



**PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE**

PO Box 85, HUNTERS HILL, NSW 2110  
[www.huntershilltrust.org.au](http://www.huntershilltrust.org.au)

22 February 2025

## **Feedback from The Hunters Hill Trust to Hunters Hill Council's draft Urban Forest Management Strategy**

The Hunters Hill Trust has had input to this Strategy through member participation on Council's Bushland Management Advisory Committee (BMAC) and looks forward to contributing further to the final review of this important policy.

Overall we consider the document is fulfilling its remit, certainly on presenting the major issues of retaining, increasing and protecting trees in our LGA, but we believe it needs to go further in encompassing and promoting the significance and benefits into the future of greater biodiversity across our major reserves and bushland, as well as the prime focus on our residential gardens, parks and streetscapes.

Managing invasive weeds, particularly vine invasions in bushland and parks, and ensuring protection of waterways, is also critical to the overall health of our natural areas. Planning for the harvesting of stormwater across our suburbs and bushland, where possible, would also prove nature-positive in a changing climate.

It is not always appreciated how fortunate we are that the Municipality supports a high diversity of native species, including threatened and endangered ecological communities as well as a wide range of locally significant flora and fauna. It would widen the educational outcomes from the Urban Forest Strategy to include information and advice on our local indigenous vegetation types. For instance, nominating locally endemic trees as well as a diversity of native shrubs, understorey and groundcovers suitable for planting in gardens would help to provide habitat value and add to the now accepted concept of creating biodiversity corridors in the urban forest, with all the beneficial ecosystem services that would bring across the urban landscape.

The five critical Core Principles, as expressed, of Robust Tree Protection, Strategic Planting, Best Management Practice, Proactive Monitoring and Community Stewardship are applauded by the Trust. Given the recent horrific experiences of tree loss and damage via unlawful removal and/or deliberate neglect, the Trust would certainly regard as an immediate focus the robust protection of our highly valued trees, both in private hands and in the public realm.

In relation to this urgent need for action, and in addition to providing more stringent deterrents where trees have been vandalised through poisoning, or felled for views, we are concerned that the existing means of protecting trees on sites subject to re-development are not being sufficiently utilised to prevent further tree removal and destruction of our natural heritage.

Therefore, as the loss of trees has been shown to be greatest on private property, in addition to the points listed under Key Objective 4 Tree Protections (p51), we suggest including a further point entitled *Tree Protection Private Development* that details the process once a Development Application (DA) is received by Council and prior to any development consent. This point needs to document the procedure by Council staff to verify the extent of tree cover via such means as the Aerial Mapping data and confirm that tree cover has been accurately represented in the DA and that adequate protection, where required, is clearly stated.

This procedure would also apply in the case of Complying Development Certification (CDC), where the *State Environmental Planning Policy 2008* legislation requires homeowners and developers to have Council approval to remove any trees that are over a height of 6m (8m in the case of new homes) that are not within 3m of a building more than 25m<sup>2</sup>.

The process must also document that site visits by Council staff will be carried out to verify that trees are being safely retained before, during and after completion. This must occur before any Completion or Occupation Certificate can be issued. Steadfastly applying the principle of Proactive Monitoring is critical in this regard.

We also urge Council to implement a system for ensuring that any replacement trees required as a condition on a DA, are monitored within a staged process to ensure their survival. Thus we welcome the development of Tree Sensitive Urban Design (TSUD) being adopted across the LGA and fully integrated into Council's culture, strategies and actions, particularly in relation to DAs (as detailed above) where there is so often significant but avoidable risk to trees. The Trust also supports the multiple components comprising Green Infrastructure, as described in the document, being fully integrated into the revised LEP/DCP.

The Strategy is strong on presenting the known benefits of maintaining tree cover, particularly large mature canopy trees, as a major part of the urban forest, and their role in mitigating the effects of climate change and providing amenity. As stated, large trees provide 16 times the value to the community compared to small trees over their lifetime.

While we acknowledge the need for a tree planting plan (and choice of 'the right tree in the right place'), it is clearly cost-effective to retain and ensure the health of large trees for all the values they provide, as discussed in the Strategy. Plantings are expensive, can often fail, be slow to grow and also be vulnerable to attack. Therefore, it is advisable to include an Action Plan as a component of the Strategy with annual targets for planting and a monitoring system in order to achieve the goal of 40% canopy by 2045 across the LGA.

The Trust supports the Vision of 'A community within a healthy, resilient biodiverse urban forest'. We look forward to the Strategy, further to a final review by the BMAC, becoming a much referenced document that leads to even greater appreciation and protection of our verdant local environment and its many natural assets.