

Ms Monica Barone
Chief Executive Officer
City of Sydney Council
GPO Box 1591
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms Barone,

Re: Host your own conversation – crown lands plans of management

The Glebe Society has been caring for Glebe and Forest Lodge for over 50 years and has nearly 400 members. It rests upon three pillars – heritage, community and the environment. This submission reflects our concerns in relation to all of these “pillars”.

A. INTRODUCTION

The City’s management of the Crown Lands in Glebe and Forest Lodge, as remnants and reconstructed landscapes of rare green open space in a densely built city, provides opportunities for a renewed commitment to Indigenous sustainable management principles of “Caring for Country”. These management practices should support the health and well-being of the land (“country”), in recognising Aboriginal custodianship of these lands, and local Aboriginal expertise should be sought where possible.

The planting and maintenance of diverse native plant species to provide shade and habitat, a mix of native grasses, shrubs, small trees, ‘native meadows’ (as at Prince Alfred Park), dense small bird habitat and re-establishment of original vegetation (where appropriate) should be encouraged to promote biodiversity, environmental awareness, and a sense of continuity with Sydney’s pre-1788 history.

There needs to be tight regulation on the proportion of these lands that can be built on or leased - to maximise deep-soil planting areas, as an offset to the loss of private garden space in modern housing/apartment developments and to protect this land for future generations.

Any proposed future development on these Crown Lands should be minimal, preferably with a focus on environmental improvements (e.g., Indigenous plant nursery, flora and tool storage) and should focus on how the proposed building or structure impacts the land.

The provision of public access to the natural environment - to vegetation and water, creeks, bays and wetlands is vital for the mental health and well-being of the community. These areas in Glebe (especially Johnston’s Creek parklands) were traditional Aboriginal gathering places. These lands in Glebe are highly valued by the community, as places of beauty, with diverse landscape and topography, water views, easy access to native and natural elements, a sense of history and as places for connecting everyone to a sense of ‘country’.

This response from the Glebe Society Inc will comment on the plans of management for some of the crown land sites in our suburb – Glebe Foreshore Walk East, the seven Johnston’s Creek sites and

Wentworth Park. We will respond to the statements numbered 1 to 7 in a general way for all of the relevant sites and then make more specific comments about particular sites.

B. STATEMENTS

1. Aboriginal people's custodianship will be recognised in Sydney's open spaces

We agree with the statement.

We support the health and preservation of the remaining endemic indigenous heritage items in Glebe's parks and reserves. The original native flora should be reintroduced and local Indigenous principles of caring for country should be used in plans of management.

Even at Wentworth Park, which is essentially constructed on reclaimed land formed from the Nineteenth Century draining of the degraded swamp at the Northern end of Blackwattle Creek, its occupation by the original inhabitants, and their activities there, should be recorded and commemorated appropriately.

2. Sydney's open spaces will be accessible to everyone

We generally agree with the statement, but with exceptions.

To preserve and re-establish resilient native flora and fauna, certain areas, including the wetlands, mangroves, "The Hill" on the northern side of the Tramsheds and the banks of Johnston's Creek should at least for a temporary period not be made accessible to the public. This could also be ongoing according to the management objectives of the specific sites, for example habitat protection.

Since 1938 the central portion of Wentworth Park (the "sporting complex") has been the more or less exclusive preserve of the greyhound racing industry, originally the National Coursing Association (NCA), and now the Greyhound Breeders Owners and Trainers Association (GBOTA). In 1985 the NCA built a massive grandstand, which now stands almost empty on racing nights, and which is effectively an office building in a public park. When the GBOTA licence expires in 2027, or before that when greyhound racing ceases at Wentworth Park and the commercial leases in the grandstand come to an end, the whole of the park including the sporting complex should once again be accessible to everyone.

3. Sydney's open spaces will be places to recharge mental health, relax, connect to nature and the outdoors

We agree with the statement.

Parks must be large enough to provide open spaces where people can be undisturbed and quietly enjoy a passive activity such as sitting and reading a book. It will be necessary to actively manage the parks for their different uses so that peaceful, quiet zones are created in locations of natural ecosystems – all aimed at improving mental health and a connection with the local environment. Such sites should be freed from lively activities and dogs.

4. Sydney's open spaces will be places to be active and will provide room for recreation, exercise and sporting activities

We generally agree with the statement, but a balance should be achieved.

Sporting activities should be confined to those open spaces where they currently take place. Jubilee Oval is laid out as a public oval, complete with grandstand and perimeter fence, and should continue to be used for cricket, Australian Rules football, hockey and any other organised sports. There are sporting fields in Federal Park 1 and on either side of the light rail viaduct in Wentworth Park.

The one exception to this suggested limitation is that when the greyhounds depart from Wentworth Park (see below), the greyhound track should become a public oval (similar to the Reg Bartley Oval in Rushcutters Bay Park).

It should be noted that there are very few parking spaces that could support an expansion of the existing sporting facilities in Glebe. It should also be noted that the proposals for the future park at the WestConnex Rozelle Interchange site, adjacent to Glebe, include ovals and spaces for other sporting activities.

Every open space should have clearly delineated, separate areas where dogs are not permitted as well as those where dogs should be leashed and where dogs should be permitted to run freely.

5. Sydney's open spaces will celebrate local history, which includes First Peoples of Australia, public art, heritage interpretation, and have space for community/cultural activities

We agree with the statement, but with reservations.

The celebration of local history should be facilitated through native vegetation and preservation of wetlands and topographical features that tell the story of Indigenous peoples. Revegetation of the crown lands should replicate the original species and enrich the biodiversity at the varied locations and establish corridors of connecting elements that reflect the history of the sites. In considering new cultural and community activities, it is essential that Glebe's limited green spaces are not reduced by the construction of further buildings or other structures.

6. *Sydney's open spaces will be multipurpose and multifunctional to respond to the changing needs of our diverse community*

We disagree with this statement as it fails to include the role of ongoing community engagement and consultation.

As an inner-city suburb, Glebe has few parks and reserves; the crown lands are precious open spaces in a densely populated community. The long term vision should include establishing and preserving the biodiversity and vegetation of the crown lands as well as the protection of their historic elements. The present form of the lands should be retained and the community should be consulted about any proposed changes involving their purpose and function.

In the case of Wentworth Park, its layout and revegetation should also reflect its heritage as a "gardenesque" Nineteenth Century park and public sporting facility.

7. *Sydney's open spaces will be lush and green and provide cooling shade from increasing heat*

We agree with the statement as part of an acknowledgement of the need to provide a diversity of vegetation for open spaces.

It is essential to provide a diversity of native flora including a variety of trees and the establishment of native meadows and grass heath lands. Some areas should be densely planted, fenced and gated to provide an undisturbed habitat for small birds. And as mentioned above, the rehabilitation and revegetation of Wentworth Park should also reflect its history and heritage.

C. SPECIFIC COMMENTS ABOUT PARTICULAR CROWN LAND SITES

1. *Glebe Foreshore Walk East*

We have assumed this site extends along the foreshore from Bridge Road in a northerly direction to the junction of Blackwattle and Rozelle Bays (at the level of *Bellevue House now used as a restaurant - Bellevue Cottage By Antoine*). Foreshore Walk West extends from this junction of the eastern border of Pope Paul VI reserve at the northern end of Glebe Point Road.

The Walk has been extensively planted with native flora and is well maintained with the recent installation of metal loop fencing helping to protect the flora. The plan of management for the Walk should include a diversity of flora which includes species appropriate for the bay foreshore. A “native meadow” should be considered as a replacement for some of the grassland in front of the Walter Burley Griffin incinerator.

The East and West Walks are shared by pedestrians, often with children’s prams and dogs, joggers and bicyclists, which have at times resulted in a dangerous combination with injuries occurring as the various components interact. There is not sufficient space, especially at the “pinch” points to create a separate bicycle track so cyclists who wish to use Glebe Foreshore Walk East and West should be required to dismount.

2. Johnston’s Creek

- Wetlands, saltmarsh areas and mangroves

The existing biodiversity is excellent, and the sites recognise the original land use by indigenous peoples where they would have provided an important range of food and water sources. The provision of seating enhances the quiet passive enjoyment of these sites.

- “The Hill” on the northern side of the Tramsheds

We recommend that the crown land on the northern side of the Tramsheds (known locally as “The Hill” and listed as part of Jubilee Park) become a dedicated urban wildlife habitat refuge.

Due to its contaminated land, “The Hill” is currently fenced off from the surrounding area and cannot be used as a park open space. Its position, fencing and vegetation can provide an environment for abundant wildlife including birds, lizards, bees and small mammals to shelter and flourish. Organisations such as the Australian Wildlife Conservancy have shown that through successful management practices, fenced land areas can offer optimal opportunities for feral animal and weed control, as well as providing a safe haven for native fauna. In the Society’s bird surveys (conducted by its Blue Wren Subcommittee) raptors, crested pigeons, brush turkeys and other birds have been identified on this crown land site.

Such a wild habitat refuge would be unique in the local government area and could also provide a safe site for the translocation of bird species, including the blue wren, which are no longer found in Glebe. Other opportunities include ongoing urban habitat research and community engagement through the use of remote sensing cameras installed within the site (similar to the peregrine falcon project at 367 Collins St Melbourne).

- Work of bushcare volunteers and the connectivity between sites of crown land

In the mid-1990s, community volunteers initiated the revegetation and restoration of native flora in the Federal Park and Johnstons Creek areas and established the Rozelle Bay Community Nursery. In recent years, the maintenance of some of these sites has been continued by Bushcare volunteers

supported by the City. The City should build on this community legacy and continue to encourage and support the work of Bushcare volunteers in caring for its crown lands.

The Johnston's Creek parks provide a unique link between seven crown land sites in a densely populated inner-city suburb. The topography contains a currently being restored creek, wetlands, flat areas, cliff faces and hills all of which are connected so providing the potential for enhanced biodiversity and wildlife corridors.

Please let me and the Society's Blue Wren Subcommittee (bluewrens@glebesociety.org.au) know if there is any further information we can provide,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Wahlquist" followed by a horizontal flourish.

Janet Wahlquist
President