



30th May 2021

hsc@hornsby.nsw.gov.au

planyourparkland@elton.com.au

Dear Sir

Hornsby Park Master Plan

The aim of Friends of Berowra Valley is to protect the natural landscape, heritage and biodiversity of Berowra Valley while making the valley more accessible to the community.

In this huge and complex project, we have three major concerns:

1. Preservation of the Blue Gum Diatreme Forest (BGDF) and the Blackbutt Gully Forest (BGF)
2. Domination of the site by mountain bikes
3. The provision of more picnicking and unstructured play areas

Preservation of the Blue Gum Diatreme Forest (BGDF) and the Blackbutt Gully Forest (BGF)

The FBV believe that the conservation of these two plant communities is paramount.

The map of the vegetation communities on p 34 shows that the native vegetation consists of BGDF and BGF.

Blue Gum High Forest now covers only approximately 136 ha in the world. The major threats to the Blue Gum High Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion are vegetation clearing and fragmentation of remnants. It is considered particularly susceptible to significant edge effects, including the invasion by exotic plant species and the decline in understorey sclerophyll shrubs and herbaceous species Australian Government (2005). Blue Gum Diatreme forest is even rarer.

Blackbutt Gully Forest was mapped in Hornsby Shire by Smith and Smith in 2008 and was found to be only 837.3 ha in extent: It is consequently recognised as a locally significant community.

The Approved Conservation Advice for the Blue Gum High Forest (approved by Delegate of the Minister, 2014) states that action by managers include:

- Control and regulate impacts from people, bikes and other vehicles via fencing, signage and determining which existing tracks should be closed or remain open.

- Develop and implement appropriate management regimes to prevent further loss or decline of functionally important species and reduction in community integrity.

FBV believe a review of the mountain bike tracks is required to determine which tracks should be closed to maintain community integrity.

Factors damaging the understorey of the Blue Gum Diatreme Forest (BGDF) and the Blackbutt Gully Forest (BGF)

Weed invasion is currently one of the major damaging factors but the 'Vegetation Management Plan and Habitat Creation and Enhancement Plan' contains excellent strategies for vegetation management, and if carried out should result in healthy native communities.

The other factor damaging the understorey is the excessive number of roads, paths, tracks, and trails. As we support accessible paths, presume the roads are necessary and feel that the number of pedestrian train/bush tracks is insufficient we would like the mountain bike trails rationalised. They zig zag all over the eastern and southern side, through BBGDF and BGF. By their sheer number they damage the understorey and its role as habitat.

Mountain bike tracks must be removed from the critically endangered Blue Gum High Forest. No more tracks of any type must be created or widened in this community, particularly on the secluded western side of the quarry, the Rosemead link.

Mountain bike trails must be reduced in the Blackbutt Gully Forest if the forest is to survive, Higgins Hill is a case in point.

Factors damaging the overstorey of the Blue Gum Diatreme Forest (BGDF) and the Blackbutt Gully Forest (BGF)

Two infra structure projects have potential to damage the canopy layer, the skywalk and the gravity based adventure recreation links (zip lines).

Zip lines run immediately over the canopy or clearings are cut through it. Their construction and operation will reduce the integrity of the canopy layer and reduce the viability of the vegetation community. Both the proposed lines seem to run through at least some BGHF. Whether the lines are over or through the canopy they will remove habitat for fauna that use this layer, including the Powerful Owls that forage through the area.

We oppose the gravity based adventure recreation links.

The proposed sky walk appears to travel through both BFGH and BGF and will disturb the canopy of both communities, to OMV and the Crusher Plant. The fly through produced by Councils shows a very broad walkway.

A Review of Environmental Factors must be undertaken before this sky walk is even contemplated. How much of the canopy will be removed? How many trees cut down? What will the effect on canopy fauna be? How much disturbance to the understorey and overstorey will there be during construction? Will material damage the surrounding flora (e.g. zinc)? Will the understorey be heavily shaded?

Protection of Powerful Owls

Powerful Owls are listed as a vulnerable species. They have been assigned to the 'Landscape species management stream' under the *Saving our Species (SoS)* program. This SoS strategy aims to ensure

that the species is secure in the wild in NSW and that its NSW geographic range is extended or maintained and maintain its conservation status under the Biodiversity Conservation Act. (Office of the Environment and Heritage, nd)

Numerous factors in this master plan may make the life of the resident pair of endangered Powerful Owls intolerable, thus making yet another pair of owls not 'secure in the wild'. These features include:

- Night lights on the sports fields at Old Mans Valley as they will disturb the prey and the Powerful Owls. This may reduce feeding opportunities for the owls.
- Noise from the sports fields, particularly at night.
- Lookouts on the northern mound are far too close to the breeding tree. Breeding owls will be disturbed, and people may be attacked (it has happened elsewhere).
- The number of trails across the northern mound. This includes an accessible lift, paths and trails as well as a new mountain bike link trail. As the Powerful Owls breed near the north mound, this is too much disturbance.
- The high ratio of mountain bike trails to bush area on the eastern side – this greatly reduces shelter and foraging opportunities for the owls.
- Canopy activities/disturbance – a lengthy skywalk from the Aquatic Centre to Old Mans Valley is proposed with a branch to the Crusher Plant. Gravity-based adventure recreation links (presumably zip lines in the canopy) are proposed from the Crusher Plant to the south-west precinct and from the north to the south-west precinct. This is too much canopy disturbance for all canopy fauna, including the prey of the Powerful Owls.
- Weed removal and replanting strategies may enable mountain bikers and walkers to take shortcuts through open areas.
- The proposed mountain bike link to Rosemead Road and the Fishponds Trail as it will clear habitat.
- Vegetation along parts of the proposed connection to Westleigh provides ideal resting and foraging sites and its reopening would damage important creek side habitat

These actions must be altered to ensure their survival.

- Removal of the proposed sporting fields would eliminate most night light and night noise.
- Lookouts on the northern Mound relocated
- Reduction of the number of trails on the Northern Mound
- Reduction of mountain bike trails through out, especially in dense understory
- No canopy activities/disturbance from zip lines
- A REF before the sky walk is contemplated.
- No link trail from the Northern Mound around through Rosemead to Westleigh, the Rosemead trail link

Unstructured/creative play and picnicking

As one of our aims is to “make the valley more accessible to the community” we are worried about many aspects of the masterplan.

The master plan certainly ensures it is accessible to the mountain bikers, but the copious number of trails makes it inaccessible to the general community.

The accessible paths make it easy for many people to move through the bush but not necessarily for them to interact with it, hence the need for nature play in the recreation areas. FBV commented on the play plan exhibited last year, and this was recently adopted by Council. Opportunities for nature play have not been given in this master plan

The sports fields dominating Old Man Valley (OMV) deprives the general community, particularly those from units, of open space to play and relax.

The Void seems to be planned for large events, but little consideration has been given to everyday use.

FBV would therefore like:

- OMV replanned so that the oval is eliminated and the space redesigned for unstructured/creative play and picnicking
- The huge, shared pedestrian and orientation plaza be reduced so that it does not protrude so far into the site. The whole of OMV could then be used by people (perhaps with some parking as planned)
- Diverse play facilities provided for all ages and abilities
- Large, grassed areas for picnicking and relaxing
- OMV to be a stunning regional park in itself
- The Void planted with many more trees
- The lake's edge made more attractive for children with water play features added
- Another major play facility added to the void – perhaps an adventure/wild play area integrated with the lake

Friends of Berowra Valley also have concern about other aspects. These include:

a) Synthetic turf

FBV do not favour the use of synthetic turf. Synthetic turf is basically a product of the fossil fuel industry and is hence not sustainable, particularly as it cannot be recycled. Cleaning chemicals and micro plastics can be shed into the environment and it deprives fauna of feeding sites.

This site is particularly unsuitable for synthetic turf. OMV should be used for unstructured play and picnicking, and synthetic turf is not a suitable for this. The site is exposed to the full sun and bushfires. Synthetic turf can get extremely hot and be unsafe for players. Synthetic turf can also burn in a bushfire and produce toxic fumes – not something we want to contemplate.

b) Heritage

We would like as much heritage preserved as possible as this is one of the aims of the FBV. Interpretation of all features, whether extant or not, must be on site, not in some remote museum.

The Higgins Cemetery is poorly dealt with in the master plan. It needs a heritage plan with all features, including plant selection and path location dealt with by experts.

Ginger Meggs seems to have been forgotten.

c) Diatrema walls

FBV is not in favour of rock climbing on the walls as they are probably dangerous, and climbing will distract other users from the wall itself.

Vegetation management must be appropriate for safety and the fauna.

Interpretation of the eastern wall is essential

Safety is paramount. The lake and swamp were designed to separate visitors from the walls and falling rocks, but the temptation is now to use the lake for recreation.

d) Smaller precincts

The smaller precincts have very general plans and these need to be refined and exhibited separately nearer the time of construction.

Commercial enterprises should not have any harmful impact on the natural values of Hornsby Park and the nearby Berowra Valley National Park.

Alternate location for mountain bikes

In our submission on the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy 2020-2025, November 2020 we stated that:

"We have no objection to creating BMX or mountain bike trails on degraded lands where there is a requirement for the land to be rehabilitated. Areas around Maroota that have previously been used for sand mining and are no longer used because sand extraction is complete, would be an excellent site for a mountain bike park. The close proximity to Wisemans Ferry would provide a significant economic and tourism increase for businesses in the village.

Excellent examples of bike tracks that use degraded landscapes include, Bare Creek Bike Park at Belrose, Sydney and Quarry Park, Footscray, Melbourne.

Mountain Bike Trails are increasingly being constructed on lands with low biodiversity value. Cringila Hills in the Wollongong area and trails around the ACT are not in biodiverse bushland. Examples from the ACT include Cotter Pines, Majura Pines and Stromlo Forest Park as well as the Centenary Trail. The ACT has taken the trouble to publicise these rides with suggestions of what to do afterwards and a list of what tourist attractions are nearby. <https://visitcanberra.com.au/articles/297/three-of-canberras-mountain-bike-locations-you-must-try>

Currently the economic benefit to Hornsby Shire from mountain biking is limited to sale and repair of bikes, a few local cafes near the Hornsby Mountain Bike Trail and the informal H2O trail at Westleigh. It is most unlikely local accommodation is used and other tourist attractions would not be accessed.

Most mountain bike riders bring their bikes to the Hornsby Mountain Bike Trail and Westleigh on the back of their cars as evidenced by the large number of parked cars at these sites. Therefore, not being in proximity to public transport and being in the north of the Shire is not considered to be an issue. Instead, it would bring much needed tourism dollars to Wisemans Ferry.

The development of BMX and mountain bike trails in Maroota (if acceptable to the community), perhaps in cooperation with Hills Shire, would enable tourism packages to be developed to ensure funds are spent on food, accommodation and other tourist attractions in the Shire.

This suggestion is supported by point 3.6 on p 46 of this document.

“Explore opportunities to further develop and market Hornsby Shire as a location of choice for cycle tourism, mountain biking, bush walking and active recreation.”

This is a position we still support.

Yours sincerely

Friends of Berowra Valley.

References

Australian Government (2005) Blue Gum High Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion.

<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/conservation-advice/blue-gum-high-forest-sydney-region>

Office of the Environment and Heritage. (n.d.) *Powerful Owl (Ninox strenua)*.

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/savingourspeciesapp/project.aspx?ProfileID=10562>

Smith & Smith (2008) Native Vegetation Communities of Hornsby Shire.

<https://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/resources/documents/environment/indigenous-trees/Native-Vegetation-Communities-2008-Update.pdf>