

Hunters Hill Trust Journal

JUNE 2024 ISSN 0310-0111 Volume 62, Number 1

From the President's desktop

Upholding the Trust's mission to protect Australia's oldest garden suburbs' heritage, character and environmental values from those who would look to demolish or degrade, remains rock solid.

However, sadly, I report our fight with 'planning issues' not only continues, it 'intensifies', with a long list of matters already faced continuing to be escalated from local, to regional or state planning processes or the Land & Environment Court. When is a win a win? Only when you continue the fight.

The changing world of planning regulations in NSW which look to remove many existing protections and existing controls to increase housing density with a 'one size fits all' approach has created much uncertainty and media coverage. It remains to be seen how these changes may impact the overall character of Hunters Hill.

The protection of trees and retention of tree canopy, especially on private land remains a high priority for the Trust. We welcome the creation of an Urban Forest Plan and the comment by GM Mitchell Murphy confirming council is "fully committed to enhancing our focus on the preservation of trees".

In a warming climate, maintaining strict landscape controls and tree canopy is vital and for this reason it was wonderful to see the reopening recently of Figtree Park, knowing that 37 of the existing and established trees were still in place due to the efforts of many Trust members and the community at large.

Karyn Raisin



How is 'Heritage' assessed?

Contributory Items, such as the one above, built in the 1920s, 30s and 40s are also important components of the streetscape of our garden suburb.

The Trust has compiled a list of these, and many feature in our Green Book, *The Heritage of Hunters Hill*. We were pleased to learn recently that Council's Heritage Officer is in the process of properly recording these items to ensure they are mapped and catalogued. We hope this may help to protect irreplaceable history in the face of the relentless knockdown/rebuild culture that is changing the face of our suburbs.

The home above is just one example of these gems. With the current push for increased density, it is even more imperative to ensure that these layers of history with their established gardens are saved for future generations.

Hunters Hill Modern

The latest in our series *Hunters Hill Modern* (insert overleaf) continues to catalogue mid-century homes of high architectural quality that must be recognised as important to our history. This is being done in many other LGAs and we will again be presenting the list to Council to follow up on our previous requests to acknowledge the value of this mid-century heritage.

Annual General Meeting 27 June 6.30pm - RSL Hall

In keeping with this theme, we're delighted to announce that the speaker for our AGM this year is local celebrity **Tim Ross**. Tim will share his thought-provoking and often hilarious journey on the power of architecture to shape our lives and will also share important lessons on how radical ideas for living in the past can help us reimagine how we will live in the future. Check out our latest news at www.huntershilltrust.org.au

NSW HOUSING REFORMS

As you may know, the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) have now released their housing target for Hunters Hill LGA which is set at 400 new homes by 2029. This overrides previous targets of 150-200 by 2026.

In light of the concerted push back to the 'one-size-fits all' policy, the State Government recently issued a "Policy Refinement Paper" to address some key issues raised. This was only circulated to councils but uploaded to the internet by Kuring-gai Council (*SMH 29 May Revealed: How Sydney's housing push will be watered down*).

This policy appears to address some of the heritage concerns within employment zones E1, E2, and MU1 zones, although it notes that the 6-storey standard will apply to the residential zones surrounding the town centres (within the 800m walking catchments).

However, the Trust has also independently been in touch with the DPHI asking for confirmation of their statement that **the new planning controls will 'turn off'** if housing targets can be reached by councils using their own Local Environmental Plan (LEP). The DPHI have now confirmed **that this is correct** and here is their reply:

"The Secretary's statement regarding the applicability of the low- and mid-rise and TOD SEPP controls is correct. If councils plan for greater or equal controls as our proposed policies, **then the policy can be replaced with these local controls** subject to review and validation by the department".

This is very important and encouraging news. In light of this, Council will be able to argue strongly to 'turn off' the new State standards and revert to our Local Environmental Plan, if the number of dwellings complies with Government targets.

Mid-rise housing (Figure 2) is generally 3 to 6 storey residential flat buildings or shop-top housing.

Figure 2. Typical mid-rise building types



Source: NSW Housing Planning Reforms

We understand that further funds have already been allocated towards finalising the **Gladesville Masterplan** and this is obviously where Council intends that a large number of the additional dwellings will be built.

The Gladesville site has recently been advertised in the financial press as follows:

'Identified for new housing uplift'

"... prospective purchasers may also seek to benefit from the recently adopted changes to the Housing SEPP."

No doubt there will be pressure from any potential developer for greater heights under the new rules but Council can now mitigate adverse effects on the community by ensuring that the regulations in our Local Environmental Plan are enforced.

We continue to question the perceived wisdom that the only solution to housing shortages is to increase supply. As recent research has shown, when all Sydney Councils are combined there are approx. 163,700 unoccupied dwellings in Sydney and more than 75,000 dwellings across NSW dedicated as AirBnB. Developers are reported to be 'land banking' and it has now been confirmed that the number of NSW

dwellings approved but not started has risen from 13,700 to 15,600 in the December quarter.

In spite of this, the State is now proposing huge concessions to the industry in the form of government action to pre-purchase units so that developments can commence.

This use of public money to encourage developers to build more housing, ironically comes at a time of reports about the latest developer push to demolish multiple blocks of solid affordable units in the Eastern suburbs to build luxury (but fewer) apartments.

As we are well aware from our own suburbs, this knock down/rebuild culture is all around us. Modest homes with mature gardens are replaced by huge single family homes with little green space and no deep planting areas for trees.

After the recent process of feedback on the LEP, Council sent the updated version to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure and it will come back to the community for public exhibition and comment later this year. The Trust is concerned that there has been a reduction in size of landscaped areas, compared to the current regulations despite strong objections, and we await the final Plan to fully review the details.

HUNTERS HILL MODERN

Two mid-century courtyard houses

Turning away from the noise and prying eyes of the street to create a more intimate but controlled connection to nature and the elements, the courtyard house is an architectural typology dating back millennia. Two excellent examples in the modernist idiom are found here in Hunters Hill at 33 Woolwich Road and 12 Ellesmere Avenue, both completed in 1961. Both houses are built on relatively flat subdivisions, allowing the creation of central courtyards around which the living and circulation spaces of the dwelling are arranged and directly connected. Both houses are simply constructed in inexpensive materials, and in their original state were small and tightly planned. Despite their modest nature, both received immediate attention in the world of architecture: 33 Woolwich Road was included in the 1961 exhibition “15 houses by Sydney architects” alongside some of the most notable modern houses built in Sydney in the 1950s, many of which are now heritage listed at either State or Local level; 12 Ellesmere Avenue, which in a number of ways signalled a future direction for housing design in Sydney, took out the inaugural Royal Australian Institute of Architects Wilkinson Award, the most prestigious award for residential architecture in NSW. Both houses would later be updated by their original architects.

Despite recognition of their architectural merit, neither of these homes have heritage protection. Their survival within the knock-down-rebuild environment of the conservation areas of Hunters Hill is therefore far from assured.

— Lucy Creagh



Photo: L. Creagh

33 Woolwich Road

The house at 33 Woolwich Road was designed by architect John James (b. 1931) for the Mainsbridge family and completed in 1961. Known by some as the lowest house in Hunters Hill, surprisingly the client Raymon Mainsbridge was a very tall man. The brief to James for this family house was simply “A walled city, a piazza of the heart.”¹ With encompassing walls to the street and a central, semi-cloistered courtyard to which the entry, kitchen, dining and living areas are connected, James clearly satisfied his client’s poetic instruction, with the Mainsbridge family occupying the house for 19 years, reengaging James along the way to alter and extend the house in 1969.

Born in London, but raised in Australia, James commenced studies in architecture at the University of Melbourne in 1949, coming under the tutelage of Roy Grounds, Fredrick Romberg and Robin Boyd—the triumvirate of Melbourne modernism at the time. Upon graduation in 1953, he proceeded to Europe, and over a three-year period gained experience in England, Sweden and Italy. James returned to Sydney to establish his private practice in Roseville in 1957 with what he described as an “increasing sense that the architect must be a builder.”²

Accruing practical experience and knowledge of the local construction industry, over the next eight years James designed, (and mostly also built) around a hundred houses, the vast majority of these on the North Shore. He brought a mathematical logic to the conception of these houses and a sense of pragmatism and craftsmanship to their execution, working out the details on site. The assumption of the dual architect-builder role in the 1960s foreshadowed a significant chapter in James’ later career as a scholar of Gothic architecture, with a specific interest in how medieval master masons shaped the design of cathedrals such as Chartres over the course of their construction.

Built on a concrete raft slab to the centre of its flat corner block, the post-and-beam roof structure of the Mainsbridge house hovers just above circumscribing concrete block walls, establishing a strong horizontal presence for the building from the street. Internally, an unusually low floor-to-ceiling height of 7 feet 4 inches (2.24 metres) sets a datum from which large sections are cut out to expose shallow hipped roofs placed above the kitchen, living/dining and bedrooms. These rooms spiral around the central courtyard, which today is delineated by a low hedge and functions as a



Above: Eastern elevation from Tیره Avenue, 1961. Photo: Max Dupain, courtesy SLNSW.

Middle: Bedroom, 1961. Photo: Max Dupain, courtesy SLNSW.

Below: Central courtyard, 2001. Photo: Ray Joyce. <https://mhns.w.au/stories/documenting-nsw-homes/mainsbridge-house/>

furnished “outdoor room,” but which originally felt more expansive, with a checkerboard of gravel and planting stretching across it and a reflective pond adding further dimension. The now-painted Besser “Vibrapac” block walls were originally buff coloured, contrasting internally with white ceilings and externally with brown-red fascias. The house was punctuated throughout with bright coloured doors



Above: Original design for the central courtyard, 1961. Photo: Max Dupain, courtesy SLNSW.

Stylistically, the Mainsbridge House belongs to the Cartesian simplicity of 1950s modernism, recalling the Californian “Case Study Houses” that investigated possibilities for indoor/outdoor living in a temperate climate. Its post-and-beam structure, articulated roof form, wide eaves and contemplative courtyard recall traditional Japanese architecture, an influence that has also been connected to James’ work in this period.³

Although it may be argued that the house is out-of-step with the sandstone-walled environs of Woolwich Road and its Jeanneret-constructed neighbours, James consciously interpreted this setting, creating a delineating masonry wall in a unit similar in dimension to sandstone blocks, demarcating a private realm from the public street. No trees were removed for the construction of the original house, rather walls were re-directed and a section of roof cut out to accommodate them. The generous insets into the boundary wall that framed the original trees on the site also remain, today containing a collection of maturing Crepe Myrtles.

Far from the look-at-me grandiosity of much that is constructed in Hunters Hill and

Woolwich today, the Mainsbridge House is diminutive in scale and recessive—a fine and significant modernist house by an intriguing Sydney architect, hidden in plain sight in the heart of the Conservation Area.

The Mainsbridge House was documented in 2001 by Sydney Living Museums for the exhibition “Fifties houses: plus or minus?”, noting that changes to the interiors included lining of the original exposed rafter ceilings, an enlarged kitchen space and additional bedrooms.

— Peter Lonergan & Lucy Creagh

1 Peter Lonergan interview with John James, 2022.

2 Jennifer Taylor, *An Australian Identity*, p. 74

3 Taylor, *ibid.*, p. 77; London et al, *An Unfinished Experiment*, p. 298.

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University of Melbourne Department of Architecture, *Cross-Section*, issue 132, October 1, 1963.

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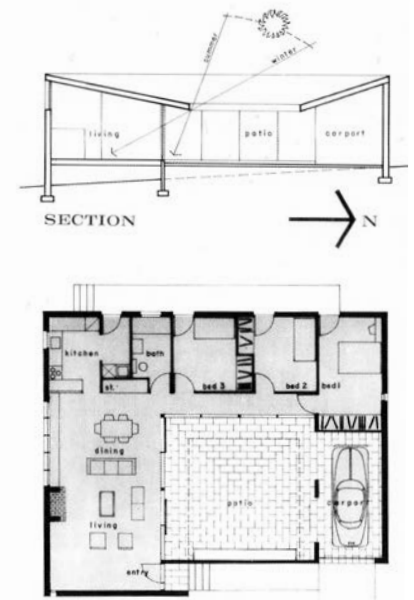
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www.johnjames.com.au

12 Ellesmere Avenue

The house at 12 Ellesmere Avenue was designed in 1960 by Donald Gazzard (1929-2017) for Trevor and Alexia Herbert and completed the following year. Alexia was the sister of Gazzard's wife Marea Gazzard, the noted sculptor and ceramicist. The Herbert family occupied the house in its original configuration for almost 40 years, filling it with Marea's works, only selling it after Alexia's death in 1998. This simple courtyard house is significant as a prototype for well-designed, cost-conscious suburban housing—a herald of the architect-designed project home. Straightforward in plan and construction, the Herbert House was replicated in mirror image as Home No. 11 at the now famous Carlingford Homes Fair in 1962, and at least one other extant version of the house is known. Its potential as a unit of medium density housing is also clear.

Donald Gazzard was born and educated in Sydney, initially studying engineering at the University of Sydney. He was drawn into the world of architecture through a student-draftsman position in the office of Harry Seidler, where he worked between 1950 and 1953, thoroughly schooled there in the principles of Bauhaus modernism. Working and travelling in Europe, the USA and Canada cemented his commitment to architecture, and Gazzard eventually gained registration as an architect in London in 1958. He returned to Sydney in 1960, establishing a multi-disciplinary practice with architect-town planner George Clarke. The Herbert House would be Gazzard's first completed building in private practice. He would go on to be involved in urban design, planning, public and private architecture, and activism. Gazzard's own house in Paddington remains perhaps the finest modern building in that suburb, and his sculptural and contemplative Memorial Church at Vacluse—the selling-off and redevelopment of which caused



Above left: 12 Ellesmere Ave. Hunters Hill, 2023. Photo: L. Creagh.

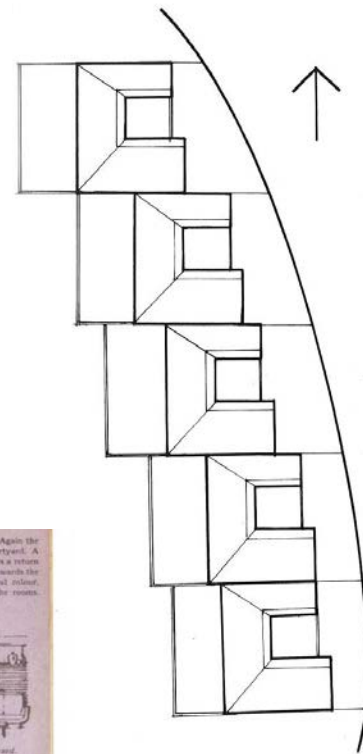
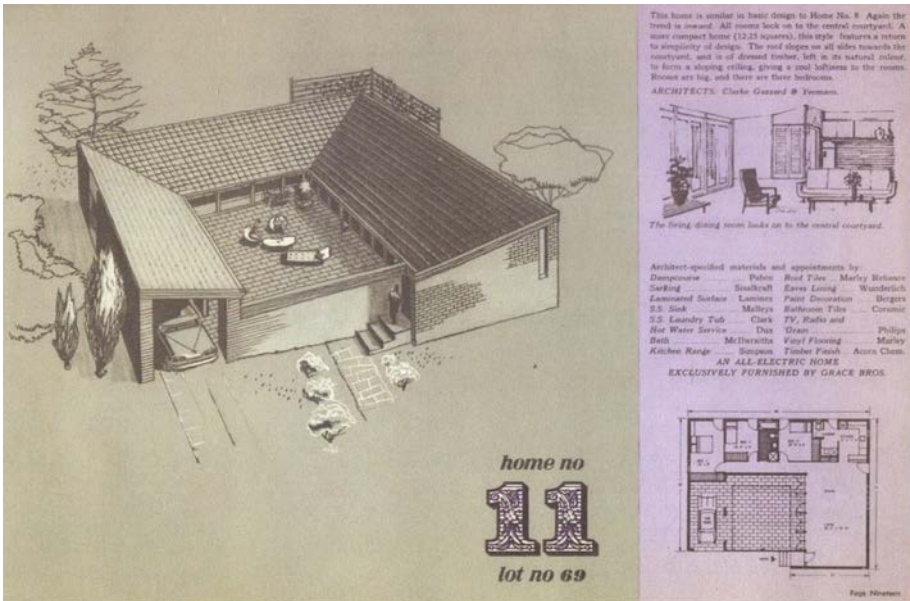
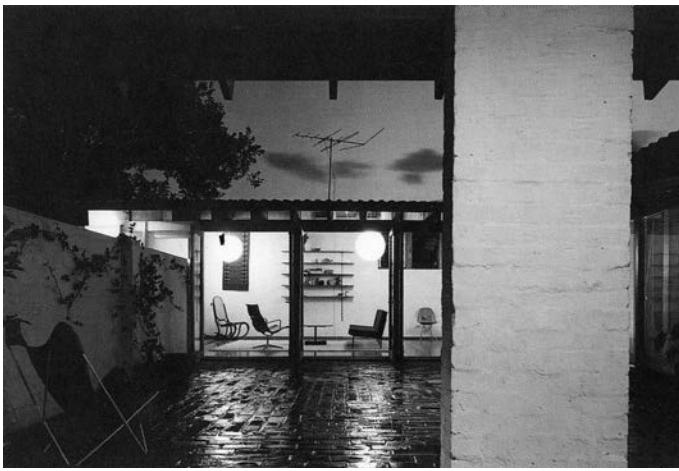
Above right: Herbert House section and plan. Don Gazzard, *Sydneysider*, p. 41.

Below: Herbert House interior, looking north from dining area to courtyard and carport. Photo: David Moore, in Don Gazzard, *Sydneysider*, p. 39.

an outcry—evidence of his great versatility. Gazzard was awarded the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medal in 2001, the highest award for architects in Australia.

The narrow, slightly sloping site Gazzard was presented with in Ellesmere Avenue in 1960 had no natural features or views to capitalise on, and the new dwelling needed to be wedged in between red brick neighbours. Likely influenced by European examples such as Jørn Utzon's Kingo courtyard housing of 1957, Gazzard chose to create a small and simple house that turned in on

itself around a central courtyard, employing numerous architectural devices to expand the sense of space and maximise thermal comfort. An entry/living/dining room with a complete wall of full height glazed doors facing north opened directly onto the courtyard, with an open carport conceived as an extension of this space, available for use during the day as a covered children's play area. This expanded living zone was juxtaposed with a tightly-planned row of kitchen/laundry, bathroom and three bedrooms, accessed via a narrow corridor that was also fully glazed to the courtyard, relieving any



Above: View to courtyard from garage. Photo: David Moore in Don Gazzard, *Sydneysider*, p. 39.

Below: Don Gazzard, House no. 11, Carlingford Homes Fair, (now 18 Tudor Place). AIA NSW, "Carlingford Project Homes 1961-67," Sept. 2012.

Above right: Diagram, "Kingsdene-Herbert" house as a unit of medium density housing. Don Gazzard, *Sydneysider*, p. 41.

sense of being cramped. The roof is pitched inwards to the courtyard on all three sides with deep overhangs controlling seasonal sun penetration. With no gutters or downpipes, all rainwater originally drained to the clinker brick-paved court. In combination with raked ceilings, louvred fanlights were incorporated to get air movement at high level. While the interior of the house was open to the courtyard at every turn, walls facing the outside world were solid, with small, discretely placed windows capturing framed views. The building is set back from the street frontage to align with neighbouring houses, and the pitched roof was said to continue the language of the adjoining gabled buildings.

Standard cavity brickwork, concrete roof tiles, exposed timber

rafters, internal stud wall partitions with plasterboard and Pacific Maple joinery in a natural finish were the inexpensive materials used, with surface wiring reducing costs further. The brick commons were bagged and painted white.

In 2001 new owners approached council with a scheme to add a first floor and double garage, a proposal that, it was estimated by the Conservation Advisory Panel at the time, would have "completely obliterated the existing house," doubling its height and destroying the original front courtyard. The new owners were duly alerted to the provenance and significance of their house. Moreover, the panel were able to raise the issue of recent amendments to the Copyright Act in December 2000 which entailed that

architects and all "creators" working in Australia now had "moral rights" over their buildings and designs created before or after that date, the right to be correctly attributed, and importantly "to be consulted if the completed work is demolished, altered or treated in a derogatory manner." The duty to consult with Gazzard in relation to the proposal was made clear. In 2002, a revised scheme was presented to the panel by Gazzard himself. The house remained a single storey, with no changes to the street elevation and additional accommodation placed to the rear of the site. The courtyard at the heart of the house was retained.

In addition to receiving the 1961 Wilkinson Award, the Herbert House is listed on the Australian Institute of Architects Register of Significant Buildings.

— Peter Lonergan & Lucy Creagh

Many thanks to Stephen Batey and Brett Boardman for their assistance with material for this article.

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- Jennifer Taylor, *An Australian Identity: houses for Sydney 1953-63*. Dept. of Architecture, University of Sydney, 1972.
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UPDATE ON TREES

HHC Urban Forest Strategy

Council is currently surveying residents for their perspectives on trees on both private land and streets within Hunters Hill LGA to contribute to a revised and more comprehensive tree policy. While the goal is to achieve 40-45% canopy cover overall, the fact is that we continue to lose trees across the local landscape. It is now fully recognised that development on private property is leading to the greatest loss, most notably where DAs are approved by private certifiers. The demolition of a modest house, and replacement with a much larger footprint leaving little room for mature trees and garden area is changing our suburbs dramatically.

The Trust believes it is vital for Council to inspect DAs to check the extent of tree cover prior to development and follow up on any replacement trees after completion, as well as monitoring in following months. We also call for increased penalties and security bonds of \$100,000 to prevent further tree vandalism. The policy will link to Council's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy with reference to improved management of vegetation in our parks, reserves and bushland habitat.

We're pleased to see that the new Street Tree Online Portal will shortly be available on Council's website, providing details of our street trees, their species, health, location, photos and an interactive map.

Significant Tree Register

Now this exercise is finally reaching completion, there has been an extra 26 trees added to the Register. To celebrate this fact, we're delighted to announce that the Trust will be running a **Significant Tree Walk** on 28 July to view some fine examples.

A Level 5 Arborist will be our guide and inform us about the history of particular trees and why they were planted. Look out for the Trust's email with further details.



One of our spectacular Significant Trees

Goat Paddock

As recently notified to members, we are pleased to report that the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust has now erected a large sign and fencing, installed a camera and planted replacement trees at the site of the destruction at Goat Paddock. Sadly this is not exactly where the trees were felled due to the sloping site but will still hopefully deter further vandalism within this valued public space.

Vandalism at Goat Paddock



Replacement trees, fence and sign



NEWS UPDATE

FIGTREE PARK

Figtree Park reopened to the public with some fanfare on Saturday 15th June after a 12 month renovation.

The first part of this project has been successfully delivered and many locals are happy with the playground and the landscaping and are very relieved to get their park back.

We're delighted that the Trust's involvement in preventing Council cutting down 37 trees has been hugely beneficial to the final outcome, which is a win for all. The trees will now provide some very welcome areas of shade in summer, especially necessary in light of the increased paving and expansive concrete at the entry.

The Trust has always strongly advocated for the playground and we're delighted that this has finally been realised.

The budget originally included \$2.25m for the purchase of 2 Ryde Road (not permitted under the terms of the grant) and has potentially given rise to a surplus. However questions regarding delays and costings at Council's 25th March meeting, resulted in the public gallery being cleared and discussions continuing behind closed doors.

Residents are entitled to know how public money has been spent and the Trust will be requesting Council's full transparency regarding this.

HENLEY PRECINCT PLAN

Submissions have closed for the draft Precinct Master Plan and overall the Trust considers the Plan is comprehensive and has been well-developed by the consultant team. It takes into account the needs of the active communities within the Reserve, such as the dedicated Happy Hens' productive garden, the Bridge Club and Bushcare groups, while proposing improvements to paths, parking and amenities. Providing safer accessibility to the Bowling Club is vital, as is an urgent

strategy to restore the damage from unauthorised bike riding within the C2 Environmental Conservation zone. All projects will be dependent on Council obtaining grants.

All Saints Soccer Club has secured a \$1.9m grant from NSW government to build a sporting clubhouse at Gladesville Reserve near Victoria Road. The Trust would want to see systems put in place to ensure ratepayers are not asked to dig deeper for other associated costs or budget blow-outs as has happened at Boronia Park.

WOOLWICH MARINA EXPANSION

After Council and the Sydney North Planning Panel rejected the above proposal, the proponent has now appealed to the Land & Environment Court, and a Conciliation meeting will be held onsite on 19th September 2024. The Trust has joined with Council and other 'party' objectors to speak at this meeting. We are hopeful - but the fight continues!

THE LONG RUNNING SAGA OF BORONIA PARK

Following the remedial works to remove contaminated soil from the site (no surprise as the ovals were formed on a previous tip!) at an additional cost of \$500,000, the facility is almost ready to open.

However, because of the chosen siting between Ovals 1 & 2, the building is over-sized and it is now necessary to move the boundary of Oval 2 and its lights, at further expense to ratepayers.

More disruption to our heritage parkland is proposed by the construction of Council's Works Depot adjacent to bushland and Oval 3, with a new road access in Princes St. The flawed decision to re-locate and outsource to Lane Cove Council's depot has cost ratepayers more than \$80,000 annually and countless hours in staff travel time.

REMNANT LAND JOUBERT ST ROAD RESERVE

The Trust is currently seeking a response from Council to our questions regarding the future of the 834sqm parcel of land adjacent to 13 Euthella Avenue (Road Reserve, Joubert Street South) – see our detailed summary at www.huntershilltrust.org.au

The Trust has urged Council to retain this rare remnant of foreshore in public hands. We are concerned at the decision made in a closed session of Council's November 2023 meeting, to sell to an adjoining neighbour for a 'minimum consideration'. If the land is to be sold, it must be done through an open and transparent process which will allow all possibilities to be explored, and achieve the best economic return for the community.



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If you are not a member why not join us?

And help swell the number of voices speaking up for our unique municipality

Become a member at
www.huntershilltrust.org.au

Publications

The Heritage of Hunters Hill
Available at Hunters Hill Post Office
32 Alexandra Street

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