area of cultural tourism and arts management.

### ***The establishment of the new permanent exhibition of Aboriginal Art from Central Australia***

*Origins to Innovations: Aboriginal Art in Central Australia* opened in March 2009 in the Araluen Arts Centre. The exhibition gives a dedicated focus to the display and interpretation of Aboriginal art, with works drawn primarily from the Araluen Art Collection. It traces and explores the development of Aboriginal art in Central Australia, from the early 1930's through to current time, linking to displays in the Albert Namatjira Gallery and the early watercolor landscape tradition.

This exhibition explores the origins of Aboriginal art in cultural practice and the development and innovative qualities of key Central Desert artists and arts communities. The exhibition is a permanent display, but will be dismantled once each year to accommodate display of the Desert Mob exhibition, featuring recent works from Aboriginal art centres in Central Australia.



*Above: The exhibition, Origins to Innovations: Aboriginal Art in Central Australia, Araluen Arts Centre, March 2009.*



*Above: The Araluen Homestead.*



Above: The Alice Craft Acquisition Exhibition in the refurbished Witchetty's Artspace, May 2009.

### **The redevelopment of Witchetty's as an Exhibition Space**

The Witchetty's function space in the Araluen Arts Centre was redeveloped in late 2008 – early 2009, opening for use as an exhibition space in March 2009. This redevelopment is linked to the new permanent exhibition of Aboriginal art, making sure sufficient exhibition space remains available to local artists.

### **Relationship with the Alice Springs Desert Park**

The Araluen Cultural Precinct and the Alice Springs Desert Park work together to establish combined strategies for tourism promotion across both organisations as a whole.

The key roles of this development are the delivery of highly engaging experiences *in the landscape* that create a need to experience more, enhance experiences in the region and help visitors to develop their own interpretations and experiences of the region.



Above: Alice Springs Desert Park Nocturnal House.

The experiences are about culture in relation to wildlife and landscape, plants, animals, geology, art and stories about place.

The Alice Springs Desert Park also continues to maintain and upgrade the grounds of the Araluen Cultural Precinct.



*Above: The grounds of the Precinct continue to be developed in partnership with the Alice Springs Desert Park.*

## **New Developments**

### ***Solar Air Conditioning for the Araluen Arts Centre***

This project is a central component of the successful Alice Springs bid to the Solar Cities program, an initiative of the Australian Government's Australian Greenhouse Office, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

### ***Solar Demonstration***

The solar air conditioning project, once completed, will be a benchmark example of sustainable energy creation and usage within a cultural facility in a regional area. In particular, the combination of solar energy and an air conditioning system, and the opportunities for public education were viewed by the Australian Government as critical elements contributing to the overall merit of the Alice Springs Solar Cities



*Above: Solar collecting trough, as proposed for use in the Araluen Arts Centre solar air conditioning plant.  
Photo Credit: Sandia National Laboratories*

bid. It is estimated that each year, the Araluen Arts Centre Solar Air Conditioning project will demonstrate to 90 000 local, national and international visitors how cost effective 'deep cuts' in energy costs and greenhouse gases can be achieved in an existing building. The project can be used as an early Solar City case study to motivate change in other commercial facilities.

# Future Developments

## *Overall plan for the Precinct*

An overall site plan will be developed for the Precinct, incorporating all the proposed concepts into a final design that can then be costed and implemented in stages, as funding is available.

## *The establishment of an Aboriginal arts and social history presence*

The new permanent exhibition of Aboriginal art from Central Australia, in the Araluen Arts Centre, provides a basis to connect the art exhibits with displays and activities incorporating social and cultural history, along with living experiences.

Providing a further gallery for local art displays and activity in Witchetty's creates an opportunity to link further community spaces and activities along the Precinct's western corridor. This also allows for other Araluen Arts Centre galleries to focus on the development of more permanent, museum quality exhibitions, as well as further displays of works by non-Aboriginal artists from the Araluen Collections.

The eastern area of the Araluen Arts Centre includes two heritage buildings and a large display space in the Strehlow Research Centre / Museum of Central Australia. The two heritage buildings are the old Connellan Airways mess and accommodation houses currently occupied by Arts NT and Central Craft.

Sensitive development of the eastern area and the possible construction of a new, additional gallery would create a living precinct. The view of the ranges, the sacred nature of the

area nearby and the links provided by the *Two Sisters* story would make this a very special place where visitors and locals would be able to gain an insight into the true nature of Alice Springs and its people. Very powerful stories could emerge of settlement and survival and the power of culture.

By linking the Araluen Arts Centre with a new gallery, which is then linked to the Strehlow Research Centre / Museum of Central Australia building, all by connecting structures and pathways, a cohesive visitor flow and visitor experience would be created.

A shade structure, to protect the refurbished Clifford Possum mural from excessive sunlight, could also double to create a community access space between the Araluen Arts Centre and the Central Craft facility, suitable for events such as craft markets, artists in residence activities and other visual arts and performing arts programs.

## *Art and Technology*

Development of the solar power generated air conditioning system will create a natural link between the arts and technology. This theme will be further enhanced by the development of interactive and audio visual experiences to assist with display interpretations and education strategies.



*Above: The Museum of Central Australia.*



*Above: The area between the Araluen Arts Centre and the Museum of Central Australia.*

## ***The establishment of social and cultural history displays in the Museum of Central Australia to provide context to the art and culture of Central Australia***

Social and cultural history displays in the Museum of Central Australia may focus on stories of land, culture and people. A feature component could be the interpretation of Arrernte stories and history as this relates specifically to Mparntwe (Alice Springs) township and its land forms.

Stories about key events in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history and important people in Central Australian history and life will also be a focus of the displays, to be developed in liaison with the Precinct's Arrernte Custodians Reference Group and local historians.

## ***Museum of Central Australia displays of Earth, Geological and Natural History***

It is proposed that the displays regarding earth, geological and natural history in the Museum of Central Australia be housed in a separate facility off site, with a possible location being the Alice Springs Desert Park, where ancient and living history could be viewed and experienced in the context of each other.

## ***Central Australian Aviation Museum***

The displays and interpretation in the Central Australian Aviation Museum will be upgraded, in conjunction with the Central Australian Aviation Museum Inc Committee and members and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

## ***Araluen Arts Centre Rehearsal Space***

The function space previously provided by Witchetty's will be maintained with the old rehearsal space being returned to community use.

*Below: The Central Australian Aviation Museum is a key component of the Precinct's history.*



## ***Redesigning and repositioning the car park and front entrance of the Araluen Arts Centre to allow for the continued expansion of events***

Suitable and available public space at the Centre does not adequately accommodate the ever expanding audiences for key annual events such as the Desert Mob exhibition and associated activities and the Alice Springs Beanie Festival. In order to continue growing the audiences for these events and adequately accommodate their continued growth and success, it is proposed that the foyer of the Centre be expanded and the road in front of the Centre be converted into a courtyard. Such a space would also allow for the possibility of installing seating and public art to create a grander, forecourt entrance to the Centre, while providing expanded indoor and outdoor event space.

In addition, it is proposed that part of the adjacent car park be established as a garden area, to allow for further event and recreational space, while softening and enlivening the Araluen Arts Centre entrance even further.

In addition, the car park area itself will be resealed to create a more modern look, with a redesign of traffic flow to accommodate the local bus service and tourism coaches. The redesign of the car park will also accommodate a slip lane to allow traffic coming from the CBD better access to the Precinct as a whole.



*Above: Foyer area of the Araluen Arts Centre  
Below Left: Desert Mob Marketplace 2007*

## ***Signage***

Develop signage for key, individual components of the Precinct – the Araluen Arts Centre, the Museum of Central Australia and the Central Australia Aviation Museum - that link to overall Precinct Signage, but also allow for the promotion of individual components as key entitles, linked to directional signage that enhances visitor flow and access.

## ***Incorporating public sculpture and securing the Precinct grounds***

Public sculpture placed and developed as integral to the grounds of the Precinct will create an experiential environment that links all the buildings and displays. As part of the overall concept design, the entire Precinct itself could be enclosed, walled or well lit, adding to the security and stability of the overall environment.

## ***Coffee shop***

The overall visitor experience requires an ability to offer a high quality food and beverage service to customers, with these being not only visitors to Alice Springs, but also to the local market. Development of a coffee shop facility would be linked to the redevelopment of the Araluen Arts Centre foyer.





*Above: Museum of Central Australia, 2009.*

## ***Education Strategies***

For spirited travellers, transfer of knowledge is not as important as gaining an experience, where the emotional response is often more important than the intellectual response. First hand knowledge and crossing of disciplines are important, requiring the delivery of higher value based experiences rather than just the delivery of knowledge.

Education strategies will therefore support the development of conversations with visitors, acknowledging who they are and where they are coming from, rather than just delivering

messages to them. These conversations may be virtual, through question and answer menus, or through person to person interactions. New experiences will be designed to facilitate interaction, not just deliver messages.

In the future, the Araluen Cultural Precinct will offer visitors a wide range of spiritual, natural, cultural, manual and physical experiences, allowing for active learning and offering a wide range of methods and tools for investigation. Education strategies will be designed to give meaning and help visitors construct their own meanings from experiences on offer.

## In the Longer Term

### *Develop a national identity and reputation for the display of Aboriginal art from Central Australia in appropriate facilities*

An appropriate facility may be a “National Gallery of Aboriginal Art”. Located in Alice Springs, in the heart of a region where the contemporary Aboriginal art movement has become internationally recognised, such a facility has the capacity to become world renowned. The facility could initially exhibit and house artworks from the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) and the Araluen Collections but could then broaden the display of artworks through loans, donations and partnerships. While it is possible that such a facility could be located at the Araluen Cultural Precinct, it could be located in the CBD, at the Alice Springs Desert Park or at another suitable site in Alice Springs, but remain inked to the Cultural Precinct displays and programs.

### *A regional presence through the Red Centre Way and the Region*

The overall plan for Alice Springs is bound together in the Red Centre Way strategy. This is the main strategy regionally. All Alice Springs venues need to be linked to the Red Centre Way in order to build regional and Alice Springs tourism.

### *Develop national links through art and stories*

Many stories pass through Alice Springs. These stories could be the basis of a national “Big Picture” plan in the longer term.

This Development Plan works towards a long term vision that no Australian or tourist has experienced the real Australia unless they have “done” the pilgrimage from Adelaide to Darwin. The east coast may provide scenery, beaches and even “outback” experiences but the unique Australian cultures, spirituality, landscape, art(s) and legends can only be experienced here.

### *Key relationships, partnerships and structures*

The key relationships, partnerships and structures to the overall Araluen Cultural Precinct development plans include:

- Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
- Arrernte Custodians Reference Group
- Desert and its member Arts Centres in Central Australia
- Alice Springs Beanie Festival
- Alice Springs Town Council
- Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI)
- Alice Springs Desert Park
- RedHot Arts Central Australia
- Alice Desert Festival
- Alice Springs arts organisations
- NT Archives
- Tourism NT

## ***Develop stronger relationships to the Town (Alice Springs)***

Developments at the Araluen Cultural Precinct will enhance the success of Alice Springs and the region as a tourism destination and Centre for learning about Indigenous art and Australian cultural identity.

Integrated planning and cooperative activity are essential to achieving the goals of Government, the Region and the Precinct, and will be achieved through ongoing consultation within Government and with strong community consultation.

The key roles of the Central Business District could be described as retail, welcome, regional orientation and relaxation, tourist information gathering and regional story telling through the Visitor Information Centre and other technologies and experiences.

These are not key roles of the Precinct and there is no intention of creating another major retail precinct or visitor information centre at the Precinct. The Precinct needs to link strongly to all Central Business District functions.

Future Precinct development will also take in to account the roles and displays of other cultural and social history attractions in Alice

Springs, making sure that the Precinct displays and programs are complimentary.

These attractions include the Alice Springs Telegraph Station and its focus on the history of the Overland Telegraph Line and the use of the area as a place to house Aboriginal children from the Stolen Generations; the Women's Pioneer Hall of Fame and it's primarily focus on women in history; the Adelaide House Museum; the National Road Transport Hall; and the Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitor Centre.

Regionally, Araluen Cultural Precinct developments will also take into account displays at the Nyinkka Nyunyu Cultural Centre in Tennant Creek and the Cultural Centre in the Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park.

When looking at the possibilities of the Araluen Cultural Precinct to tell stores related to Aboriginal art, Alice Springs, social history and cultural traditions and practices, in relation to other cultural and social history attractions, there is a great opportunity in the market generally, with many stories remaining untold that could be displayed and interpreted, for the benefit of local people and visitors alike.



*Above: Alice Springs Desert Park.*



## Feedback

Contact details to provide feedback on the Araluen Cultural Precinct Development Plan:

Email: [araluen@nt.gov.au](mailto:araluen@nt.gov.au)

Fax: (08) 8953 0259

Post: PO Box 3521, Alice Springs NT 0871

By hand: Araluen Arts Centre

Larapinta Drive, Alice Springs

All correspondence to be addressed to:

Director, Araluen Cultural Precinct.



Northern  
Territory  
Government



## **Araluen Cultural Precinct**

Corner Larapinta & Memorial Drive

Alice Springs NT 0871

Telephone 08 8951 1120

Facsimile 08 8953 0259

Email: [araluen@nt.gov.au](mailto:araluen@nt.gov.au)

Website: [www.araluen.nt.gov.au](http://www.araluen.nt.gov.au)