

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF BUSH REGENERATORS (AABR)

Submission to NSW DPE Masterplan Stage 1: Ropes Creek Corridor, NSW, 10 August 2022

AABR Secretary: Jane Gye secretary@aabr.org.au

Introduction and purpose

AABR welcomes the NSW Department's invitation to comment on its draft Masterplan for Ropes Creek.

AABR is a NGO formed in 1986 which supports research and education into ecological restoration and works with the community and government to assist them to effectively manage Australia's native bushland and biodiversity.

Many AABR members are volunteer bush regenerators or coordinators of local or State/Territory Bushcare programs. AABR has a long history in supporting volunteers and volunteer programs.

AABR promotes adoption of the *National Standards for the practice of ecological restoration in Australia* (2018), of especial relevance in this UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. These Standards recognises the importance of engagement with stakeholders, First Nations people and local communities.

AABR supports the engagement of First Nations people as Rangers and guides. For First Nations people, the connection to country is to be honoured. We note the contributions made by The Royal Botanical Gardens and the ABC's Gardening Australia to widening interest in this area.

Tour and bush regeneration at the northern end

AABR and its members have had a long association with Ropes Creek and in July 2022, AABR in conjunction with Friends of Ropes Creek co-hosted a tour (talk-walk-bush regeneration activities) of the "Northern Natural Area" (Zoned **Biobank (pink area)) of Ropes Creek**, access gate corner Boronia and Sycamore Road, St Marys. It was supported by Penrith Council, and professional bush regenerators specialising in the Cumberland Plain. About 30 people participated, from Western Sydney and inner Sydney.

A short talk was given about the history of the site, on the unique Cumberland Plain, and its conservation. Friends of Ropes Creek supplied copies of *Native Flora on the Cumberland Plain, Western Sydney: an Identification Guide* by Teresa James (2016).

Attendees learned about the unique vegetation communities, invasions by weeds and their lookalike native species. The party then split into three groups for weed removal (undertaking the three stages of bush regen). Some people worked from the

healthy bushland to the edge of the transmission corridor for removal of African Lovegrass and other weeds. From experience elsewhere, we know that careful removal of Lovegrass enables the return of Cumberland Plain flora (the native ground covers and shrubs) that are lost by simpler actions such as tree planting.

The Ropes Creek corridor: subject land of the Masterplan

The NSW Department describes the subject land:

“The area we are investigating for this project includes over 450 hectares of recreational and environmental conservation land along both sides of Ropes Creek, with the creek forming the boundary between the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Penrith and Blacktown.”

<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/ropescreekcorridor>

AABR’s approach to the Masterplan

While we appreciate the novelty of the interactive map, we did not feel that we could provide a coherent set of comments through that process..

<https://dpe.mysocialpinpoint.com.au/ropes-creek-corridor/map#/marker/124024>

AABR obviously supports conservation of remnant bushland and ecological restoration while appreciating the NSW Department’s commitment to identify areas for many other uses: active and passive recreation, and routes for walking and cycling that optimise regional connectivity.

With the last few years of pandemic, AABR has witnessed growing recognition of the health and well-being value of spaces for people to be outdoors, to move outdoors by walking, cycling (active travel for health), and undertaking active volunteering activities such as bush regeneration and tree planting. New research, commissioned by Landcare, shows that “we have at our disposal an opportunity to learn and to contribute, and ultimately to feel better about ourselves through volunteering”¹.

Response to the Mapped areas

Overview: The total land area

The MySocialPinPointMap frequently uses the term Open Space and even Green Space.

Clearing land can destroy seed beds of Cumberland Plain Woodland, listed as Critically Endangered. AABR would like to see the Masterplan principles commit to retention and ecological restoration (so Green Space utilises native, local plant

¹ Landcare commissioned KPMG to produce a research report: *Building Resilience in local communities: the well-being benefits of participating in LandCare* <https://landcareaustralia.org.au/wellbeing-report/>;

species – not plastic!), and minimising damage. Sealing surfaces interferes with habitat and the water cycle, therefore we encourage the use of environmentally sensitive design and materials.

The proximity of the subject land to Wianamatta Regional Park is significant – both ecosystem connectivity and integration of the transport network, particularly walking and cycling networks.

Accommodating physical activities – bush regeneration and landcare – are a means of having kids experience nature, as we recently saw with the Tree Planting events promoted by PlanetArk.

Volunteering in bush regeneration and, where needed, revegetation provides a physical outlet that is personally and ecological restorative.

AABR recognises the need to plan to include areas for recreational activities (ovals, picnic areas, play and fitness circuits, dog runs). Such planning requires further attention to the green webs on the Cumberland Plain in Western Sydney. By so doing, the existing flora and fauna values can be protected, degradation halted, and ecological restoration enabled. In selecting areas for active recreation, it is important to not unduly compromise lands with high ecological integrity and biodiversity. In this respect, this draft Masterplan warrants further attention. We urge the Department of Planning & Environment to undertake further stakeholder consultation on this issue.

Management of the land will require infrastructure – **an Environment Education Centre** – with recurrent funds for staff and managing education and volunteers. Many activities could be offered from here: tours, with some bush regeneration; citizen science etc. Potential for partnerships with WSU, TAFE and other environmental groups in the region could be made.

In addition, this Environmental Centre could be co-located with a bicycle centre, to jointly serve bicycle training, like the facility in Sydney Park and the bicycle training services offered there. Provision for bicycle riding may be located on the same or different routes to pedestrians, ensuring separate pathways, and attention to materials. Riding bicycles is invaluable for health and reducing greenhouse gas emissions – fitting with NSW Governments targets for modal shift.

Careful planning and management of bicycle riding in the corridor is critical owing to the risk of ecological damage, fragmentation of bushland and impact on native fauna.

AABR's policy on bicycles in bushland, understandably, is for restricted use. Specific aspects of this policy are useful to master-planning the Ropes Creek Corridor:

“6.2 No construction of bicycle paths through or immediately adjacent to any Endangered Ecological Community

6.3 No construction of bicycle paths in linear reserves or in or adjacent to remnant bushland areas where the construction of a path and associated landscaping will compromise any of the values outlined [in the policy]

6.5 The creation of on-road bicycle friendly routes near to bushland [to access bushland, preferably on foot] with points of access to the bushland to encourage cyclists to travel to those areas

6.6 The construction of bicycle storage facilities (racks or lockers) at popular bushland areas, so that bicycles can be left safely.”²

Hornsby Council (2022) advisory page³ takes a calm, measured approach encouraging outdoor bicycle riding while explaining well the damage that riding on unauthorised tracks (or creating jumps etc) can cause bushland, and endangered flora and fauna. It promotes riding only on fire trails, not bushwalking trails in the very large National Parks, areas far larger than the Ropes Creek Corridor.

Local bicycle network improvements are quite apparent from a comment on the interactive map:

Lenore Drive has a shared pedestrian and cycle path that links into the M7 cycle path and Western Sydney Parklands. There must be an entry gate that enables residents of Erskine Park to access this existing path. Currently, residents need to ride / walk to Erskine Park Rd before being able to start using the cycle way.

Dark Green North of Forrester Road (Zoned Regional Open Space): icon and questions (4)

Question 2 (at 1 o'clock) picks up on the recognised need for ovals, referencing the *Precinct Plan 2011*, and promotes this area as suitable for ovals. However, **the icon** suggests

however north of Ropes Creek, adjacent in Blacktown LGA, features open parklands and a section of the Great West Walk. There may be an opportunity to provide access to the creek, construct picnic areas and extend walking paths to surrounding communities, parks and open space to the north and south.

On re-looking at this area, named North of Forrester Road, however, in its spatial ecological context, it is an inappropriate site for ovals and active recreation because this would entail vegetation clearance and unacceptable impacts on the local ecology.

² AABR Policy: *Bicycles in Bushland*, 2002.

https://aabr.org.au/images/stories/about_files/policy/BikeTracksInBushland.pdf

³ Hornsby Council, *Bike riding in Bushland*, 2022. <https://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/lifestyle/sports-and-recreation/biking/bike-riding-in-bushland>

Ecologically, this area functions as a bird and fauna corridor between Wianamatta Park and Ropes Creek, highlighted as a “priority regional biodiversity corridor” shown on the Cumberland Subregion BIO Map. AABR supports, therefore, this recommendation from Friends of Ropes Creek:

North of Forrester Road area itself should be reviewed as suitable for zoning Environmental Conservation, given its ecological function

Another location, to the north of Ropes Creek, an area lying within Blacktown LGA would be better suited for ovals, picnic areas (active recreation) with access by active travel and cars, especially given its proximity to the suburb of Ropes Crossing. Other alternatives may need to be canvassed, for both this northern end, as well as the western and southern edges of the overall Ropes Creek corridor.

Question 3 (at 8 o’clock) recommends a rezoning of this area to become a Conservation Zone, recognising that some revegetation would be desirable. It is an important corridor for birds, dependent upon Open Woodland habitat, and one appreciated by birding enthusiasts of Western Sydney.

Pale Green Area Zoned RE Public Recreation (to SE of North of Forrester Road)

AABR agrees with the proposal that this area is to be used for recreational activities. As a general comment above, we recognise the need for planning locations for active recreation jointly with protecting ecological value.

This Pale Green area is surrounded by lands recognised on the MySocialPinPointMap as areas with high ecological values:

- edged by land (brown) zoned C2 Environmental Conservation Zones; and
- connected to the largest Biobank pink parcel, the “Northern Natural Area”.

AABR believes that this Pale Green area also needs to be re-zoned for environmental conservation, especially as they abut the lands zoned biobank (Pink).

Northern Natural Area (Zoned Biobank)

The integrity of this relatively large parcel needs to be retained, to prevent further fragmentation and cumulative degradation of this rare ecosystem.

The MySocialPinPointMap describes this habitat in similar and brief terms to the Southern Natural Area:

This area contains important natural vegetation including threatened Riverflat Eucalypt Forest, and Grey-headed Flying-fox habitat. Passive recreation opportunities could include bird watching and bushwalking.

This description is a mere mention of the richness of flora, fauna and soils (including Cumberland Land Snails) to be seen here.

Therefore, any routes here for walking and cycling would need careful planning and design, and material selection.

We encourage collaboration with the managers of land beneath the transmission lines (Ausgrid?), particularly with respect to the mowing schedule, as identified by Friends of Ropes Creek.

AABR supports continuation of the bushcare program on this site. In future communications, the Department could mention the opportunity for people to engage in volunteer bushcare to help protect the unique ecosystems of the Cumberland Plain.

Robin Wiles Park

AABR supports the construction an environmental education centre, at this location, as recommended by Friends of Ropes Creek.

Its apparent that this Park is locally appreciated! Issues for design include a safe Creek crossing and the management of trail bikes.

AABR appreciates the opportunity to comment on this Masterplan Stage 1. We would be happy to engage further or provide any clarification or additional information.

Figures – Extract from MySocialPinPointMap – northern end (more Questions on enlargement): <https://dpe.mysocialpinpoint.com.au/ropes-creek-corridor/map#/marker/124024>



Fig 1 - Northern end