



North
Shore
Group



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Australian Plants Society
North Shore Group
10 Carnarvon Road Roseville
2069
10th May 2021

The General Manager
Hornsby Shire Council
PO Box 37
Hornsby NSW 1630

Dear Sir

Re: Development of sports fields at Westleigh Park

We are members of the Australian Plants Society North Shore Group (APS). We are aware of planning currently being undertaken by Council to develop sports fields at the former Sydney Water land at Westleigh. This letter is to express our views on what should be considered during that planning process. Would you please pass this letter on to appropriate Council officers.

Background

Our organisation has a membership of about 200, many of whom live in the Hornsby Shire. Our aim is to educate ourselves and the public on the value, propagation, growth and protection of native plants and their habitats. We also encourage the use of Australian Plants in home gardens and public places and aim to interest nursery owners and managers to propagate and sell Australian plants to the public. Many of us are active in the community, and involved in Bushcare, Landcare, floating Landcare, National Parks care, bushwalking and volunteering at the Hornsby Community Nursery. We also manage the outstanding Hornsby Herbarium, in partnership with Council. As a result, we have a deep knowledge of the bushland throughout the Shire.

The Site

We congratulate Council on your decision to purchase the land for the provision of sports fields, rather than letting it be developed for housing. As our population climbs, open areas with recreation facilities and bushland will become increasingly vital to the health, wellbeing and social cohesion of the community.

Given the history of the site, we are impressed by the high quality of the bushland. It contains threatened communities (Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest and Duffys Forest) and rare plants (*Melaleuca deanei*, *Tetratheca glandulosa*, *Epacris purpurascens* and *Darwinia biflora*). Having said that, some sections need attention such as bush regeneration and engineering works to deal with erosion.

We consider that the following factors should be considered during the planning process:

- Bushland currently covers about 23Ha of the 34Ha site. APS is keen to see that this entire area of bush is kept.
- We consider that there are far too many bike tracks through the bush. These reduce the area of bush, and invite the trampling of plants, weed incursion and erosion. They also reduce the enjoyment of people out for a relaxing walk, and endanger their safety. It seems unreasonable to us to devote so much land to one particular group (mountain bike riders) at the expense of bushwalkers, picnickers and others who are looking for peace and quiet. As the population of this part of Sydney increases, quiet areas will become more sought after and valued by the community. We therefore consider that the number of mountain bike tracks should be minimised. They should also be kept out of threatened bush communities completely and located well away from any threatened plants. Unauthorised mountain bike track construction and use is already damaging otherwise good quality bushland. With the opening up of the adjacent sports fields and visitation by many more people, it is likely that there would be more pressure on any remaining mountain bike tracks.
- A bigger cross section of the community could appreciate the rare and beautiful bush area by way of a walking track, as has been proposed. Defined paths should be provided, with signage asking walkers to stick to the paths, to minimise the trampling of plants by bushwalkers.
- Movement of stormwater from the playing fields into local creeks will need careful planning. Hard surfaces and mown grassed areas reduce the efficiency and time for infiltration of rainfall, creating more runoff faster after heavy rain. Water velocities must be kept low to minimise erosion. If sports fields are fertilised, stormwater should be prevented from entering the bush. Runoff from asphalt or concrete carparks will be alkaline and this will also damage native plants. Ponding of stormwater in wetlands should be considered.
- We object to the Precinct 2 Sports field being synthetically surfaced. There is an environmental risk of plastics, micro-plastics and chemicals ending up in adjacent creek catchments and ultimately in the ocean. It is now widely recognised that there is a growing problem of micro-plastic pollution in the ocean. Synthetic turf can be even more toxic if recycled tyre crumbs are used as infill. The ground covered by synthetic turf becomes sterile and there is no food or habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- Any planting on the site should be of local native species. If grass needs to be sown on playing fields, native species should be considered. Any introduced grasses used should be of a type that will not produce wind-blown or water-washed seeds that will invade bushland.

- There is an area of critically endangered Bluegum High Forest (Dog Pound Creek) adjacent to the site. This must be protected from disturbance during construction and use of the sports facility.
- Floodlighting of the facility at night has the ability to significantly reduce visitation by native fauna. Studies show that certain wavelengths of light have a large, adverse impact. As many native trees are fertilised by native fauna this is an important issue.
- The planning should include funding for the bush regeneration of degraded areas.
- The movement of machinery and areas for stockpiling soil and materials during construction must be carefully managed so that the bush is not affected.
- Impacts on the endangered Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest (STIF) must be minimised by the construction and siting of the proposed 7 metre wide asphalt road along the eastern edge of the playing fields in a north south direction. The regeneration of the STIF to the east of the asphalt road and in other places is applauded. Plantings for this should be propagated from endemic plant material from adjacent STIF plants.
- Sydney Water has given an in-principle agreement to the potential Sefton Road extension being built within their property, ie the grassed strip. We are very opposed to any alternative that would result in any loss of good quality STIF if it becomes necessary to consider alternative routes. A Sefton Rd extension would presumably be substantial as it would carry large amounts of local Quartersessions Road, Westleigh residents' traffic as they use it as a shortcut to Hornsby.

We hope our comments receive serious consideration during the planning, tendering, contract supervision, maintenance and usage of this very important Sports Facility.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sue Bowen
President, Australian Plants Society North Shore Group