



STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978

Plan Your Parkland – Hornsby Park Project
Hornsby Shire Council
PO Box 37
Hornsby
NSW 1630

7 March 2017

Dear Sir

Re: Hornsby Park

STEP Inc is a local community-based environmental group, with a membership of over 400 in the Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai area. Our group has considerable experience in environmental issues and regenerating and preserving natural bushland and native vegetation.

The landscape character of the Hornsby Park area is unique with the quarry providing a dramatic, quiet, and remote landscape with high environmental and heritage values. We would like these preserved.

The following issues are of major concern to STEP.

Biodiversity

Because we are an environmental group our prime concern is the conservation of flora, fauna and water quality in all sections of the Park. In October 2015 we commented on the Draft Plan of Management - Hornsby Park, Old Mans Valley and Hornsby Quarry, 2015 by Hornsby Shire Council. Our wishes remain the same as in 2015 when we stated that:

“Natural values are of great importance. Any remnant vegetation must be protected and its values enhanced by bush regeneration techniques. These types of forest generally have a high natural regeneration capacity and weed removal and follow up maintenance is often sufficient to regenerate a high quality bushland. Areas that are currently weedy should not be written off as of low value as they may be able to be regenerated easily. Any planting to extend, protect or reinforce these areas must be from local provenance sources. One of the main planning considerations must be the connectivity of the bushland and natural areas internally within the planning areas and with Berowra Valley National Park.

It is pleasing to see that creeks are given great emphasis: for their natural values, water quality control, aesthetic and play values.”

In previous submissions we have highlighted the inadequate data re biodiversity. In the same submission of 2015 we stated that:

“The conservation status and significance is not adequately described. There would be many more than one amphibian and one reptile in such a diverse range of habitats. Thirty one birds are also surprisingly low. The discussion of the native plant species is primarily limited to threatened species and communities and no indication of the range of species and structure is given. A more detailed report on both the flora and fauna is required before any development of the site.”

In 2016 we state in a letter to Hornsby Shire Council that:

“If Council is going to make correct environmental decisions in this important valley then a detailed up to date fauna survey is required. STEP would like assurance that this fauna survey will take place.”

We would like to reinforce our opinion that no planning or construction should take place until a detailed EIS and thorough surveys by reputable consultants are undertaken.

Access

STEP would like the access to the site to be planned from well outside the immediate precinct to allow pedestrian access and minimise parking demand. Currently, the Aquatic Centre and TAFE form a wall around the head of the valley. Clearly marked, safe and prioritized pedestrian and bike access needs to be planned through or around this wall. Planning needs to incorporate the Hornby bus and train interchange and, ideally, Waitara and Asquith stations to ensure safe access.

Internal roads should be sufficient for management purposes but the movement of people needs to be by foot and bike, with cars limited to disability access.

European Heritage

STEP is fully supportive of the conservation of the heritage values of Hornsby Park, the Higgins Cemetery, the Heritage Steps and the Crusher Plant.

Geoheritage

We are particularly supportive of the conservation of the diatrema wall. It is of State and National geological significance and is possibly of world significance as it is a particularly large and well-exposed example of this geological phenomenon (Percival, 1985). Council must leave as much of the eastern face, as illustrated in Percival (1985), exposed as possible for its geological heritage and its aesthetic values. It is a stunning landscape and educational feature that could not be replicated. The scale, shape and colour, is unique and Council should resist attempts to compromise its value with water falls, slides, runs, climbs abseiling, lights and cables. Interpretative signage should not interfere with the geological and aesthetic values. The instability of the diatrema face is also a major factor to be considered.

The unique exposure of the diatrema rocks in the quarry has a huge value in scientific study and teaching. There seems an inexplicable lack of PhD level or other comprehensive academic investigation other than on specific aspects like dating of microfossils. Once it becomes accessible it should become a mecca for earth science students.

We recommend that submissions from geologists re its preservation be acted upon.

Passive recreational use

The provision of recreational space needs to be centered on the natural environment, children and families. There are six main reasons for our recommendations:

1. Natural areas

Natural areas will be more easily protected and enhanced with no active specialized sports use.

2. Historic and planning precedents

Parks of a similar size in Sydney usually have facilities for one or two specific interest groups, with the majority of the park left for the general population to stroll, run, play, sit and picnic. Examples of parks that provide the bulk of the area for passive recreation include Ku-ring-gai Bicentennial Park, Centennial Park, Sydney Park and the large complex of parks at Homebush and Newington that are outside the Olympic complex. This model is widely accepted and Hornsby Shire Council should follow this pattern.

Hornsby Shire Council only has a relatively small area of 45.4 ha to plan (Hornsby Shire Council, 2015). Two specific sports/activities (swimming and mountain bike riding) already existing in the precinct and no more are needed.

3. Demographics

This park is located on the edge of the densest population in the Shire. In 2011 (Hornsby Shire Council, n.d.) parts of Waitara had a population density of 348.62 people per ha, with more apartments added to Waitara, Hornsby, Asquith and Mt Colah since. No additional green space has been provided. Space for those living in apartments to gather with friends and families will need to be provided in outdoor spaces such as Hornsby Park.

The 2011 census also shows (Hornsby Shire Council, n.d. 1) that almost 24% of the population is under 18 years of age. Children need space to run, jump, skip, hop, throw balls and generally just mess around and parents and grandparents need access to facilities for their children. Smooth paths for bikes, prams and strollers and smooth easy grades for the grandparents are required.

4. Walking the main form of exercise in Hornsby

The Active Living Study by Clouston Associates (2015) showed that of all sport or physical recreation walking had the highest participation at 23%. Swimming was only 7.4% and cycling 6.5%. The design for Hornsby Park should reflect the importance of walking above all other activities.

5. Reduce parking requirements

Specialized sports attract people from long distances and these people will generally drive as, even though this park is near public transport, the participants may not live near it. The number of cars with bike racks parked on Quarry Road in the weekend is a sure indicator of problems if space for specific sports is provided. The car park for the Aquatic Centre is frequently full. STEP does not want valuable recreational space eaten up by car parks.

6. Education

The exposed diatreme in the quarry will provide a unique opportunity for earth science education. The nation has recognized the importance of STEM education and diatreme exposure will increase understanding of planetary processes.

Summary

In summary, STEP would like Council to focus on the conservation of natural areas, passive recreation, heritage and educational opportunities for redevelopment of Hornsby Park and to limit activities that will require significant parking and traffic turnover.

Recreational spaces should include:

- Natural areas that are healthy, weed free and managed for their biodiversity
- Clean and healthy creeks
- A clean and healthy natural water pool
- Large children's play areas with interlinked spaces suitable for babies to teenagers. The design theme should be centered on the natural environment and incorporate as much natural imaginative play as possible, e.g. interaction with water.
- BBQ areas, preferably with shelters and most suitably in Old Mans Valley
- Informal lawn areas without BBQs to just lounge around in, throw or kick a ball and fly a kite
- Pathways that are accessible to almost everyone. Most pathways need to be grade 1 (but with a greater length) or 2 (National Parks and Wildlife Service, n.d.). Apart from tracks at Crosslands, Bobbin Head and Ku-ring-gai's Bicentennial Park, almost all bush tracks in Hornsby Shire and Ku-ring-gai Municipality are grade 3 or 4. The Heritage Steps, which would be a grade 3 track, and the walk immediately adjacent to Hornsby Park, Blue Gum Walk (Joes Mountain Circuit), is rated by WildWalks (n.d.) as grade 4. Walking reasonable distances through natural and semi natural areas without vehicular traffic, would be a rare and much needed pleasure for most of the population. STEP therefore suggests that walking tracks, even walking paths through the park's bushland, are generally no more than grade 2 tracks. Pathways should be enhanced by strategic look outs and interpretation.

Active recreation

Provision of a single large multipurpose oval in Old Mans Valley may be suitable but STEP would strongly prefer informal spaces. We understand Hornsby Shire Council is currently formulating a Sports Facility Strategic Plan and any decision on the provision of an oval should be made after the finalization of this plan. STEP considers that sporting fields should be limited to activities that do not generate large numbers of spectators to reduce demand for parking and noise, that will be amplified by the landform.

Mountain bike trails are already in place and STEP strongly recommends that their maintenance and possible extension does not deleteriously impact on biodiversity, water quality, heritage or other park users.

Hornsby Aquatic and Leisure Centre is already inadequate, both in size and the diversity of pools, but any expansion of the centre should not impact on the environment or other park users. STEP would hope that the water feature in the quarry would be maintained for its aesthetics, wildlife and possibly rafting but not for formalized swimming.

Clouston Associates (2014) have suggested various adventure activities. STEP has previously supported limited adventure activities to reduce pressure on the nearby bushland but our opinion is now that the need for passive open space is so urgent that these should be very limited due to parking and other competition for space. Climbing or abseiling on the friable quarry face is potentially dangerous and would damage the geoheritage and aesthetic appeal. Zip lines will do the same. In our experience, tree-top walks can damage the native vegetation, e.g. the Otway Fly in Victoria. Views and outlooks should be sufficient to get a feel for the tree tops.

Recommendations for each area

Taking into consideration all of the above points, in particular the protection of all remnant vegetation and its improvement by bush regeneration techniques, STEP recommends the following facilities for each section:

Quarry area

1. Walking trails
2. Boardwalks and viewing platforms
3. Picnic facilities with adequate shade
4. Open-air amphitheatre – but with strict regulation on sound and light so that the local residents and the fauna are not inconvenienced
5. Lake with nature based activities – birdwatching, rafting?

Old Mans Valley

1. Walking trails
2. Picnic areas with adequate shade (both areas with and without BBQs)
3. Playground – large, imaginative and nature based

The Crusher Plant

1. Walking trails
2. Café
3. Information, art and community space
4. Small play area for the children to use near café.

Hornsby Park

1. Ensure that the design and plant selection reflect its heritage values
2. Improve the health of the Jacarandas near the existing children's play area and immediately undertake succession planting of Jacarandas

Name of the Park

STEP is concerned that this proposal is considered under the name of 'Hornsby Park'. STEP would like consideration to be given to applying the name 'Old Mans Valley' for any area behind the Aquatic Centre and the heritage gardens of Hornsby Park.

Yours sincerely



Jill Green
President

References

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