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Hunters Hill Council  
22 Alexandra Street  
Hunters Hill  
NSW 2110

1 July 2022

Dear General Manager

**Submission to DA2022 0104  
Removal of thirty seven (37) trees and pruning of 7**

Figtree Park is a 'European' garden with a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees, intended to provide a serene shady outdoor space for the community to enjoy passive recreation. The deciduous trees offer shade in summer (particularly important for outdoor activities during the pandemic) and filtered sunlight in the winter. Abundant spring flowering and autumn colour is one of its main attractions. This Park in its garden setting in a conservation area is now inexplicably under threat.

We strongly object to the unwarranted cutting down of so many trees without adequate explanation and are concerned that some of the removals could be due to the imperatives of "*a broader Council initiative to develop a community precinct within the heart of the Hunters Hill town centre.....*" referred to in the Owner's Consent document but not yet shared with the community. The Trust is seeking clarification of the Council policy (as distinct from draft documents) that applies to this statement and whether this is a reference to the unadopted Draft Property Strategy.

The proposal for Figtree Park 'upgrade' was first detailed in the Draft Community Infrastructure Plan (now renamed the Draft Property Strategy) as part of a "*re-development opportunity at 40-48 Gladesville Road*". No business case, drawings or financial costings were given to the community regarding this proposed development and after fierce opposition by residents at Council's meeting on 26 April 2021, the Draft Property Strategy was rejected by Council, who voted '*to investigate options and associated financial modelling*', prior to further community consultation.

There has been a distinct lack of transparency also around the 'Figtree Park Concept Report' where the community was unable to comment on the final designs and plans. In addition the existence of a 'Masterplan' that only Council's consultants have seen, is unacceptable.

**Specific Objections:**

1) **The Plan of Management for Figtree Park** adopted by Council in Nov 2021 includes Action (6.12) to provide landscape amenity and environmental benefits at the park, specifically to:

***Retain and maintain existing trees and vegetation in the park for environmental and community benefit***

*Review and evaluate shade needs and provision*

*Removing 37 trees is contrary to this plan*

2) **NSW Public Spaces Legacy Grant Program**

a) In 2021 Council successfully secured \$4.75m grant for Figtree Park, which included a sum of \$2.25m for the acquisition of 2 Ryde Road. This acquisition was not permitted under the terms of the grant. Therefore as the sum available to upgrade the Park is already substantial, any attempt to spend more on unnecessary embellishment is unethical and the \$2.25m allocated for the acquisition should be handed back to the State.

b) Council's Summary Grant Application stated: **Reibey's Green** (Council's suggested name change for Figtree Park) **will commit to increasing the green canopy of the park by a minimum 10%.**  
*This is patently not the case with this Development Application*

### 3) Figtree Park Concept Design Options

a) In November 2021 the community were presented with two Concept Design Options, with and without the croquet lawn. In neither Option was it made clear how wide the walking/bike tracks were, how the buffer plantings would affect the existing green space **or if trees would be lost.** No detailed drawings were available to the community and the narrative was that these were 'concepts' only.

b) Subsequently, a **Figtree Park Concept Report** dated 11 March 2022 was prepared, which contained all the detailed plans and drawings that should have been subject to further response from the community. However this was signed off by Council at their meeting on 21 March 2022 with no opportunity for the community to comment further. We note early in the Report on Page 9, the Design Response states '**Retention of Existing Trees**', however notations on subsequent drawings are simply marked as '**Existing retained trees**' – an obvious distinction.

c) **Amenities Block** – as stated in the brief, the normal requirements for operational purposes are 1 male and 1 female toilet and 1 accessible water closet, as is present at Weil Park and Riverglade Reserve, both heavily used for sport. However this amenities block in a limited space has 2 male and 2 female toilets plus a unisex changing places accessible toilet and 1 communal shared basin (visible to park) and necessitates the removal of a tree. The minimal setback is problematic and the rationale for tree removal in terms of view corridors is flawed.  
*For the consultation process to have any validity, the designs and layouts must be made available for community comment before any tree removal work is carried out.*

4) A key goal of the **State Strategic Plan for Crown Land 2031** is to manage open spaces for climate change resilience using porous grassed areas, increased biodiversity and **tree cover.**  
*This goal is clearly not being met by this Development Application.*

### 5) Tree Removal

To destroy trees to 'improve sightlines' through to the croquet lawn is an act of vandalism. **If this was a homeowner doing the same to improve their view, Council would rightly be prosecuting them.** Just 6 of the 37 trees to be removed are described by the arborist as 'large shrubs' so to categorise the remaining trees as not being significant is disingenuous.

We acknowledge that certain upgrades such as the playground and additional seating are in line with community wishes - but the destruction of trees is not. There is no doubt that judicious pruning is very necessary for trees that have been long neglected and, while no-one would question the removal of trees for reasons of disease or public safety (four trees have been marked as 'Priority for Removal'), it is essential to question why the remaining trees are under threat and whether some are being removed to make way for future construction along Gladesville Road.

a) There is no excuse for the removal of a 13m Willow Gum (Tree 54) and a 9m Firewheel Tree (Tree 58) both of which are identified for retention in the Arborist's Report.

b) What is the reason for the removal of seven trees (Tree 66, and Trees 58, 60, 61x3, 63) that provide a leafy green boundary at the rear of the Community Services carpark?

c) The removal of Trees 1 & 21 – both Junipers in good health and rated highly by the arborist, is completely unjustified. These slow growing ornamental trees are perfectly located in their garden settings surrounded with planting and sandstone boulders and enjoyed by children. **Tree 1 in particular is in an historic location and part of a commemorative memorial for the centenary of Hunters Hill.** They both have intrinsic value and must remain.

d) The removal of 11 key middle storey flowering trees located at the central portion of the park, north-east of the croquet lawn means that the extensive shade they provide for both users of the lawn and the park will be lost. In addition their removal means their roots will no longer be taking up excess rainwater which in an often waterlogged park is an important amenity. These should be pruned, not removed – see point e) below

- e) The removal of another 5 healthy middle storey flowering trees in Group 42 (incorrectly marked as Group 61 in the Statement of Environmental Effects) again to 'improve sightlines' is also unjustified. The low shrubs around the croquet lawn fence and NOT the trees impede sight lines.
- f) The two young trees, Tree 8 and 'Sapling', planted by Council 4 years ago have now reached the stage of providing valuable shade in the middle of a potentially hot grassed area so, even if Tree 8 is to be replanted, it is nonsensical to remove them for no apparent reason.
- g) Tree 101 Weeping Bottlebrush and Tree 114 Crepe Myrtle are marked as to be removed under the **48 Gladesville Demolition Plan**. Neither of these trees must be removed to facilitate development, as both could be easily incorporated into the newly designed entrance plaza.

**6) Landscape General Arrangement - Sheet 2**

- a) **Proposed replacement of Matthew St sandstone kerb.** The above document includes the instruction relating to the boundary of the croquet lawn with Matthew Street 'CO-091 CONCRETE CURB TO SIDE OF ROAD'. Heritage sandstone kerbs are protected under Council's '*Policy For The Protection And Maintenance Of Kerbs, Gutters And Sandstone Elements*' and must not be removed. *This notation must be urgently amended before any tenders are called.*
- b) The materials and height of FN-012 FENCE around the croquet lawn must be stated.

The Trust is now calling on Council to disclose the full details of how this publicly funded grant is being spent and for the community to be consulted on all aspects of the hard infrastructure design and layout, before any work is carried out and before approval for the removal of any trees.

Yours sincerely



Alister Sharp  
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