



**PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE**  
PO BOX 85, HUNTERS HILL, NSW 2110

16 July 2021

The Hon. Rob Stokes, MP  
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Minister Stokes,

### **Re Crown Land in Hunters Hill**

We recently received a reply to correspondence sent from The Hunters Hill Trust to the Hon. Melinda Pavey (attached), which she had forwarded to you. We have now received a reply, on your behalf, from the Deputy Secretary Crown Lands, Ms Melanie Hawyes (copy attached). We understand that Crown Lands also falls within your portfolio responsibilities.

We wrote originally to seek reassurance, from the Minister responsible for Crown Lands, that permission would not be granted to Hunters Hill Council to re-develop Figtree Park on Ryde Road in Hunters Hill, as this is a much-loved open green space with mature trees used extensively by the community for a variety of passive and active recreation activities. A copy of our original letter is attached for ease reference.

The Trust, our membership, neighbours and users of the space and adjoining facilities are still deeply concerned that our Council has been progressing ambitious plans to re-develop land contiguous with the park and continues to obfuscate in its communications with the community about its plans, the potential scale or impact on the Park of these plans, or discussions it may have been progressing with Crown Lands to enable it to pursue its agenda long term. The letter from Ms Hawyes is not reassuring where she says that Hunters Hill Council, as the appointed Crown Land Manager, is required to *'carry-out community engagement and consider any public submissions prior to authorising any significant change to the use of reserved, or dedicated, Crown land.'*

She goes on to advise that Council must adopt a Plan of Management (PoM) and that until this is done the use of Figtree Park must not be altered by Council. A PoM must be placed on public exhibition for 28 days, with a public submission period of 42 days.

Minister - this all sounds reassuring except that Council has already submitted to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) a draft PoM<sup>1</sup>, seeking approval for public exhibition. This document was adopted by Council at its March meeting without any request for community notification or input. We are dismayed to find that the draft PoM is based on the contentious and flawed draft Community Infrastructure Plan (dCIP) which our Council delayed adopting due to the outcry from the community requesting greater consultation, detailed drawings and a business case. We refer in particular to Section 8 (points 8.1 through point 8.3) of the draft PoM which refers to Future Uses including *'Potential Future Development'* and *'Potential Future Plan of Management'*.

Since preparation of the draft PoM, the dCIP has been revised and re-named as the Draft Property Strategy, and at its meeting on 18 April Council resolved to *'to defer it at this time for further revision'*. This is hardly a satisfactory basis on which to construct a Plan of Management! The community concerns raised during the public exhibition of the dCIP are unresolved. And it appears that the draft PoM for Figtree Park has been conflated with Council's ambitious plans in the dCIP by calling it the *'Figtree Park and Gladesville Community Centre Reserves PoM'*.

Is it not the wrong way around, Minister, that a draft PoM could be approved by the Department for public consultation when there is no evidence that the community supports that draft Plan on which the PoM is based?

This appears to be a contrived attempt to entrench re-development plans that have no social licence at this point, during the drafting of a PoM requiring a separate, far simpler response. This fails to meet best practice consultation and inspires a level of cynicism in the community. We would be stunned if the Department considers this draft Plan of Management to be worthy of approval for public exhibition.

Ms Hawyes also indicated in her letter (1 July) that the NSW Public Spaces Legacy Program applications were still being assessed, yet a media release from our local member, Anthony Roberts, dated 3 June 'today announced \$4.75 million has been allocated to Hunter's Hill Council as part of the Public Spaces Legacy Program'. Again, this fails to reassure the community that the NSW Government's processes for allocating public funding are being managed to achieve transparency and best outcomes for residents.

Furthermore, a grant of \$4.75M is excessive for such a small area (Figtree Park covers approximately 0.6 hectare) that has only minimal needs for improvement.

We note that: '*Councils are expected to undertake community engagement as part of the design phase which will begin once successful applications have been announced*'. But Council has already ignored community feedback and is driving an agenda to build infrastructure described in their 2020 dCIP, which includes major construction works to the precinct (to accommodate a library, Council's administration, plus commercial residential accommodation). How can this be appropriately addressed? The dCIP included a series of assertions without any clear information and there was no meaningful community engagement informing the ideas being put forward.

Because the Hunters Hill Council was not transparent about its application for the \$4.75M in funding under DPIE's Public Spaces Legacy Program, we applied for and received a copy of the grant application which included little detail, and from which critical information that may have included the real plans for the site had been redacted. How does NSW Government assess the appropriateness of these grants? We also question whether the disconnect in providing funds for open space as an incentive for accelerating e-planning for Development Approvals gives sufficient clarity around the Department's intentions and method of meeting its own goals.

Again, we are concerned that the former General Manager, and Council's Property Advisory Committee led by Councillor Miles, has progressed plans for Figtree Park that are development-driven and not aligned with the wishes or best interests of the community. We again urge NSW Government, and you in your capacity as the Minister responsible for this special Crown Land precinct, to ensure that due process is followed with appropriate transparency and consultation and that this does not become another development fait accompli.

We will be keeping our community informed.

Yours sincerely



Alister Sharp PhD, President

(1) *Plan of Management, final Draft 2 March, Figtree Park and Gladesville Community Centre reserves*

**Attachments:**

- Letter to Melinda Pavey (dated 9 April)
- Letter from Ms Hawyes (dated 1 July 2021, received on 9 July)
- Previous Letter to Minister Stokes (28 May 2021)