

Hunters Hill Trust Journal

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From the President's desktop:

As we head into the festive season I've been reflecting on this past year while contemplating new projects and opportunities for the year ahead. The Trust will still be carrying forward some lingering challenges from 2023, for instance the urgent review of our Local Environmental Plan. However we can also report some major successes.

Trees and loss of tree canopy was always going to be high on this year's agenda, as were new challenges from inappropriate development and planning. In January we presented Council with our thoughts on strengthening their tree policies and the cumulative loss of tree canopy on both private and public lands. More upsetting were the many instances of seemingly deliberate tree poisoning and vandalism within our suburbs.

We're pleased that Council has taken some positive initiatives in this area with a Street Tree Audit and developing the framework for a comprehensive tree policy, plus a long awaited update to the Significant Tree Register (more on page 3).

In March the community had a significant win when the independent Local Planning Panel, for the second time, rejected Council's Application to remove trees in Figtree Park, ensuring that 37 trees have now been saved from the chainsaw.

Changes to development and planning controls is another issue on our radar. A review of the Local Environment Plan took a back seat at the Town Hall meeting on 15 March when residents showed their strength of feeling at the lack of Council communication over the introduction of the NSW Planning Department's Zoning reforms. We've yet to see the full implications of the new Employment Zones that may impact 7 sites across our Municipality.



The recently renovated 'Wybalena' at 3 Jeanneret Avenue

In September the Montefiore Planning Proposal to redevelop their site at Boronia Park, required many hours' work to scrutinize the details of their plan which would increase building heights and create a precedent elsewhere in our LGA.

At around the same time, a DA was lodged to 'double the size' of Woolwich Marina, alienating this busy stretch of water for the community and placing an unacceptable burden on locals, with Margaret Street as the primary access point. The Application was rejected by Councillors and will be considered by Council staff who received 400+ submissions. Its fate will ultimately be determined by an Independent Planning Panel.

Busy? Our wonderful executive committee and members haven't had time to draw breath!

As another year closes we are forever grateful and appreciative of the support from our members and, on your behalf, we will continue to advocate to preserve our unique environment and heritage for future generations. We wish you all a safe and happy festive season.
Karyn Raisin

Christmas Party 2023



We were delighted to be welcomed into the beautifully restored heritage house 'Wybalena'. Our hosts Melissa and Joe kindly opened their stunning home to over 100 Trust members who were thrilled to be in this spectacular setting. See huntershilltrust.org.au for more pictures.

DO CONSERVATION AREAS OFFER ADEQUATE PROTECTION?

This question is worth asking as recent media reports suggest Heritage Conservation Areas (HCAs) are being used to stop urban growth.

However this does not appear to be true in our LGA where we are increasingly seeing that there is not much protection in our HCAs against the current 'knock-down & rebuild' culture. This preference does not even increase the numbers of dwellings, as it almost always leads to single family homes built to the fence lines with minimum setback and loss of gardens and trees.

Some progress has been made on strengthening the LEP terminology with the release of a revised Scoping Proposal, but the Trust has concerns that the trend for total demolition of non-heritage items in the Conservation Areas will only continue, losing further layers of the character that makes our Municipality so unique.

The before and after pictures opposite are just one example of this. The original house on this site had heritage beginnings. Pilkington's Cottage c1870 was built by one of our most famous stonemasons, John Cuneo, who was responsible for many stone buildings including Garibaldi Inn.

Unfortunately, the house suffered extensive additions over the years and only a small part of the original stone cottage was still visible. The heritage consultant engaged by the owner wishing to demolish it, argued that the existing house and garden made no contribution to the conservation area and that the replacement house will "positively improve the dwelling's contribution to the street".

The DA was approved and the house demolished. The large new home in an unsympathetic architectural style has come at the expense of the streetscape and garden setting - one of the LEP's landscape objectives.



Demolished house



New build replacement

This type of development would not be allowed in nearby Balmain, where alterations and additions to existing dwellings, rather than wholesale demolitions, are the norm, and their Council is more stringent about impacts to streetscapes in the conservation area. **So the question is - why can't we achieve that here?**

We will be speaking with Council's Director Town Planning to ask the questions you've been asking us regarding the changes in built form across our Municipality, especially in conservation areas.

A major LEP landscape area objective is *"to maintain and enhance the character and identity of the municipality by ensuring a general visual dominance of landscape over buildings and by ensuring that dwelling houses and secondary dwellings are surrounded and separated by individual gardens"*.

However the reality is often different when DAs are approved with elements that do not appear to adhere to this.

It is concerning that the current landscape ratios are now being degraded even further by reducing the landscape area from 50% to 33% in the proposed LEP, in spite of community protests.

The Director Town Planning has confirmed that the LEP Scoping Proposal is just the start of the process and that submissions will be taken into account by Council at the public exhibition stage. We will be arguing strongly that this reduction should not be implemented and current landscape ratios must be maintained to achieve the stated LEP objective of *"general visual dominance of landscape over buildings"*

Another major concern is the excessive excavation taking place to build underground cellars and carports, in one case to accommodate 15 cars, which irreversibly changes the natural sandstone topography impacting groundwater infiltration and soil biodiversity. Ecological damage is compounded with the removal of trees and damage to mature tree roots.

We need Council to be proactive in encouraging potential applicants to consider adaptive re-use, or to provide an additional dwelling within the same area, in preference to demolition. Sustainability must be a key objective.

The Trust will also be seeking assurances that our **Contributory Items** will finally be recorded. This range of buildings in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s make a valuable contribution to the streetscapes of conservation areas and need to be recognized.

The next in our series **Hunters Hill Modern'** will be published in our June 2024 edition as we continue to catalogue more mid-century homes of high architectural quality that also need protection, to help ensure this layer of history is saved for future generations.

UPDATE ON TREES

As you will no doubt remember from previous Journals we have often featured the urgent need to prevent further erosion of our green environment. Sadly progress in some areas remains disappointingly slow. Here is the latest news:

Council's Tree Policy

A budget is now available for an Urban Tree Canopy policy and a framework is being developed for consultants to complete by June 2024. There is ongoing community concern about loss of trees and biodiversity corridors and vandalism and inadequate protection for trees on both public and private land. Council's Bushland Management Advisory Committee is urging more immediate action and importantly, their involvement, as we've learnt recently that Council's internal Tree Management Working Group has not yet convened.

Significant Tree Register

Funds have now been allocated and consultants Tree IQ have begun assessing the 54 nominations from the last round in 2021 (hopefully they're all still standing). This site work should be completed by year's end and results reported in late March 2024. Successful nominations will be included in the revised LEP.

Street Tree Audit

This involves a comprehensive assessment of street trees, and some within parkland, to identify, locate and photograph the 5,012 trees recorded. When uploaded on Council's website an interactive map will allow individual trees to be viewed and their health assessed, important for managing trees needing treatment, replacement or at risk. It is proposed that bushland trees will also be included.

Loss of Trees

This has unfortunately been a serious ongoing problem (see our December 2022 Journal) with the latest example pictured above.

The Trust recently alerted Council to this apparently dying Moreton Bay Fig on the construction site of a new house in a conservation area. We understand there had been previous unsuccessful attempts by unknown individuals to kill this tree and Council has records of such occurrences.



2018



2023

After Council received an initial enquiry in August, a senior Council officer visited the site and inspected the tree at that time, and again after our subsequent alert mid-October, and reported there were no obvious signs of any vandalism and/or poisoning. Therefore there were no grounds at that stage to take enforcement action. However in order to alleviate our concerns, Council confirmed they would arrange for a Level 5 arborist to provide a report.

In the meantime at the request of Council, the Trust received a report from the Private Certifier who stated that the tree looked to be in very poor condition with large drill holes in the base although he was unsure of how recent they were. There were also large root systems which had been exposed by the excavation of the

basement. Together with the owner, the Certifier will meet with an arborist onsite to seek advice on next steps. Council has confirmed they will wait for that advice before undertaking any further actions.

Council advised the following: *"In this instance, a private Registered Certifier is appointed as the PC, it is not Council's responsibility to conduct inspections or ensure building and construction compliance. Council generally becomes the 'keeper of public records'".* Their letter reiterated that *"an adjoining neighbour or Council may contact a private certifier who is responsible for a project (Construction Certificate) requesting clarification on a specific matter on site"*.

We are pleased with the recent action by Council on this issue but still have questions as to how the gradual destruction of a magnificent tree, identified as at risk over a period of years, was allowed to continue.

We have urged Council to do more to strengthen penalties and send a clear message that tampering with trees on private or public land will not be tolerated in our Municipality.

Incredibly, the appalling act of vandalism against several trees in Betts Park which came to light in 2022, has recently been repeated after the trees showed signs of recovery! This type of wanton destruction cannot be allowed to benefit the perpetrators. Trees must be substantially left in place and banners that cannot easily be removed, placed high in the trees creating visual barriers. We welcome the State Government's very recent promise to take stronger action in light of the brazen destruction of trees in nearby Longueville.

The community needs to be confident that deliberate damage and lack of care for trees that get in the way of development or water views, is exposed and properly penalized. We will keep you informed of further developments.

LATEST NEWS

Electronic Billboard at the Church Street Overpass

There has been a groundswell of opposition to the sudden imposition of the above. Issues include the lack of appropriate community consultation, serious concerns about safety with the significant potential distraction to drivers and lack of due regard for, and compliance with, Hunters Hill LEP & DCP. A good result was achieved at Council's meeting on 27 November when a unanimous vote saw Council resolve to seek legal advice and write to the relevant NSW Government Minister and NSW Agency expressing their profound objection and calling for its immediate removal.

Boronia Park Sports & Community Facility

Behind its shroud between Ovals 1 & 2 the sporting facility is taking shape where mature eucalypts once flourished. The Rugby Club have gained their 20 year lease for use of the new building and almost exclusive use of the three ovals, plus agreement on a \$23,000 rental p.a. towards the ongoing annual maintenance costs of at least \$38,000.

Residents will recall that, in addition to the \$2.8 million in government grants, a further \$1.7 million of ratepayers' money was gifted to the build due to a major shortfall in promised donations from Rugby supporters and the fact that the tender prices for this project were well above the estimate. A Project Control Group is advising Council on construction but this apparently does not include a community representative.

Readers of our last Journal will have noted that the Trust has submitted a Freedom of Information (GIPA) request as a result of the lack of transparency on some crucial aspects of this project. This investigation is ongoing as we evaluate further information from Council.

Woolwich Marina Expansion

Councillors recently voted unanimously to reject the proposal for Woolwich Marina to double in size for

several reasons, including that it will obstruct waterways and public views of heritage items. 400+ submissions were received which are being considered by Council staff who will be preparing a report for an Independent Planning Panel.

Montefiore Proposed Development

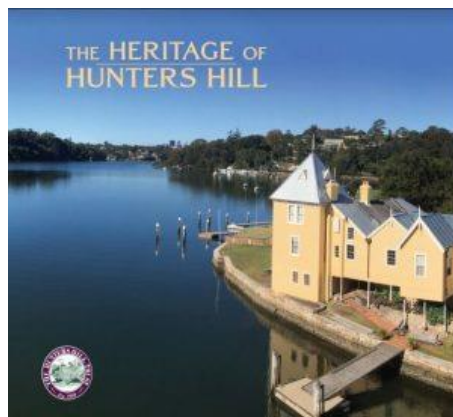
Hunters Hill Councillors rejected Montefiore's current proposal to build unit blocks, one up to 6 storeys high, citing a range of reasons including:

- The unit blocks are too high and out of character with the local area
- They set an alarming precedent for the whole municipality
- The zoning is incorrect
- The proposal fails to meet relevant government planning proposal guidelines
- The unacceptable increase in traffic

Montefiore is pushing on regardless, and has applied to the Department of Planning and Environment to review Council's decision.

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The Heritage of Hunters Hill "Green Book"

If you need the perfect gift for that hard-to-buy-for friend or relative, this is it!

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info@huntershilltrust@gmail.com

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Preserving our heritage

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speaking up for our unique municipality

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Publications:

The Heritage of Hunters Hill
Available at Hunters Hill Post Office
32 Alexandra Street
Wishbone and the Village Florist,
Garibaldi Square

Or access online at
<https://greenbook.huntershilltrust.org.au/>

**The Vision and the Struggle
The Industrial Village of Woolwich**
Available at Hunters Hill Post Office

We acknowledge the Wallumedegal of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of all land and water of the Hunters Hill local government area and pay our respects to their elders