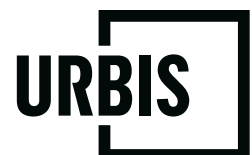




WESTLEIGH PARK REVISED DRAFT MASTER PLAN

Submissions analysis report

Prepared for
HORNSBY SHIRE COUNCIL
June 2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, Hornsby Shire Council exhibited the Westleigh Park draft Master Plan. This was accompanied by a comprehensive community engagement program that heard from 1,147 people over approximately six weeks.

Although there was broad support from the majority of those who were engaged through both community engagement and a telephone survey, some clear areas of contention emerged. These were primarily regarding the location and extent of mountain bike trails on site, and separately, concerns about traffic generation.

As a result, Council determined to defer the adoption of the draft Master Plan, requesting targeted engagement to better understand stakeholder perspectives. This engagement was undertaken and led to the revised draft Master Plan being updated. Details of the changes can be found in chapter two.

The revised draft Master Plan was placed on exhibition for the second time between 13 March - 11 April 2023 inclusive, focussing on the changes to the draft Master Plan. Details on how the exhibition was promoted is included in chapter three.

685 new submissions regarding the revised draft Master Plan were received via *Your Say Hornsby* website; email; and written letters during the re-exhibition period. As a result of analysis, 1,801 topics were coded into themes. The coding process followed standard industry practice. That is, identifying topics which were then grouped into key themes.

It should be noted that 64 percent of respondents that submitted through the *Your Say Hornsby* website identified themselves as being residents of Hornsby Shire, as shown in Table 1 on page four.

This report provides a high-level summary of the themes that emerged from the coded topics. Key insights include:

Mountain bike trails

Responses were consistent with the initial feedback heard in 2021, confirming that this is a polarised issue.

Responses supportive of the redesigned trails outlined community and personal benefits, and a desire to strike a balance between mountain biking on site, while protecting the natural environment.

Although much of the opposition to formalising the trails was related to their location in sensitive and protected environmental areas (for example the Sydney Turpentine and Ironbark Forest (STIF) and Duffys Forest), some respondents explicitly stated opposition to formalising the trails across the whole site, due to the unsanctioned beginnings of the trails, and the need for the bush to be rehabilitated.

Sports platforms

A consensus was noted about the need for local sports facilities across the Shire. However, within this consensus, opposing views emerged about the inclusion of a synthetic surface. Responses in favour cited the all-weather surface facilitating more practice and playing time, and those against feared a detrimental impact on the environment.

Environmental sustainability

Opposition to the revised draft Master Plan was expressed in reference to environmental sustainability. It was argued that the proposal would have a negative impact on the site's vulnerable environment, add to biodiversity loss, and adversely affect wildlife such as the Powerful Owl. Others specifically called upon Council to act as a protector of the natural environment and requested there be a stronger focus on rehabilitation.

Traffic management

Of the responses that mentioned traffic, concern was expressed that the revised draft Master Plan would result in unacceptable traffic generation and safety concerns for the local roads. The need for the proposed extension of Sefton Road was also questioned.

Other recreation

Some respondents expressed concern that the revised draft Master Plan did not adequately cater for the needs of bushwalkers, botanists, birdwatchers or citizen scientists, instead prioritising mountain bike trails. In addition, it was argued that separate trails are needed for both mountain biking and bushwalking as they cannot co-exist safely on the one trail.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

This report has been prepared by Urbis Pty Ltd (Urbis) for Hornsby Shire Council (Council). It provides a summary of the views expressed in submissions lodged during the public exhibition of the Westleigh Park draft Master Plan between 13 March and 11 April, 2023.

WESTLEIGH PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

In 2021, Council began developing the Westleigh Park revised draft Master Plan (draft Master Plan). The draft Master Plan sought to transform a large parcel of land in Westleigh into a community asset that balances the needs for a high-quality multi-use recreational facility along with conservation of its natural bushland.

The draft Master Plan detailed Council's proposed uses. These included a range of active and passive recreational opportunities for the community to enjoy whilst protecting the biodiversity values associated with the bushland areas. These opportunities included:

- Community sport
- Opportunities for school and club athletics
- Cycling and mountain biking
- Informal exercising and walking
- Children's playground
- Bushwalking
- Passive recreation such as picnic areas, and
- Biodiversity protection and enhancement.

Previous engagement

In 2021, Council began an extensive community consultation program to meaningfully engage with the wider community and key stakeholders to inform the draft Master Plan's development.

Two types of engagement were undertaken.

A randomised telephone survey with 700 Hornsby residents that was weighted by age and gender to reflect the 2016 ABS community profile of Hornsby Shire Council. The results of the telephone survey indicated that 81 per cent of participants believed that the draft Master Plan had a good balance of restoring and protecting the natural environment while providing a diverse range of recreation activities.

In addition, Council embarked upon a comprehensive community engagement program. Council heard from 1,147 people who were reached through the following activities over an approximate six-week period:

- Project website
- Notification via the Council rates notice, Council's eNewsletter and a letterbox drop
- Advertising via newspaper, social media and display boards
- Stakeholder briefings with a range of Council committees and community groups
- Online survey
- Community swing bys at Hornsby Mall and Ruddock Park
- Written submissions to Council.

Although there was broad support for the overall content of the draft Master Plan, a range of competing interests between some stakeholder groups was identified. In particular, contention between the mountain biking community and environmental groups regarding the bushland on site; and local residents concerned about traffic generation.

After reviewing the outcomes of engagement, Councillors voted to defer adoption of the draft Master Plan to undertake additional consultation between March and October 2022 to better understand stakeholder perspectives.

Two streams of engagement were then undertaken.

In relation to the mountain bike trails on site, seven workshops were held with stakeholders with a particular focus on the current and future uses of the bushland in Westleigh Park and how the draft Master Plan could further balance competing community needs - specifically in Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest (STIF) and Duffys Forest.

Regarding concerns over traffic generation, two workshops were held. The first focused on understanding the issues and establishing a register to track Council's actions. At the second workshop, a traffic model developed by Bitzios Consulting was presented.

At the completion of this engagement, Council revised its draft Master Plan based on the outcomes of what was heard from the community and stakeholders.

The changes made to the revised draft Master Plan included:

Bushland areas and mountain bike trails

With respect to bushland areas and mountain bike trails, changes were made to the revised draft Master Plan informed by stakeholder feedback, best practice design principles and on-site investigations. These included:

- Validating the onsite vegetation community composition and mapping
- Undertaking seasonal flora and fauna surveys
- Maintaining a focus on providing easy to intermediate trails
- Avoidance and reduction of tracks in areas of high value biodiversity
- Creation of additional trails in less sensitive areas
- Reusing and upgrading existing tracks to avoid creating new trails and impacts where possible
- Establishment of a primary track head that includes wayfinding and auxiliary facilities (e.g., wash bays) at selected sites
- Creation of zones and hubs to improve rider experience and environmental sustainability
- Ground truthing to ensure constructability

The revised draft Master Plan also identified potential connections between Westleigh Park and Hornsby Park. These connections would link established fire trails and roadways with Hornsby Mountain Bike Park.

Traffic management

In respect to the traffic matters, particularly on Sefton Road, the revised draft Master Plan referred to the Bitzios report which was available for the community to read.

Other changes to the document

In addition to the above, the revised draft Master Plan:

- Reaffirmed Council's intention to develop an environmentally and culturally sustainable framework for the development of recreational uses that:
 - Avoids, minimises and mitigates impacts on biodiversity at every stage
 - Poses minimal to no adverse impacts to the local creek system and applies Water Sensitive Urban Design (WUSD).
 - Supports sustainable energy
 - Designs for bushfires
 - Promotes active transport
 - Connects with Country
 - Additional and updated mapping has been included that:
 - Shows the extent of contamination
 - Shows updated (validated by Eco Logical Australia) vegetation communities
 - Provides greater detail on the expected staging of the development.

Additionally, the revised draft Master Plan:

- Addressed the approach to landfill
- Provided more detail and updated information on remediation, specifically in environmental areas
- Included stormwater management and Water Sensitive Urban Design information
- Included information on Indigenous Heritage

EXHIBITION AND ANALYSIS

EXHIBITION

The revised draft Master Plan was placed on public exhibition on the *Your Say Hornsby* website from 13 March 2023 – 11 April 2023.

Promotion of exhibition

Notification of exhibition was provided through the following publications and electronic communication channels:

- *Your Say Hornsby* website
- Council's April e-News
- April newspapers "Have Your Say" – Bush Telegraph, The Post, Galston & Glenorie Community News, Dooral Roundup.
- Weekly Community Engagement newsletters
- Facebook post (15 March)

Exhibition submission channels

Submissions were received through Council's *Your Say Hornsby* website via a feedback form, email to hsc@hornsby.nsw.gov.au, and via written letter.

ANALYSIS

Submissions

685 submissions about the Westleigh Park revised draft Master Plan were received and coded. They were submitted by letter, via email to hsc@hornsby.nsw.gov.au, and through Council's *Your Say Hornsby* website feedback form.

Table 1 – submissions received through *Your Say Hornsby* website and via email or letter.

<i>Your Say Hornsby</i> website	546
Email/ letter (including pro forma)	139

Your Say Hornsby website self-selection data

For the 546 submissions that were uploaded via Council's *Your Say Hornsby* website, submitters were asked to answer the following question: *I would like to provide feedback on the following section(s) of the revised draft Master Plan (required).*

The results and postcode analysis are provided below:

Table 2 – Sections selected and postcodes identified.

Sections Selected (respondents could select more than one section)			Postcode identified		
Section	Theme Count*	Theme Percent**	Hornsby Local Government Area (LGA) ***	Neighbouring**** LGA	Other LGA
Mountain Bike Trails	420	76.92%	59%	22%	20%
Sportsfields	177	32.42%	86%	10%	3%

Environmental sustainability	57	10.44%	65%	14%	21%
Traffic management	55	10.07%	95%	2%	4%
Other recreation	51	9.3%	86%	6%	8%
Access	38	6.96%	82%	5%	13%
Implementation of the Master Plan	34	6.23%	76%	12%	12%
Connecting with Country	13	2.38%	77%	0%	23%
Other	13	2.38%	69%	15%	15%
Landfill management	12	2.2%	83%	8%	8%
Total	870		64% *****	19%	16%

Interpreting the table

A number of factors need to be considered when interpreting the statistics in the table above.

*Respondents could select multiple sections. This resulted in the 546 submissions covering 870 sections.

**Percentages were calculated on 546 submissions. E.g 77 per cent of respondents selected Mountain Bike Trails.

*** Correlates the postcodes to themes. E.g 59 per cent of respondents that selected Mountain Biking nominated a Hornsby Local Government Area (LGA) postcode.

**** Neighbouring LGA shares a boarder with Hornsby LGA. They include Parramatta, The Hills and Ku-ring-gai.

***** Indicates that of the 546 submissions 64 per cent (352) nominated the Hornsby LGA.

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

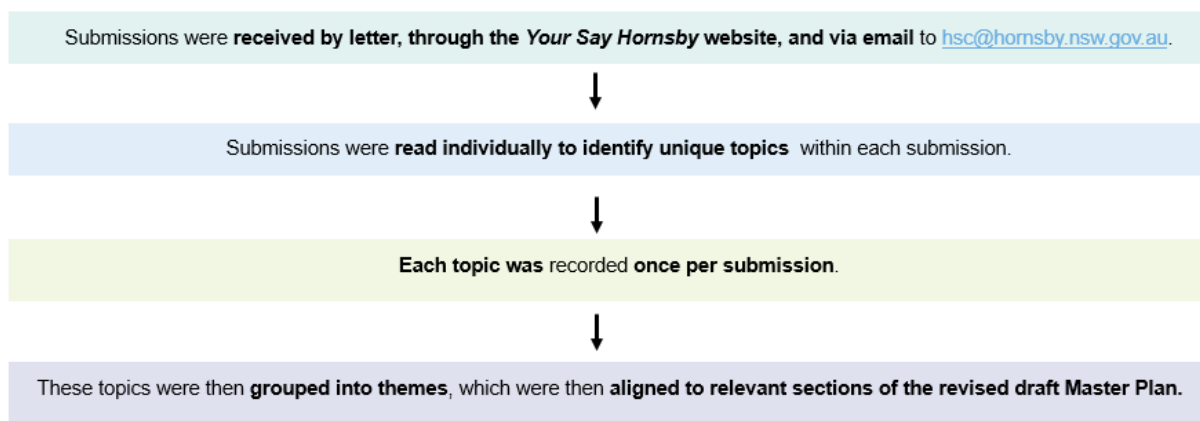
685 submissions were received through the channels listed. Submissions were made by individuals, organisations and groups.

A thematic analysis identified and recorded topic(s) covered in each submission. As a standard practice, the approach allows unique topics that are mentioned in a single submission to be analysed and recorded, and then grouped into themes.

The process of analysing submissions followed these steps:

- Submissions were read to identify unique topics.
- Topics were recorded once per submission. **This resulted in 1801 'coded' topics.**
- Topics were grouped into themes.
- Themes were then aligned to the relevant sections of the revised draft Master Plan.

The diagram below outlines the methodology:



For this report, topics and themes have been summarised, with direct quotes from submissions illustrating the range of views expressed.

Duplicate and proforma submissions

Six (6) submissions were duplicates, lodged through the *Your Say Hornsby* website and email/letter. The topics mentioned in submissions were counted once and are included in the 1801 'coded' topics.

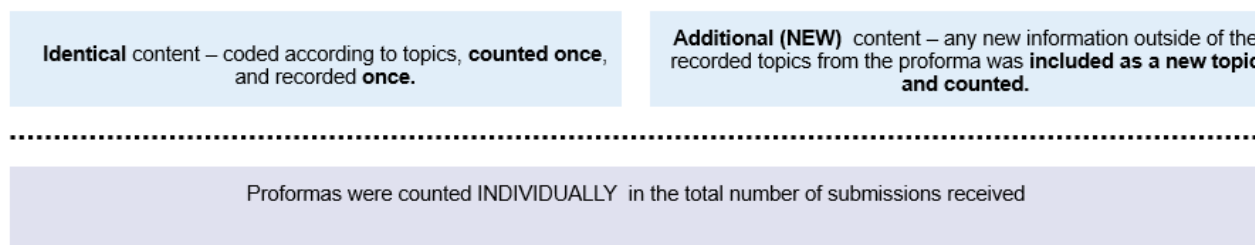
86 submissions came in the form of a pro forma. That is, each submission contained identical pre-filled content, with space for additional individualised content. This number is included in the 685 submissions.

The following process was adopted to code these pro forma submissions:

- Identical (pre-filled) content – coded according to topics. Each topic was counted once and recorded once.
- Additional content – any new information outside of the recorded topics from the pro forma was included as a new topic and counted.

These pro formas are included in the 1801 'coded' topics.

This process is outlined in the diagram below:



This process has created consistency with the coding method for all other submissions received.

OUTCOMES OF ANALYSIS

This report is intended to provide a high-level summary of submissions, and an insight into the key themes that emerged. As such, de-identified quotes from submissions have been included to illustrate key topics and themes. Applying the standard practice, and complying with privacy and consent requirements, individual submissions (which could potentially identify respondents) have not been included as part of this summary report.

It should be noted that this report and the quotes selected have been prepared to reflect the types of topics and themes that emerged, rather than the 'popularity' or otherwise of a particular issue.

Caution is advised against drawing more general conclusions from the themes in this report regarding the sentiments held by the wider community (approximately 150, 000 LGA residents). Submissions were sought and made voluntarily by community members, on an 'opt-in' basis. They are not a statistically representative sample of the wider community.

THE REVISED DRAFT MASTER PLAN

Support

A sentiment recorded during the coding process expressed support (either directly or implied) for the revised draft Master Plan. This support can be grouped into the following categories: Community need for sports facilities; Support for mountain biking; Achieving a balance between recreation and environmental protection; and General support for more recreational space and facilities across Hornsby Shire. These categories are explored in the thematic analysis that appears in chapter three.

Some responses expressed categorical endorsement. Examples of this explicit support included the following:

"I support the current draft master plan".

"Hornsby Council's master plan is fantastic for the local community".

"Master plan has struck the right balance".

Opposition

Implied or direct opposition, concern, or criticisms of the revised draft Master Plan were also expressed. These can be grouped into the following broad categories - impacts on the environment; Traffic generation; and, Opposition to mountain biking (especially in STIF and Duffys Forest). Some submissions also cited inadequate or inaccurate information and called for the revised draft Master Plan to be updated and re-exhibited. These categories are explored further in this chapter. However, examples of the explicit opposition to the master plan included:

"I do not support the above Master Plan."

"In principle I support the provision of local sporting fields at Westleigh Park, however I am strongly opposed to the current revised draft Master Plan which due to its size would adversely impact on the site, would be detrimental to the significant biodiversity of the area's environment and would have a strong negative impact on the local community of Westleigh & Thornleigh, it's traffic and it's local commerce."

"The proposed Westleigh Park Development is of such scale that it will overwhelm Westleigh in physical size, traffic, parking and noise and destroy part of the bushland surrounds."

"Significant amendments must be made to the current Revised draft Master Plan and re-exhibited for public comment."

MOUNTAIN BIKE (MTB) TRAILS

The largest number of responses received related to mountain bike trails. A large number supported formalising the trails, as it was argued this would mitigate the risk of unsanctioned trails and minimise the impact on the environment. These submissions also outlined other benefits such as connecting with nature, the variety of experiences the trails provide riders and the health and wellbeing benefits to individuals and families. Opinions that reflect this included:

“Voice my support for the redesigned mountain bike trail network.”

“We purchased our home in Westleigh to be close to the MTB trails, and its surrounding bushland. I am privileged to be able to ride from home into the sensational Westleigh H2O bushland and local fire-trails at least a few times per week.”

“I strongly support the retention of mountain bike trails and doing so in a way that minimises environmental impact and maximises the trails that can be used by people of all ages and abilities.”

“Having easily accessible and well-maintained bike tracks that are cared for by the council reduces the drive for people to build illegal tracks. They are important to keeping all people engaged with keeping our environment as healthy as possible.”

It was argued by some that the location of the proposed tracks would aid in the protection of other, more sensitive environmental areas while maintaining a connection to nature. Examples of this opinion include:

“As a mtb rider, I support the avoidance and reduction of tracks in areas of high value biodiversity and creation of additional trails in less sensitive areas.”

“It is entirely possible and expected to construct these trails in a way that minimises any potential environmental impact and even has a net positive effect on the local ecology. There are many, many similar examples of this seen elsewhere, particularly overseas where professional trail planning and building is nothing new.”

The importance that the trail network design will have in providing a variety of experiences for riders of all abilities was also well documented. Examples included:

“The plan provides a sensible stacked loop network that will allow for rider progression from beginner to intermediate level riders. It also will provide a great riding experience by taking riders on a tour of the many and varied ecological communities which enables riders to experience the different environments and allow them to appreciate them for their uniqueness. Consideration should be given to add interpretive signage to inform users of the different ecological communities, what makes them unique, and the role they play in the mosaic of the greater landscape in which we live.”

“This site is the only location in HSC where inexperienced riders and family can ride safely.”

“I believe the focus on intermediate and beginner trails will be well received, though I also look forward to some advanced riding options.”

Another recurring topic was the personal benefit that mountain biking has had on individuals and families in the area, especially in relation to family health and wellbeing. Examples included the benefits of bringing families together for sport and fitness and reducing the time children spent on devices. Comments that reflect this included:

“Our family have enjoyed riding around the Westleigh trails, exploring the tracks and having great fun outdoors. We can't do enough to encourage kids away from devices and into outdoor play, especially as they mature into teens.”

“Just a quick note to say how important and influential the mountain biking trails at “H2O” have been to myself and my two kids, now aged 12 and 9. They have learnt to value the great outdoors and the natural environment through their engagement with the bush land whilst cycling. Importantly they have prioritised exercise and outdoors over screens and technology- this is all down to the localised availability of quality mountain biking at H2O. I can't imagine a more appropriate way to utilise local amenity and foster good healthy culture.”

Mountain biking and STIF, CEEC, EEC and Duffys Forest

Considerable opposition to mountain bike trails in the Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest, (STIF), Duffys Forest, Critically Endangered Ecological Communities (CEEC), and Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC) emerged from the coding process. Some respondents went further, saying that all mountain biking should be removed from high conservation areas as they are unsuitable for the site and unsustainable. A small number argued that passive recreation such as bushwalking would be acceptable in these areas, and that mountain biking is not a passive recreation. Others argued there should be no activity in these areas at all. The introduction of pathogens through mountain biking and the effects mountain biking on microcelium in STIF and Duffy's Forest was also raised a handful of times.

It is worth noting that a small number of these respondents also explicitly stated opposition to formalising the trails across the whole site and wrote that Council should not facilitate the continuation of mountain biking at Westleigh due to their unsanctioned beginnings. Comments that reflected these opinions included:

"I wish to register my opposition to mountain bike trails in the critically endangered Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest and Duffys Forest in Westleigh Park and would like to see these moved to less sensitive areas of the park."

"Extremely disappointed by Hornsby Shire Council's (Council) decision to allow mountain bike and walking trails through Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) and the Critically Endangered, as outlined in the Westleigh Park Draft Masterplan of February 2023....we are dismayed by Council's actions that will without doubt damage, if not destroy, these endangered areas of native bush. They form a vital part of the amenity of this suburb which has been a strong reason for residents to move into this area."

"All existing unsanctioned tracks must be closed."

"The definition of Passive recreation does not include MTB or Mountain Trail Biking which is an 'active' recreational activity which involves high speeds, jumps and is a dangerous and high-risk sport. Passive recreation includes activities such as bird watching, camping, picnics, fishing, photography and bush walking. It is an activity which requires little exertion but is generally sustained."

"Formalising what started as illegal bike trails may encourage further trail encroachments in other areas."

SPORTS PLATFORMS

A sizeable number of responses related to the proposed sports platform. From the coding process, a consensus supporting the sports platforms emerged. Respondents referenced the shortage of safe, accessible and all-abilities facilities that cater to multiple sporting codes. A reflection of this support is captured in the comments below. Unlike other themes, there was little variation in sentiment. Examples of the support expressed included:

"More fields in our local area would be amazing! We want to get our community outdoors and participating in local sports."

"I am very aware of the need for more sporting fields, preferably shared among codes."

"It's definitely apparent that we need more sporting fields."

"We are so limited in this area for excellent sporting facilities and this would really meet the needs of the changing demographic of our suburbs."

"We are pleased to provide in-principle support to the future playing fields identified by Hornsby Council."

A number of submissions also referred to specific sports or codes. As such, many of them called on Council to prioritise or dedicate access. The codes and sports that were mentioned included:

- Soccer
- Basketball
- Netball

- Women's sport
- Cricket
- Sports that cater to all ages
- Local club priority

Athletics track

The need for a dedicated, all-weather athletics track also emerged from the coding process. A lack of facilities across Hornsby Shire and Sydney's Northwest was often cited in these submissions. Specifically, people referred to the need for a tartan or synthetic track to mitigate the impact of wet weather. Comments included:

"I am excited and very supportive of athletics facilities."

"A synthetic athletics track and supporting amenities replacing the grass athletics track as part Westleigh Park Draft Plan of Management, is a high priority for the athletics community. Currently there is no synthetic athletics track in the north-west of Sydney and accordingly the development of facilities such as this is a priority for athletics as a sport."

Synthetic fields

Support for synthetic fields on at least one of the sports platforms was expressed across a number of responses. For this report's transparency, it must be noted that other descriptive names for synthetic surface were also used. These were *astroturf*, *artificial* or *all-weather access*.

Often when support for synthetic surface was detailed, it related to a specific sport. The increased usage synthetic coverage would provide for participation was the primary factor provided in submissions that expressed support. Examples included:

"I'm supportive of synthetic turf."

"Highly support a multi-purpose astro turf football (soccer) field available for general use."

"Despite the great participation there are limited all weather playing options in our community."

Opposition to synthetic fields also emerged during analysis. Of the responses that outlined opposition to synthetic fields, the reasoning given primarily referenced the perceived health and detrimental environmental impacts. Commonly held views included:

"Please DO NOT use a synthetic surface on playing fields they contain forever chemicals these will effect the health of everybody using these fields

"I am strongly against the use of astro turf (synthetic grass) in the development. It is damaging to the environment."

"Synthetic fields create plastic and microplastic runoff into the environment. The surrounding bushland really doesn't need this."

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Another theme that emerged during coding related to environmental sustainability. When opposition to the revised draft Master Plan was expressed, it was most often on the grounds of needing to protect the site's natural environment. Many of these opposing responses referred to the mountain bike trails, but a small number also mentioned the sports platforms and other uses. Several respondents canvassed concern about the vulnerable state of the environment, biodiversity loss, and the impact that increased activity on-site will have on wildlife such as the Powerful Owl. Others specifically called upon Council to act as a protector of the natural environment and requested that there be a stronger focus on rehabilitation of the bush. Comments that reflect these views included:

"I wish to express my opposition to the proposed Master Plan (the Plan) for the development of Westleigh Park in relation to the development and management of the bushland areas."

"Leave the land as it is and stop this unnecessary destruction of the natural environment".

“Given the HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE of the bushland on the Westleigh site, it is considered that Council has a legal, regulatory, ethical and moral obligation to AVOID impacts on the bushland, not just minimise or mitigate the impacts of the development of this site.”

“The proposed Westleigh Park Regional Sports Ground, with its two football fields, rugby field, full athletics facility, and mountain bike circuit, would significantly impact the natural environment, traffic, people, and character of the area.”

“We recognise that outdoor recreation (both passive and active) is vitally important. We also understand there is a need for more sporting venues and facilities within Hornsby Shire. However, these must not be allowed to impact upon rare, high quality, Critically Endangered Ecological Communities of Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest and Blue Gum High Forest, the Ecological Endangered Community of Duffy’s Forest, Commonwealth listed threatened species, and State listed threatened species.”

“To ignore the complexity of ecological linkages and processes for a development of this type in a large, robust ecological community rated as of ‘least concern’ may be acceptable but not for an EEC and certainly not for a Critically Endangered EEC, by definition, at risk of collapse.”

“While I have nothing against mountain bike trails, I oppose to developments that would endangered or threatened fragile ecosystems.”

“Looking at the diagrams in the Master Plan, Westleigh Park actually appears to be a Mountain Bike Facility with a few sports fields on the side. I don’t agree with mountain bike trails being given precedence over endangered and critically endangered bushland. Sanctioning the previously unsanctioned mountain bike trails sets a very bad precedent. Should the MTB trails go ahead regardless, steps need to be taken to ensure all mountain bikes that enter the bushland are clean and do not bring weeds and pathogens into Westleigh Park bushland.”

The impact on fauna, particularly bird species was also of notable concern for some respondents. This is illustrated in a sample of quotes below:

“Westleigh Park is home to both Powerful Owls and Glossy Black Cockatoos, which are vulnerable threatened species. As there is no fauna report, we cannot be aware of what other valuable species may live in this forest. The proposed development of this site would destroy the habitat of more than forty species of bird and who knows what other fauna would be affected?”

“The continuation of these activities is threatening the native species of flora and fauna, which are in danger of being destroyed or severely depleted...From the fauna aspect, slow ground dwelling animals such as the echidna and any reptiles are subject to injury and death by fast moving riders...The Vulnerable Threatened Powerful Owl though far ranging have been recorded in Westleigh Park forests over long periods of time. They will be subject to a lot of human activity and disturbance and highly likely not return.”

“There is known habitat and breeding hollows in and around this site. These owls listed as “Vulnerable” fall under Council’s responsibility for protection. This includes consideration of lighting and noise from the proposed sporting fields. All of the latest data, best practices and recommendations re these issues must be applied.”

The impact of artificial lighting from the sports platforms on the flora and fauna located within the site’s bushland areas also arose during the coding process. In particular, responses highlighted how artificial lighting may interfere with the activities of nocturnal animal species that might reside in the bushland areas. Comments included:

“Light pollution is a huge issue for nocturnal species. It is disruptive to their behaviours and negatively affects their health. Nocturnal species use natural darkness to carry out important activities like breeding, foraging and migrating. Night lighting also attracts predators. There are threatened species Powerful Owls roosting within Westleigh park, as well as boobook owls, ringtail and brushtail possums, sugar gliders, grey-headed flying foxes and a variety of bats.”

"If night lighting of the sports fields for night games cannot be avoided altogether then it must be restricted to playing field 1 only – the southernmost field. There must be no light spill into the bushland and lighting only used when the games are on."

"Lighting has a serious impact on native fauna and to minimise the impact on nocturnal animals...Playing field lighting must be consistent with the Australian Standards including Control of Obtrusive Lighting Effects.... The closure of playing fields by 9pm to minimise disruption to resident amenity and wildlife."

Responses that expressed opposition to the revised draft Master Plan on the grounds of environmental sustainability at times also expressed a view that Council was contravening a number of their own policies in addition to State and Federal legislation. The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, as well as other Council strategies like the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and the Urban Forest Strategy, were among the most commonly referenced policies or legislative instruments. Examples included the following:

"Council is ignoring legislation and scientific proof of the fragile nature of the EEC and the CEEC in Westleigh Park by allowing mountain bike and walking trails through this endangered bushland.....Threatened species are legally protected by the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999....The NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee, established under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, made a Final Determination in May 2019 to list the Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest in the Sydney Basin Bioregion as a CRITICALLY ENDANGERED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY.....For Council to maintain its credibility in the community as the custodians of the Bush Shire, Council must rigorously uphold its own legislation and that of other government agencies both Federal and State"

"Proposed constructed mountain bike tracks pass through Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest (STIF), a Critically Endangered Ecological Community (CEEC) and Duffys Forest, an Endangered Ecological Community. These two Ecological Communities are protected legally by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act (BCA) 2016 and STIF is also protected by the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act (EPBC Act) 1999. Only 0.5% of the original area of STIF Forest in the Sydney Basin remains, the remainder having been lost to development. As land owner, Hornsby Council is obligated to manage these two Vegetation Communities in line with the legislation. There should be no mountain biking tracks in these two Endangered Communities at all."

"Noting the motion from HSC General Meeting in July 2021 states "there is a need to protect high value biodiversity on the site"; allowing mountain bike trails to continue through the CEEC and EEC forests at Westleigh will be the antithesis of upholding this directive in the motion and against the Biodiversity Conservation Act, as there is no avoidance of the vegetation."

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Some responses mentioned traffic, and expressed concern that the revised draft Master Plan would result in unacceptable traffic generation. Questions about the validity of the traffic analysis that had been used to inform the revised draft Master Plan emerged several times throughout the coding process. It was expressed that no data about traffic during the winter sports season had been used to determine traffic impacts. Comments that were representative of this view included:

"According to the Council's estimates, the traffic generated by the development will far exceed the levels of local traffic. With Duffy Avenue as the major access road [Nicholson Ave providing a low volume alternate access route], the forecast traffic levels will be unmanageable and intolerable."

"The Regional Sports Ground will offer 373 car spaces as well as bus parking, leading to a dramatic increase in local traffic. This includes an increase in buses, coaches, mini-vans, cars, motorbikes and bicycles on our once quiet roads."

"The installation of a new roundabout on Quarter Sessions Road near Corang Road to enter the park will cause increased traffic congestion during peak hours of sporting activity."

"Concerned about safety of the area for my children with the traffic impacts."

Sefton Road extension

In addition to traffic generation, a small number of respondents expressed concern about the proposal to extend Sefton Road. Traffic generation, the narrow design of the road, its potential as a 'rat run' and lack of perceived need in stage one were among the concerns raised. Some challenged the need for a bushfire-related exit for the surrounding community, while others said emergency access is needed, but via a different alignment due to the impact on the STIF and Thornleigh Reservoir. Other submissions expressed that its cost meant it would be more appropriate to be constructed as part of stage two (when more sports platforms will be in use).

Some of these responses also raised the in-principal agreement between Hornsby Shire Council and Sydney Water. Some questioned the validity of the proposed road in light of questions around the legitimacy of this agreement and suggested that it should not go ahead.

"We would urge you to not proceed with the extension of Sefton Road and increase the traffic through the area."

"The plan is too ambitious for a quiet residential area. Sefton Road has already been severely impacted by the failure of council to provide adequate parking for its staff. It is also being negatively impacted by the further development of the old National Can site; the existing storage and warehousing facility is being extended and the remainder of the site is being prepared for a potential 80 place childcare centre. This is all too much for a quiet residential area. The idea of adding up to 1500 cars a day is completely unrealistic and unacceptable. The plan should not involve the extension of Sefton Road."

"The plan for the Sefton Rd Exit incorrectly states that the width of the existing Sefton Carriageway is "good", and completely ignores the reduction to one traffic lane with alternate traffic flow."

"The proposed southern access road alignment is unacceptable because it will result in the removal of Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest."

"As only one sporting field is planned for Stage 1, then the permanent access road through the reservoir land is not needed. Considering the parlous state of Hornsby Council finances, it appears ludicrous to spend this money now when it is badly needed for so many other things. This can be revisited in the future, if the funds ever become available."

Although only a handful of responses mentioned the proposed gate or emergency exit, they included the following views:

"It is worth noting that traffic impacts associated with the sportsground uses occur on the weekend (currently Saturday) and possibly during night training activities (currently 5-9pm Monday, Wednesday and Thursday). Outside these times and during Stage 1 the link road is not required. Therefore, it is proposed that the link road through the Sydney Water site be gated to ensure the road is not used as a rat-run, it can be used as an emergency access under the control of the Police/RFS it forms part of a suitable traffic and event management strategy for the conduct of sporting activities as the site is progressively developed beyond Stage 1."

"Council should provide the emergency bushfire egress only...which does not have to be full access road...Council could and should also develop an emergency egress plan utilising Corang Rd and Eucalyptus Drive".

Parking

Parking was also mentioned in a small number of responses. Concern was expressed that the revised draft Master Plan had not provided adequate car parking spaces. Examples of this view included:

"The approximately 100 car spaces provided for the stage one first platform will not be sufficient."

"I am also concerned overflow parking, in which cars will park alongside any new road and impact local residents and native nocturnal fauna and a road would create a rat run which would put further strain on the Sefton Rd / Chilvers Rd local traffic."

OTHER RECREATION

Lack of bush walking tracks

Concern that the revised draft Master Plan did not adequately cater for the needs of bushwalkers, botanists, birdwatchers or citizen scientists, instead prioritising mountain bike trails, was identified in some responses. In addition, it was argued that separate trails are needed for both mountain biking and bushwalking as they cannot co-exist safely on the one trail. Several submissions also referred to the existing mountain biking network in Old Mans Valley and Hornsby Quarry, stating that a broader cross section of the community would benefit from the inclusion of dedicated bush walking tracks. Comments that reflect these views included:

“This Draft Plan considers just 150m of dedicated walking track within the forested area as sufficient for Westleigh residents and the many others that enjoy the natural treasures this forest showcases. Closing the trails to bushwalkers is ensuring threatened species will not be regularly monitored and protected by citizen scientists and the recommendation to use this site for ‘environmental education and conservation’ is being ignored at the detriment of threatened flora and fauna.”

“A bigger cross section of the community could appreciate the rare and beautiful bush area by way of a walking track.... Defined paths should be provided, with signage asking walkers to stick to the paths, to minimise the trampling of plants by bushwalkers. The draft Master Plan does not provide enough such walking track opportunities.”

“After attending the public hearing on the draft master plan, I discovered that the plan allows for 150-200 m of dedicated walking track within the park and in comparison allows for 7.5 Km of mountain bike tracks through the park. This plan is highly skewed towards mountain bikers and sports clubs above the interests of bushwalkers, local residents, local traffic and the also impacts the local Thornleigh reservoir.”

“There must be no shared use paths at all within the bushland areas.”

ACCESS

The proposed link between Westleigh and Hornsby Parks was again another polarising topic. Some responses supported the link. Comments included:

“I also love the idea of walking/cycling tracks linking Westleigh Park and OMV/Hornsby.”

“A well designed, built, & sustainable mountain bike trail connected through the bushland to Hornsby OMV is a terrific asset to our community.”

However, opposition was also expressed, due to its alignment and environmental impacts. Some responses also pointed out that the linkage would not be permissible as per the Biobanking Agreement for the Dog Pound Creek site. These views are expressed in the following quotes:

“There should be no access to or from the site from Dog Pound Creek maintenance trail because not only would it impact on the Dog Pound Creek Biobanking site, it risks spreading pathogens from external sources, through Westleigh park and into the important Biobanking site.”

“Any link to Hornsby Quarry will have to travel through the Dog Pound Creek Biobank site and the Biobanking Agreement that outlines the ongoing management of this site specifically states that only ‘passive recreation’ can take place here, such as bushwalking and bird watching. It specifically mentions that mountain biking is ‘excluded’ from Dog Pound Creek Biobank site and this agreement cannot be circumvented. The exclusion specifically mentions Fire Trails as part of the exclusion zone for access to this site.”

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

Scale of the proposal

The scale of the revised draft Master Plan also emerged as a topic throughout the coding process. A small number of respondents argued the proposal is out of proportion to the surrounding suburban environment. The impact on the bush, the impact on local character and amenity, generation of traffic were of particular concern. Comments that reflected this opinion included:

“The size and scale of this development is not suited to this quiet residential area...does not adequately address the infrastructure, traffic and amenity needs of the community.”

“The suitability of this site for such a large sporting complex is of great concern to many residents and this site has many drawbacks for housing 4 or 5 different sporting codes in the heart of a quiet residential area with limited access....By reducing the size of this proposed development, council would be able to reduce the detrimental amenity issues, such as parking and traffic, reduce the cost of the overall proposal and downgrade the proposed Through Road to Sefton Road to an emergency bushfire access route as requested by residents for decades.

“I and most residents I have spoken to consider that the above plan is totally inappropriate for the area, being a planned regional hub sporting complex, which will bring excess traffic, less security, problems with noise and strong lights at night, to a tranquil area chosen for that reason to live. Councils explanation to these matters is not acceptable. The plan should be scaled down to be of a facility for local district residents only.”

Economic Impacts

The view that the revised draft Master Plan will bring economic benefits to the Westleigh community and wider Hornsby Shire was also a topic that emerged in a small number of responses. Many of these were linked the benefits of the mountain biking trails, but others discussed wider aspects, such as the sports platforms and athletics track:

“It's great to see that you support our community and I have no doubt that a developed network of trails will drive more business for local businesses.”

“I am also pleased to say that - apart from the obvious health, social and cultural benefits - we also nearly always stop at one of the nearby cafes for some post ride chat, providing additional economic inputs to the local community.”

“Schools, in my view, would prefer using a facility in closer proximity, should it be available. This could provide approximately \$40,000 in funding that could be reinvested into the community, from just eight days of carnival use during the day, not impacting on after school activities.”

“The development of a synthetic athletics track would also bring economic benefits to the local area. With the potential to host competitions and events, the track would attract visitors from other areas and generate income for local businesses such as hotels and restaurants. This would not only benefit the local economy, but also raise the profile of the area as a destination for sporting events.”

Conversely, concern was found in some responses about the financial implications the draft Master Plan would have. Comments about the operational cost of the proposed site, other ongoing projects in Hornsby Shire and the materials that will be used (particularly gabion) were embedded throughout some responses. There were also requests for greater transparency around how funds will be spent throughout all stages of the project. Common views included:

“A regional sporting complex is way over the top considering all of these constraints and the currently allocated funding.”

“There are insufficient funds to build stage 2 of the complex and community needs and climate change may alter the usage for this space. Now is not the time to decide on what might happen in years 10 +. Sports rorts are over!”

“It seems there is not enough funding for this ongoing project. This added to Council ignoring the Community’s overwhelming plea to not raise rates, would imply the rate rise may well be needed for this project or can we have a guarantee that NO RATES will be used to fund this project? We have been burdened for years with rate levies for the Quarry and now this.”

CONNECTING WITH COUNTRY

Aboriginal heritage and Scarred Tree relocation

Across the small number of responses that referred to the relocation of the Scarred Tree on site, support and opposition was found in an approximately equal number.

“I find it unconscionable that a scarred tree could simply be “picked up and relocated” elsewhere for a development. It is not just the scarred tree that has aboriginal cultural significance, but the site that the scarred tree resides on.”

“I acknowledge the previous inhabitants to Westleigh Park the Darug and Guringai people, and their connection to land and sea, past, present, and emerging. I also acknowledge the presence of the beautiful scarred tree, and wish for it to be relocated and preserved as a connection to that history, but also a connection to the future of Westleigh Park.”

“There must be proper protection for all Indigenous cultural sites in this plan. The Scar Tree must be properly protected and advice sought from local Indigenous elders to ensure that NO damage at all occurs to any Indigenous heritage.”

LANDFILL MANAGEMENT

Contamination also emerged as a topic across a small number of responses. This included concern about the contamination on site and how it will be safely handled. Many expressed the view that capping on site was not the safest method for Council to implement. Concern about handling asbestos was especially prevalent. Furthermore, requests for a Remedial Action Plan to be exhibited as part of the revised draft Master Plan was also included in a handful of responses.

“The proposal requires the large-scale excavation of this material and moving it around the site to be reburied. Control of contaminants increases markedly with every handling operation. There is no credible risk analysis of this element of the proposal.”

“The Revised draft Masterplan includes information on landfill and earthworks on this sensitive site with hazardous soil elements. Due to the significant earthworks required, I am concerned how this material, including asbestos, will be handled.”

“The proposal to simply excavate and relocate the contaminate material from one part of the site to another with 400mm capping is unacceptable and potentially hazardous to residents.”

“The contamination Remedial Action Plan should have been exhibited with the 2023 Revised draft Master Plan Documents...Groundwater could be impacted by contaminated liquid leachate emanating from the relocated contaminated material...Contamination should be fully remediated as was undertaken at Homebush, not just capped...Surrounding residents could potentially be put at risk from airborne asbestos fibres.”

OTHER

Publicly available information

A small number of responses argued Council had not provided adequate studies, surveys and assessments to support the revised draft Master Plan's objectives. It was also contended that it was difficult to provide feedback on the revised draft Master Plan without access to this information. A publicly available flora and fauna survey, tree assessments, and a Report on Environmental Factors were among the most referenced. Comments that reflect these views included:

"Insufficient information has been provided by Hornsby Shire Council to be able to make an informed decision on this Draft Master Plan. Relevant documents have been withheld and until those documents are made available it is not possible to ascertain whether the Master Plan in its current form can be supported."

"It is unsatisfactory for council to exhibit a plan and request community feedback when crucial information cannot be provided. Without knowing exactly what native wildlife inhabits this forest and in what areas, it is not possible to choose a layout for a trail network."

"It is noted that Council has deemed that flora and fauna survey reports, or reports on soil micro-organisms, indeed if no reports had been engaged at all, will not be released for public viewing until a later date after public comment. All relevant documents must be released including detailed reports/ surveys on the soil micro-organisms, vegetation mapping and natural areas and habitat assessments. These special reports are essential requirements for (CEEC) areas."

Zoning of the proposed site

Another theme that surfaced throughout the coding process was the need for Council to embark upon rezoning the site. Many stated that the bushland should be rezoned as C2 Environmental Conservation, and that the regional sporting complex should be rezoned as RE1 Public Recreation, in alignment with other sportsfields in the Hornsby Shire LGA.

"Council needs to seriously reconsider their failure to apply the correct zoning to this site prior to their exhibition of this Draft Master Plan."

"Without first rezoning this site to RE1 Public Recreation, council is not adhering to the criteria which limits this sporting complex to one which does not overly impact the amenity of the local residents. This Draft Masterplan, if enacted in its entirety, would expose this community which is presently a safe and quiet neighbourhood to extensive traffic, noise, light, parking and congestion issues which far exceed those permitted in an R2 Low Density Residential area."

"All the bushland on the site must be rezoned as C2 Environmental Conservation with protection for mature trees on any other part of the site. All mountain bike tracks in this area must be closed and the bushland allowed to regenerate. The proposed sanctioning of mountain bike tracks in the CEEC and in areas where there are threatened species is unacceptable and must not be permitted...The regional sporting complex should be rezoned as RE1 Public Recreation, as most of Hornsby's sports fields are zoned. It is currently R2 Low Density Residential zoning. This is completely inappropriate as a sports field is proposed, not houses."

"Hornsby Council has classified the forest at Westleigh Park as 'bushland' but since they have now identified Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest (STIF) and Duffy's Forest ecological communities here, I believe the classification should be changed to C2 Environmental Conservation which provides a greater level of protection for significant threatened species."

Other cycling infrastructure

An argument was put forward in a handful of responses that a closed-road cycling track should be included in the draft Master Plan. Comments that reflected this view included:

"A 1.8km closed-road cycling criterium track is desperately needed in the Northern Sydney region."

Other topics

There were a number of other topics/suggestions that were of such a small number that a narrative analysis was not undertaken. These included:

- The potential for anti-social behaviour to occur on-site
- Access to mountain biking trails during construction
- The need for a nature playground on-site
- Pedestrian safety

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