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Dear Sir

Westleigh 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.

The surrounds of the proposed sporting fields have been recognised as of great biodiversity value. It contains three threatened plant communities, Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest (STIF), Duffys Forest and Blue Gum Diatreme Forest (Master plan and HSC, 2018). The Dog Pound Creek Biobanking site is adjacent, and parts of Dog Pound Creek are mapped on the Biodiversity Values Map (NSW Government, 2020).

Friends of Berowra Valley (FBV) are therefore concerned about several aspects of the master plan: Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest (STIF) and Duffys Forest preservation, impact of sports fields, proposed synthetic turf and the Hornsby – Westleigh Connection.

STIF

The 2005 map of *Turpentine - Ironbark Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion* produced by the Environmental Resources Information Network shows the concentration of STIF in the Ryde, Ku-ring-gai and Hornsby Local Government areas, with the western portion of Hornsby Shire having the highest proportion of fragments for this community. The detailed *Native Vegetation Maps* produced by Hornsby Shire Council in 2018 show that STIF is concentrated in the general Dural/Galston/Arcadia area. These maps also show that it is highly fragmented and, apart from Carrs Bush, it is present on private land and roadsides. Our knowledge of the rural lands of Hornsby Shire and STIF would indicate that there would be very little of this community in good to excellent condition due to its fragmented nature and long rural use in this area.

Only 0.5 percent of its original extent remain intact (Office of the Environment and Heritage, 2020).

We are extremely lucky to have remnants of this community in Westleigh Park and it must be preserved.

The Approved Conservation Advice for Turpentine-Ironbark Forest (approved by Delegate of the Minister, 2014) states that action by managers include:

- Manage the impacts of damaging recreational activities, e.g. access by mountain bikes and other vehicles, within bushland remnants through appropriate signage and selectively limiting access to tracks.
- Identify and fence important remnants to minimise impacts from grazing and damaging recreational activities at key sites.

We support the complete removal of mountain bike trails and walking tracks from the STIF.

We also note that STIF occurs as strips on the eastern and western side of the Sydney Water land. These must not be allowed to be damaged and in the long term and should be managed by Council for its conservation.

Duffys Forest

According to the Office of the Environment and Heritage, (2017) this endangered ecological community occurs in association with shale lenses and lateritic soils in Hawkesbury Sandstone and is usually situated on ridgetops, plateaus, and upper slopes. These areas are prone to development, hence its rarity. Estimated original extent was approximately 1450 ha, of which less than 16%, or approximately 240 ha, remains.

We support the complete removal of mountain bike trails and walking tracks from the Duffys Forest plant community.

Impact of sports fields

FBV support the construction of the three sports fields but we are concerned about their impact on the environment.

Most sports fields and access roads in Hornsby Shire have a plume of weeds below them, caused by water and fertiliser run off.

Water, fertiliser, microplastics and any other pollutant must be managed on site, so they do not enter or affect the adjoining Dog Pound Creek Biobanking site and threatened ecological communities, STIF, Duffys Forest and Blue Gum Diatreme Forest

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Regulation 2017, section 1.4 specifically states under additional biodiversity values:

(f) water sustainability—being the degree to which water quality, water bodies and hydrological processes sustain threatened species and threatened ecological communities at a particular site.

With three threatened ecological communities and the endangered Powerful Owl this clause certainly applies here.

Noise from sporting activities is often very loud and is likely to affect fauna the way it does people, we get stressed or move away. We would like noise reduced as much as possible allowing fauna to continue to flourish.

Night lighting on three sports fields, presumably up to 10 pm at night, will be very bright and damage the ability of nocturnal fauna to forage. The lighting for paths and roads will also add to the

amount of light. The National Light Pollution Guidelines by the Australian Government must be followed to reduce this impact.

Synthetic Turf

FBV do not favour synthetic turf on Precinct 2. We are unsure why it has been proposed as the other two fields are natural 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 as it 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.

As stated above, we are also concerned about the impact of microplastics and other particles from synthetic turf on threatened ecological communities and species.

Hornsby – Westleigh Connection

FBV are not in favour of this link.

It would compromise the safety of walkers and other nature lovers at each end of the very popular Blue Gum Walk, at Rosemead Road and at the Ginger Meggs Park end. Sharing with mountain bikes is not often successful as they are fast, rarely slow down to pass and never sound bells. Being in the bush is meant to be relaxing, time to potter around and listen, observe, and smell the scents. This is not possible when on the alert for bikes all the time.

This link also has the possibility of damaging the exceedingly rare Blue Gum Diatreme Forest.

Habitat damage for the abundant Powerful Owls is very likely as this is ideal habitat for them.

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

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