

13/11/2013
Regional Panels Secretariat
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Planning Proposal Submission

Rezone site from non-urban to residential use at 120 – 122 Mona Vale Road, Warriewood

The Katandra Bushland Sanctuary Trust would like to object to the above planning proposal due to the drastic effect it would have on the local natural environment. The site in question forms a critical wildlife corridor between the Warriewood Escarpment and Katandra Bushland Sanctuary, both of which are well known for their high biodiversity value. It also provides a potential site for construction of a much needed fauna crossing over Mona Vale Road, something that will be even more vital once the Ingleside Precinct land development goes ahead.

Residential development on the proposed site

1. will have an unacceptable negative effect on the local environment and forever change the fauna of the Pittwater area
 2. should be considered in conjunction with the impending land development in the Ingleside Precinct which is currently being planned.
 3. goes against the wishes and expectations of the local community
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1. Katandra Bushland Sanctuary occupies a site on the escarpment overlooking Mona Vale. It is linked to Ku-ring-gai and Garigal National Parks by narrow bushland corridors that include Ingleside Chase Reserve and the Warriewood Escarpment. The proposed residential development would sever this corridor preventing fauna from moving between these areas, isolating populations and putting them at risk of extinction from the local area. This of course will have a devastating effect on populations all along the Mona Vale / Warriewood Escarpment.

The importance of this wildlife corridor was recognised in the Ingleside / Warriewood Urban Land Release Draft Planning Strategy (1995) which indicated that the land had been allocated for conservation purposes. While some of the site was subject to unauthorised clearing of vegetation in the 1990's, it still provides vital access for fauna movement between Katandra Bushland Sanctuary (and other areas to the north of Mona Vale Road) and Ingleside Chase Reserve (and other areas to the south of Mona Vale Road). Pittwater Council's website

acknowledges the need to keep these bushland corridors, stating that “Wildlife corridors play a crucial role in maintaining connections between animal and plant populations that would otherwise be isolated and at greater risk of local extinction.”

Surveys of Katandra Bushland Sanctuary conducted between 1998 and 2000 recorded

- approximately 350 native plant species existing in five main types of vegetation communities – woodland, wet heathland, dry open forest, moist tall open forest and rainforest-like closed forest
- 15 species of native mammals, 64 bird species, 16 species of reptiles and 5 species of amphibians within Katandra along with numerous invertebrate species representative of six of the ten major invertebrate phyla.

The flora survey concluded that “there are very few non-indigenous plants in Katandra” due to “an active weeding program by the Friends of Katandra” and that “the flora is generally healthy and diverse”.

The fauna survey was conducted by George Hangay. George Hangay is very well credentialed for this work, having worked for the Australian Museum for 22 years and being a Scientific member of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW and numerous other International societies. Methods used in his survey included visual and aural observations, searching for evidence such as droppings and footprints, and a trapping program using Elliot traps and sand traps. This survey involved approximately 256 hours of observation within the Sanctuary, and he noted that “a thorough survey of the entire reptile and amphibian fauna was not achieved during this project. Undoubtedly there are more species of these animals living in the area and a more detailed research would be needed in the future.”

Species he did record in this survey that are endangered, rare or uncommon in the area include the spotted quoll, echidna, swamp rat, Eastern pygmy-possum, powerful owl, superb lyrebird, channel-billed cuckoo, king parrot, peregrine falcon, heath monitor and the Giant Burrowing frog. Recorded sightings by Sanctuary Trustees, rangers and members of the public indicate that the majority, if not all, of these species are still found regularly in Katandra.

The survey concluded that many of these populations no doubt interact with those outside the Sanctuary in nearby bushland due to their migratory or nomadic habits and that the preservation of these nearby bushland areas is of “paramount importance” even if some of it is not completely undisturbed bushland.

The survey concludes

“Katandra Bushland Sanctuary is especially important from a conservation point of view as it harbours a high number of native flora and fauna elements within the metropolitan limits of Sydney. From its vegetation communities, the wet heathland and the relatively small closed-forest are perhaps the most vulnerable and therefore most valuable. However the rest of the area is also very important as a number of unique plant species live there also.”

“The following mammal species are either rare or uncommon and/or especially sensitive in the Sydney region, but do occur within the limits of the Sanctuary and hence their protection and management deserve further conservation effort.”

“Although some introduced species frequent the area, the presence of native elements emphasises the importance of this protected area. The most immediate danger threatening most of the vertebrate fauna is the presence of feral mammals either by direct predation or by competition”

“Another endangering factor is the ever-increasing urbanisation of the area. At present the Sanctuary is mostly surrounded by vacant land, either privately or government owned. The vegetation of these lands is somewhat similar to Katandra, even if any organisation or government office does not properly care for these areas. Birds and some mammals are regularly using these lands as feeding grounds, some even for breeding. These areas, although they no longer form large, uninterrupted bushlands, can also serve as corridors for migratory or nomadic species. Therefore it is of paramount importance that the ecosystems of these remain undisturbed. Urban development would greatly reduce the chance of survival for this unique and vulnerable environment. Ultimately, possible formation of a national park or wildlife refuge or the annexation to existing protected areas should implement environmental protection and conservation.”

This conclusion makes it clear that any development of the proposed site would have significant impact on the flora and particularly the fauna of the area. Removal of vegetation for housing will heavily impact on food sources and breeding habitat for the native fauna.

Along with any residential development come family pets. Introduction of more domestic animals, particularly dogs and cats, to the immediate area will no doubt heavily impact on the survival of the native fauna of the area.

This survey conclusion is backed up by the fact that many of these species are also listed as being found in the Ingleside Chase Reserve and Warriewood Escarpment, on the opposite side of the proposed development site to Katandra, so movement of fauna through this corridor is obvious.

Research shows that individuals of many of these species identified do occupy and cover large ranges of land. For example

- Tiger quolls home range is usually in excess of 200 ha for males, often moving several kilometres in one night.
- The Giant Burrowing Frog is known to move 300m in a night, more than the width of parts of the proposed development just in one night.
- Echidnas have a home range up to 50 ha
- The Swamp Wallaby has a home range of about 20 ha
- Powerful owls home ranges of many hundreds of ha
- Male Red-bellied black snakes will travel over one kilometre in a day during breeding season in search of a mate.

When you consider the combined area of the corridor that includes Ingleside Chase Reserve, the proposed development site and Katandra is only about 100 ha, then their combined importance as a corridor to more extensive bushland areas becomes even more obvious. Restricting the movement of these species will almost certainly lead to their local extinction.

Evidence that these animals do use this bushland corridor is also supported by the fact that reports prepared for NSW Government Roads and Maritime Services has identified the

section of Mona Vale Road that passes within 100 metres of Katandra and between Katandra and the proposed development as a road kill hot spot.

The rezoning proposal for 120-122 Mona Vale Road does not include a full assessment of the impact of such a development on the fauna of the area. Some surveys do appear to have been carried out to identify some of fauna that might be found on the land in question, however the details indicate a very limited number of survey hours being carried out. It is not surprising then that the results of these surveys differ significantly in identified species to those recorded in the immediate surrounding areas over much longer observational time periods. The limited survey included in the development proposal itself notes the “seasonal limitations of short term surveys”, so it substitutes survey hours with a “habitat assessment” to identify potential habitats where threatened and other fauna species could reside or forage. The only actual impact assessment provided is for the construction of an access road servicing 120-122 Mona Vale Road, again based on a very short term fauna survey. Additionally, these surveys focus mainly on those species that are officially classified as “threatened species”. However no species ever exist in isolation. These surveys do not provide an accurate picture of the true biodiversity that exists in the area or the impact that this development would have on this biodiversity. A lot of the fauna threatened by this development may not be officially classified as threatened, however it is the fauna native to the Pittwater area and its existence in this area is very much threatened. It is well known that isolated populations of fauna species are much more vulnerable to extinction from an area. Habitat corridors are vital for fauna movement to keep populations healthy. No short term survey carried out in less than a week is ever going to be able to provide an accurate assessment of the fauna that rely on this bushland corridor, not just for breeding, not just for foraging, but also for free movement between larger areas of habitat.

Free fauna movement along bushland corridors is particularly important during extreme events, such as during bushfires. The last 2 major fires that have impacted on this escarpment (1979 and 1994) came from Ku-ring-gai National park to the north-west, again making this wildlife corridor link to the south to Ingleside Chase Reserve and the Warriewood Escarpment through the proposed development site even more important.

2. The impending release of land in the Ingleside Precinct area for urban development has been a controversial topic in the local community for decades. The Ingleside Community Reference Group, made up of interested local community members, has been engaged by the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, UrbanGrowth NSW and Pittwater Council to give input into the planning process for the development of land in the Ingleside Precinct. As part of the development of the Master Plan a range of specialist input and technical studies is required in areas including
 - Biodiversity and Riparian Corridor assessment
 - Land capability, contamination and salinity
 - Bushfire
 - Community, recreation, cultural facilities and open space.

The bushland corridor which includes Ingleside Chase Reserve, the proposed development site and Katandra borders this precinct. How could it be possible to properly and validly consider all the implications of any proposed development of the area around 120-122 Mona Vale Road if the overall Master Plan for the Ingleside Precinct area has not yet been set or even the required specialist and technical studies made? Any future development in the area

should surely be considered in conjunction with the overall Master Plan being developed for the whole Ingleside Precinct.

The minutes of the meetings of the Ingleside Community Reference Group to date indicate that environmental impact of development and the effect on the local biodiversity is of upmost concern. Pittwater Council, one of the major stakeholders in this precinct development, has expressed through a Council resolution dated 18th February 2013 requests that the planning process takes into account

- The future protection and management of environmentally sensitive land, including environmental, biodiversity and creekline corridors.
- A sustainable and ecologically sensitive development form based on the highest standards
- The threat from bushfire and provision of emergency access/egress eg bushfire.

Again I question how could it be possible to properly and validly consider all the implications of any proposed development of the area around 120-122 Mona Vale Road if the overall Master Plan for the Ingleside Precinct area has not yet been set or even the required specialist and technical studies made?

Once all these specialist and technical studies have been made, it will be even more obvious the importance of keeping the critical bushland corridor that passes through the proposed 120-122 Mona Vale Road development site. Aerial maps show that this development proposal completely severs this corridor.

The Ingleside Precinct separates large areas of the Garigal and Kuring-gai National Parks. It also separates these National Parks from the rest of the Pittwater Municipality. The inclusion of adequate bushland corridors through and around this area is critical for the survival of the fauna of the whole Pittwater area, fauna already under considerable pressure from urban development. One of the more critical corridors is the one with the largest interface between the Ingleside Precinct and the rest of Pittwater, and that is the very corridor that passes through Ingleside Chase Reserve, the proposed development site and Katandra.

The extra pressure created by all this development in Ingleside, in whatever form it takes, will require extra efforts to be made to ensure the survival of the local fauna already under considerable pressure from loss of habitat. Considerations such as fauna underpasses or overpasses across the busy Mona Vale Road, which will by then be carrying even more traffic will be needed. The most obvious place for these to be constructed is at the known roadkill hotspots. As mentioned previously, reports prepared for NSW Government Roads and Maritime Services has identified the section of Mona Vale Road that passes within 100 metres of Katandra and between Katandra and the proposed 120-122 Mona Vale Road development as a roadkill hot spot. The road along this section passes through a number of deep cuttings that provide the perfect place for constructing a fauna overpass. Development at 120-122 Mona Vale Road would prevent that from ever being a possibility. Plans are already well advanced for the widening of Mona Vale Road to cater for increased traffic. A wider road and increased traffic will only make this a worse roadkill hot spot, making the construction of an overpass even more important for the survival of Pittwater's fauna. Again, development at 120-122 Mona Vale Road would prevent that from ever being a possibility in the future.

The development of the Ingleside Precinct, its position between two National Parks and the effect it will have on the flora and fauna in these National Parks means that the adequate provision of bushland corridors in and around the area is not just a Pittwater issue, but it takes on State and National importance.

3. The Pittwater community have made it abundantly clear on many occasions, over many generations, what importance the local natural environment holds to them and what they expect in relation to the conservation of this environment. That is why Pittwater is as it is today, renowned for its unique natural beauty, flora and fauna. Our forefathers over many generations ensured that development was done in such a way that much of the beauty and character of the area was retained.

The retention and conservation of the corridor of bushland along the Warriewood / Mona Vale Escarpment has received overwhelming community support over a period of more than 60 years. Harold Seymour, who owned land along much of the escarpment on what is known as Foley's Hill, became concerned about the clearing of land for farmland and the construction of glass houses in the 1950's. When he first began to consider options for conserving his land in its natural state "for future generations to enjoy", he received huge support from the community. It was these community members that established the Katandra Bushland Club in the early 1960's to help with the work and finance required to maintain the bushland in its pristine state, removing exotic weeds and constructing and maintaining walking tracks to allow other community members to enjoy the area. In 1967 Harold had the gift of his land to the people of NSW via the State Government accepted and "Katandra Bushland Sanctuary" was officially gazetted as a "Bushland Reserve" to be managed by a voluntary Trust under the administration of the NSW Lands Department. It has been community members who have maintained Harold's dream over the ensuing decades, continuing the hard work to maintain the bushland in its natural state. All of this work and effort has been on a voluntary basis, emphasising their commitment and desire to retain this important aspect of the Pittwater community. It is also predominantly local community members that visit Katandra during its Open Season to enjoy the local flora and fauna in its natural state.

It was also Pittwater community members that rallied in 1990's to save other areas of the escarpment to the south in Warriewood. Saving this corridor of bushland in its natural state was seen as imperative for retaining the very environment that attract people to live and visit this unique part of urban Sydney and Australia. The flora and fauna it supports exists because of the generosity of many community members from the past, including landowners who have donated land, and the hard work of local Councillors and other devoted community members in organising land swaps and maintaining this vital wildlife corridor.

Over the years there have been numerous other examples of the Pittwater community making their wishes for the conservation of the natural local environment clear, including the demonstrations over the Mona Vale TAFE site, Warriewood Wetlands, Winnerremy Bay, Currawong Beach, and more recently Barrenjoey Headland.

The destruction of such a critical bushland corridor vital for the survival of the fauna of Pittwater is then clearly against the wishes of the community.

As the current generation of caretakers for this unique and fragile environment, we cannot allow unsympathetic development to occur which will destroy the natural fabric of the area. It is the view of the Trust that development of this site would threaten the survival of local populations of many fauna species by restricting their movement between bushland areas and so is inappropriate for such an environmentally sensitive area already under threat from nearby over-development.

Yours Sincerely

David Seymour
President
Katandra Bushland Sanctuary Trust