

3 December 2025

Councillor Clover Moore AO

Lord Mayor

City Of Sydney

Email: [cmoore@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cmoore@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Clover,

**Update for Johnstons Creek Parklands, Master Plan (2013) and the  
Johnstons Creek Parklands Plan of Management (2022).**

The City's Johnstons Creek Parklands, Master Plan (2013) is especially important for the amenity of Glebe and Forest Lodge as these green spaces are used on a weekly basis by thousands of local residents and visitors.

*[Please note: in 2022 the City published its Johnstons Creek Parklands Plan of Management. The document, however, considers only very briefly the mangroves, wetlands and Glebe's Hill contained within the Parklands; in the 86-page document these features are only referred to on a total of seven occasions. Further, it does not mention the significant contamination of the Hill. Clearly the Plan of Management will also need to be updated following the revision of the Master Plan.]*

The current 2013 Master Plan is no longer fit for purpose and requires updating.

In updating the Master Plan, the Society's recommends that the City consider the following:

*A. Mangrove plantings*

The 2013 Master Plan states: "Retain and enhance existing mangrove planting. Consider strategies to protect and improve the health of the mangroves."

The constructed mangrove wetlands on Rozelle Bay have indeed proved to be a valuable contribution to habitat values of the park. Recent annual spring bird surveys conducted by the Society have demonstrated how successful the mangroves have been in providing bird habitat especially for small bird breeding (willie wagtails) and water birds.

**Recommendation - the revised Master Plan should actively investigate feasibility of extending the plantings of mangroves (*Avicennia marina*) to new areas in Bicentennial Park 2 and ensure fencing and signage for the current site is improved to stop dogs and people from damaging the area. Expanding the area to include additional saltmarsh species is also to be recommended.**

*B. Expanding areas of saltmarsh and construction of freshwater wetlands*

The 2013 Master Plan proposes: “..a separate freshwater wetland and saltmarsh treatment systems...and to separate the fresh and saltwater wetlands”.

The constructed, fenced saltmarsh in Federal Park has become quite degraded and is urgently requiring dredging and proper maintenance to function adequately. It is now rarely accessed by the native birds that were described in the 2013 Master Plan, according to the Society’s annual bird surveys. There appears to be no progress on the proposed freshwater treatment wetland and better management of storm water. Federal Park paths become inundated after rain and drainage issues need to be addressed.

**Recommendations –**

- 1. Provide an update to residents about the plans for the freshwater wetland and reasons for the delay in progressing this plan. The Society sees great value in this proposal and wishes it to proceed in a timely manner.**
- 2. Urgently improve the condition of the fenced saltmarsh**
- 3. Improve drainage and access for paths along the canal by extending the boardwalk if possible**

*C. Glebe’s Hill*

**Background**

By 1890 The Hill served as Glebe municipality’s major dumping ground for house garbage and refuse; its use continued until 1926. Later on, the flat part of the Hill was capped with bitumen and used as a car park for patrons of the Harold Park trotting and greyhound races. There have now been at least eight published consultants’ reports about the contamination of Glebe’s Hill dating from 1999 to 2010.

The condition of Glebe’s Hill as it exists now is of concern to the Glebe Society. Coffey Geosciences (2000) concluded in their report that the “existing contamination could affect the health of future users as well as vegetation growth. Complete removal of The Hill was deemed prohibitively expensive” (2013 Master Plan). Later reports prepared by JBS Environmental Pty Ltd in 2010, found that soil samples contained high levels of contamination by lead, other chemicals and bonded asbestos sufficient for the site to be considered a soil contamination hotspot. Further, fill material was encountered in bore holes to a depth of 10m.

The 2013 Master Plan recommends that public access to the contaminated Hill could be provided by:

1. re-shaping The Hill to allow contamination treatment, and therefore planting of endemic species.
2. constructing both elevated walkways through the heritage significant fig trees and an elevated viewing platform to reduce the need for on-ground walkways and maximise habitat availability.
3. Constructing pocket playgrounds on The Hill to allow for more adventurous play for older children; the playgrounds could be integrated with public art.

These recommendations, however, seem not to have fully taken into account the 2000 contamination report and certainly would not be advised following the publication of the 2010 reports.

### **Glebe Society was awarded a City of Sydney's Innovation and Ideas Grant**

1. The City awarded the Glebe Society a \$45,000 Innovation and Ideas Grant in 2022 entitled "*Glebe's Hill - unravelling its biodiversity secrets and potential*". The funds were used to support research conducted by the School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Sydney - Professor Dieter Hochuli's group investigated the flora and fauna of the site with the view of determining whether the 0.6Ha Hill could become a wildlife refuge.
2. The University's report was presented to Society members and local residents at a meeting in Glebe Town Hall, and published in November 2024.
3. Four public meetings/events were held to inform the local community about the grant and present the results of the University's research. These events were attended by 240 local residents, including the Lord Mayor, and there was unanimous support for Glebe's Hill becoming a wildlife refuge.
4. The University's report concluded "The Glebe's Hill project presents a significant opportunity to enhance urban biodiversity in the City of Sydney in a way that supports nature and people. By transforming this degraded site into a thriving greenspace, the project aims to create a model for urban ecological restoration that can be replicated in other cities."

## Recommendations

### The updated Master Plan should:

- 1. expand the size of The Hill so that it includes the pathway along its southern boundary.**

The current status of the pathway (a designated road) that runs along the southern boundary of The Hill (i.e. between The Hill and the Tramsheds) is not clear. The pathway because of its proximity to Glebe's Hill is likely to also be heavily contaminated. The two sites (The Hill and the pathway) should be considered as a single expanded Hill as there are now alternative, safe ways to walk between Glebe and Annandale.

- 2. avoid a major remediation of The Hill.**

Major remediation would involve encapsulation of the contaminated material, surface capping of part or the entire site, treatment off or on-site, or off-site disposal – all of which would be at great expense. As stated in the 2013 Master Plan, Coffey Geosciences (2000) concluded "Complete removal of The Hill was deemed prohibitively expensive". In recent correspondence from the City's CEO, the cost of full remediation was estimated at \$20 million.

- 3. designate an expanded Glebe's Hill as a wildlife refuge.**

As stated above, the University of Sydney's report concluded that "The Glebe's Hill project presents a significant opportunity to enhance urban biodiversity in the City of Sydney in a way that supports nature and people. By transforming this degraded site into a thriving greenspace, the project aims to create a model for urban ecological restoration that can be replicated in other cities." Their recommendations also included the planting of native species with staggered flowering periods to support pollinators and other wildlife i.e. the establishment of an urban wildlife refuge.

A wildlife refuge could be quickly and easily established on The Hill, it would remove the suggested children's play areas in a heavily contaminated site (as proposed in the 2013 Master Plan) and cause little disturbance to the existing vegetation.

The Society is excited about these relatively simple, economical solutions to the problem of safe, limited access to Glebe's Hill which would bring the public closer to wildlife. A wildlife refuge would provide the City with a unique opportunity to improve the biodiversity of our City and enhance its wild-life corridors. Let's create a win-win solution – a win for the City of Sydney and a win for the people of Glebe and Forest Lodge!

## Conclusion

In concluding, the Society believes that the current Johnstons Creek Parklands, Master Plan (2013) is now outdated; the current Plan is especially deficient in its failure to recognise the significant contamination (including with asbestos) of Glebe's Hill. **Given the significant flaws in the current Master Plan, the Society would be grateful if the City could please promptly update its Johnstons Creek Parklands Master Plan and the Johnstons Creek Parklands Plan of Management.**

We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these proposals,

With many thanks and kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Duncan Leys', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Duncan Leys, Acting President

### Attached references

#### *Consultants' reports*

Interim Environmental Plan, City of Sydney, 12 Maxwell Road Glebe NSW (2010), JBS Environmental Pty Ltd, 22pp.

Remedial Options Report, City of Sydney, 12 Maxwell Road Glebe NSW (2010), JBS Environmental Pty Ltd, 40pp.

#### *University of Sydney*

Hochuli DF, Lequerica Tamara ME and Heggarty GA (2024). "Glebe's Hill - unravelling its biodiversity secrets and potential". Integrative Ecology Research Group, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, The University of Sydney.