

**Submission
No 163**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING SYSTEM AND THE IMPACTS
OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND
COMMUNITIES**

Organisation: Callan Park Bushcare Inc.

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Submission by Callan Park Bushcare Inc. to the Inquiry into the NSW planning system and the impacts of climate change on the environment and communities



Introduction

Callan Park Bushcare Inc.(CPB) are volunteers who for the last 29 years have been involved in regeneration and restoration of bushland adjacent to King George Park on the southern and western boundaries of Callan Park. Many of us have formal qualifications in conservation and land management and all have experience in this work. We are currently supervised by Bush Habitat Restoration Co-operative under the auspice of Greater Sydney Parklands (GSP).

Overarching principles

From our training, expertise and experience, we believe the Inquiry should recommend improvements to the planning system in NSW in line with the following principles:

- State and local governments must take every opportunity to expand and regenerate habitat – the highest priority being to create *more*, connected bushland areas across municipalities rather than to continue building large developments without due consideration of environmental and climate impacts.
- Where an area is key habitat for threatened species, the area should be permanently and clearly excluded from future development including extractive industry. The option of offsets should not be considered.
- Commonly used terms such as “open” and “green” space must be clearly defined, delineated and consistently used in all government and council documentation to avoid conflation with existing natural bushland areas including wildlife corridors. The ratio of green space/complex canopy and biodiversity must be defined in council policies and be measurable
- The State government must reduce the amount of control it has over local councils on planning matters, while maintaining a rigorous review process through appropriate *independent* entities staffed with appropriately qualified personnel not political appointees.
- Planning matters affecting local government areas must firstly sit at local level where councils, ideally, have greater knowledge of local priorities and conditions. That is, local councils must be given *more* power - not less - to make decisions about planning and environmental matters that directly affect their local communities.
- There must be increased, transparent vetting of the influence of private interests, including the widespread use of consultants without competitive tender and private developer lobbyists in relation to council policies and procedures.
- Local environment plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs) should be widely circulated and explained to residents across municipalities in the most transparent, accessible forums and input sought.

Background

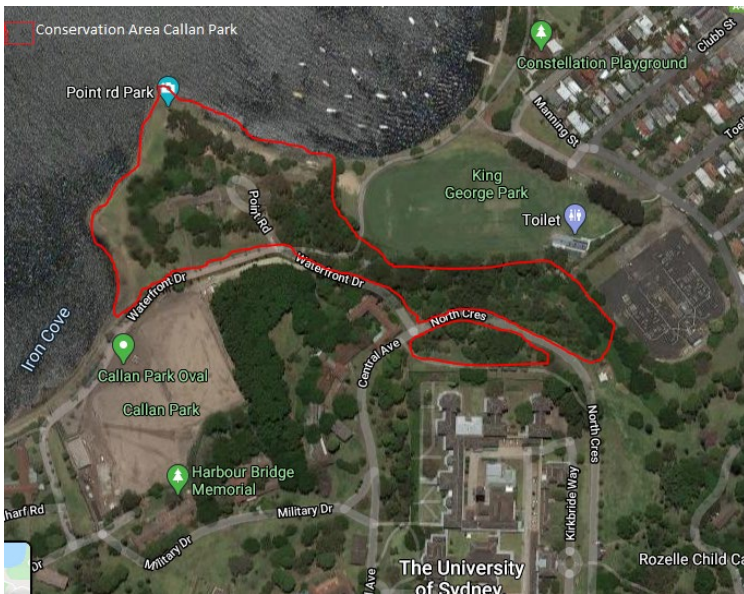
Callan Park in Iron Cove, Lilyfield is one of the largest and most regionally significant public spaces in Sydney’s inner west. Comprising 61 hectares in total, 38 hectares are managed by GSP and the NSW

Department of Transport. The remaining area, except for sporting grounds, is managed by NSW Health. Inner West Council manages the Balmain Road and Glover Street sporting grounds only.¹

Callan Park is governed by the *Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002* and despite efforts by the previous LNP Government to amend it, it remains intact so as to prohibit commercial activities and privatisation.

Since the closure of Rozelle Hospital in 2008, Callan Park has increasingly become a precious resource for local populations where residents and workers of the Inner West can enjoy recreational activities. The area provides stress reduction and mental, physical and spiritual health benefits, as increased visitation during the recent Covid pandemic demonstrated.

Within the wider park is a small two-hectare area where CPB work to restore and maintain remnant indigenous woodland and coastal heath. Below is a map of this area:



Some 40 indigenous plants and 75 indigenous fauna species were originally identified in this area, the largest remnant surviving in the inner west. The site also includes the remains of Aboriginal middens and some interesting European rock carvings of unconfirmed origin. The preservation of this site is therefore of scientific, cultural and heritage importance.

CPB is greatly concerned about the worsening impacts of global warming and in our experience, the loss of biodiversity in urban areas. Due to higher human population increases and with them, more intrusive buildings and roadways, current planning laws are not taking the natural environment into sufficient consideration, nor acknowledging global warming as the serious threat that it is.

This submission addresses in particular sections (b) and (c) of the Inquiry's terms of reference.

Growing population pressures together with NSW Planning Laws (T of R (b))

The Inner West municipality has the fourth highest population density in NSW and yet the third lowest ratio of open space per resident in the State at 16 square metres per resident. The wave of new development and accompanying population increase will further reduce this ratio.

Despite these ratios, expanding numbers of medium and high-rise developments are being planned or built in the immediate vicinity of Callan Park. Additionally, the soon-to-be-opened Rozelle Interchange/ Stage 3

¹ <https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/develop/state-government-and-utility-works-and-projects/state-government-projects/callan-park-future>

of the WestConnex Tollway which includes four huge, unfiltered emissions stacks in the nearby Lilyfield/Rozelle area will release large volumes of carcinogens from vehicles into the atmosphere.²

Current planning laws allow for the demolition of once small homes with gardens being replaced by much larger ones, usually built to boundaries. There is a corresponding loss of open space, backyard vegetation canopy and permeable surfaces. With increasing density, there is little opportunity for Council to purchase new open space. These laws also lead to many more vehicles in local streets and in Callan Park, unless restrictions are placed on non-essential movements.

Taken together, it is obvious all these elements are contributing to the “heat island effect”, and to increasing pressure on Callan Park, considered by some to be the “lungs” of the area. The bushland areas are particularly affected.

Impacts on biodiversity and communities

As global warming effects increase, the bushland areas are under greater pressure to preserve biodiversity despite being fragmented and not linked to other bushland areas in the municipality.

Callan Park has local environmental significance being the home of probably the last remaining population of Superb Fairywrens in the Lilyfield/Leichhardt area. Previous populations including in Rozelle (formerly the goods yards), along the light rail corridor and at Whites Creek Annandale have all disappeared following clearing of vegetation for developments such as WestConnex. These small birds are sedentary and do not travel from their home range. Once their safe resting places, food sources and breeding sites are destroyed they quickly become prey for cats or larger aggressive birds.

Our careful work on the bushcare sites at Callan Park has so far safeguarded their survival in the area.

The bushcare sites also provide a refuge for other wildlife no longer common in the surrounding built-up suburbs where few houses now have gardens and densely planted open space is become rarer. Species such as blue-tongue lizards and ring-tail possums have been seen on site. Large trees such as those in Callan Park provide daytime roost sites and there are reports of Powerful Owls being seen in the park. If Powerful Owls continue to breed successfully in Sydney, it is likely that young birds in the process of establishing their own territory will increasingly be present in areas like Callan Park.

GSP/Dept of Transport management themselves recognise some level of climate change impacts as evidenced by their recent installation, under the auspice of Ku-ring-gai Council and UNSW³ of three beehives for stingless bees in the bushland areas.

More broadly, there is greater pressure than ever on diminishing biodiversity across the Inner West municipality. Callan Park's current bushland areas are too small to absorb these flow-on effects. The Greenway is arguably the Inner West's other most significant natural space. It was envisaged as an important habitat corridor linking southern areas of the municipality near the Cooks River with the north via Hawthorn Canal. However, doubling of the light rail track and construction of a wide active transport route within a narrow space have reduced and fragmented the area available for revegetation and retention as wildlife habitat. A partial link exists between the northern end of the Greenway and Callan Park. If this were to be strengthened, there would be huge benefits.

In summary

² See, for example, references to current development proposals <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/problematic-mesmerising-intrusive-the-giant-exhaust-stacks-set-to-divide-sydney-20220816-p5ba6m.html> ; <https://www.urban.com.au/news/nsw/rozelle-village-former-balmain-leagues-club-redevelopment-set-to-launch> ; <https://www.urban.com.au/news/nsw/roche-group-submit-plans-for-impressive-lilyfield-mixed-use-development>

³ <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/save-our-bees>

As has been noted widely, global warming is accelerating including in Australia ⁴.

With increased heat, drought, more erratic rainfall, increased fragmentation of habitat and species loss, our biodiversity is diminishing.

We believe governments should be finding more areas that can be regenerated to bushland spaces within our urban landscapes to mitigate these ever-worsening effects.

In this context, it is of great concern that the current NSW government is heralding even more density of medium and high-rise buildings including in the Inner West, while aiming to curtail the power of local councils, and offering developers a trade-off by encouraging them to include at least 15% affordable housing -an ill-defined concept. ⁵

The overarching consideration is the climate crisis. It must be placed front and centre of all planning laws and regulations, whether state or local. Planning instruments need to be flexible and responsive to a constantly changing climate and environment.

Recommendations

- Specifically within Callan Park itself there is an opportunity to expand the indigenous vegetation zone at Callan Point and southwards, following removal of three identified dilapidated buildings. This would be a relatively inexpensive claim on available budgets especially if volunteer bush carers undertook most of the preparation, plantings and maintenance. While it is understood GSP intend to carry out this work, we have not as yet had any indication of a timeline. This expansion is urgently needed.
- At present GSP funds only 12 hours of bushcare supervision per month. Funding an expansion of the program could achieve much by involving other community groups on the Callan Park site such as WHO, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, Refugee Centre and other community groups. The State Government is in a unique position to develop such relatively cheap community-based programs rather than slow, expensive and ineffective contractor work.
- The *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* should be amended as a matter of urgency to prevent local councils from losing planning powers or to increase their powers to disallow inappropriate building developments of any scale for a specific area of environmental fragility, and to prioritise the identification of potential bushland/biodiversity areas.
- State and local government policies must stipulate urban canopy density but include mid storey and ground cover plantings. This means *not* approving parkland restorations which favour large swathes of lawn, wide concrete paths dotted with small clumps of trees and a few shrubs. Improving habitat for fauna in increasingly crowded urban areas should be a priority not an afterthought.
- State and Local Government should fund surveys of wildlife densities in urban bushland areas to provide a benchmark understanding of biodiversity and the impact of climate change.⁶
- To help reduce urban heat accumulation, planning instruments should mandate currently underused green building measures and reduce maximum building footprints to enable landscaping that provides more natural areas on private property.

Bronwen Campbell

President, on behalf of
Callan Park Bushcare Inc.

⁴ [Global heating is accelerating, warns scientist who sounded climate alarm in the 80s | Climate crisis | The Guardian](#)

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jun/15/nsw-to-allow-taller-denser-property-developments-while-curtailling-power-of-councils>

⁶ See for example, Sharp B, Impacts of habitat fragmentation in an urban environment, Conference Paper Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference Townsville 2012 <https://www.awrc.org.au/townsville-2012.html>

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