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Our ref: 24SYD7782

Stockland
Level 25, 133 Castlereagh Street
Sydney

Attention: Clare Roberts

Dear Clare

West Gables - Retention of biodiversity values in proposed parks

Eco Logical Australia (ELA) are assisting the West Gables proponent group in assessing and protecting biodiversity values for the West Gables Planning Proposal. We understand that The Hills Council seek greater certainty that biodiversity values in the proposed parks can be retained and improved.

ELA has undertaken vegetation validation of the site and confirms the proposed parks contain areas with little to no vegetation as well as various condition classes of Shale Sandstone Transition Forest and Cumberland Plain Woodland, both of which are Critically Endangered Ecological Communities under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act. The communities are generally in poor or poor-moderate condition due to a lack of native understorey and an abundance of weeds.

Following significant planning and design work, we understand the proposal is to retain and restore the native vegetation in the parks. Services areas (eg play space) will be focussed on areas that have little to no tree canopy. Recreation within the proposed native vegetation areas will be limited to walking paths and benches that would be micro-sited to avoid the need for tree removal wherever possible. The protection and management of the biodiversity values is proposed to be achieved via the mechanisms in Table 1.

Table 1 Biodiversity protection and management mechanisms

Mechanism	How it will apply to the proposed parks	Effect
Zoning	RE1 zoning of all parks	Restricts potential land uses. One of the objectives of the zone is 'To protect and enhance the natural environment for recreational purposes'. Any development application would need to demonstrate consistency with this objective.
Additional local provisions	Apply section 7.4 of The Hills LEP 2019 to the parts of the park that will be restored	Requires the consent authority to specifically consider the terrestrial biodiversity values of

Mechanism	How it will apply to the proposed parks	Effect
		the site and whether the development is likely to have any adverse impact on the condition, ecological value and significance of the flora and fauna.
Design	Play space in areas of no/limited biodiversity value. Bollards to delineate the play space from the restoration areas. Walking paths through the restored environments would be micro-sited to avoid or minimise the need for tree removal.	Designates certain areas for services and delineates areas subject to restoration. Whilst it is not possible to prevent a person from deviating from the path, the likelihood of this will be reduced by providing entry points at the logical points of the park (eg: near roads). Signage would be provided so that users of the park would understand that the trees are art of an endangered ecological community that provide habitat for various species.
Biodiversity certification	The proposal would biodiversity certify the active spaces, but not the vegetated areas.	Allows Council to undertake management of the services areas without contravening the proposed conservation measures and avoids the need for biodiversity assessment of any proposed infrastructure.
Ownership	Transfer ownership to The Hills after initial vegetation management works have been undertaken. Indicatively this would be somewhere between 3 and 5 years.	Puts Council in control of the site.
Management planning	A Vegetation Management Plan is to be prepared and implemented for the native vegetation. The VMP would treat the weeds and restore native groundcover and mid-storey. The VMP will be placed on title.	Provides a clear and costed management regime to restore the ecological communities. The VMP can either be secured
Management costing	Proponent group to fund the establishment phase of restoration (primary weed control and planting of groundcover). Funding of longer term works would be provided to Council via a Planning Agreement.	The restoration works are undertaken at no cost to Council during the establishment phase.

The above suite of measures is comprehensive. The only practical way to better protect the biodiversity values within the parks would be to prevent public access via a permanent fence. However this would also remove the many benefits that may be accrued through having public access such as a place for play and enjoyment of nature. Eliminating public access, in our view, in not necessary for biodiversity management and is not consistent with the directions provided by the NSW Government Architect (2024) 'Biodiversity in Place'. That document has six principles which have guided the concept of parks that provide both biodiversity and recreation outcomes:

Principle	Explanation in 'Biodiversity in Place'	Relevance to West Gables
Nature as partner	Be guided by nature through an understanding of natural processes, and allow these processes to play out over time. This requires a step change in how our communities and stakeholders value and perceive the role of nature in our public spaces.	Native vegetation communities have been mapped in each park. By focussing recreation opportunities in specific locations, it allows the majority of the site to continue the ecological processes of the vegetation community.
For human and non-humans	Create resilient spaces for both humans and animals to thrive through creating niches and habitat	The proposed park design allows interaction of humans and non-

Principle	Explanation in 'Biodiversity in Place'	Relevance to West Gables
	opportunities as well as opportunities for humans to encounter and be immersed in nature.	humans in a passive way via footpaths. Interpretive signage is proposed to inform the park users of the values. A walking path through the forest will allow time for park users to appreciate the peace and quiet of a forest.
Guided by the landscape	Urban biodiversity must be inspired by the beauty and complexity of nature, without necessarily attempting to recreate it. Biodiversity in Place respects soils, aspect, rainfall and uses and is inspired by indigenous species where appropriate to support wildlife	Vegetation management will consider soils, aspect and rainfall when identify planting schedules
Highly diverse planting	Diverse understorey planting of shrubs, grasses and flowering plants provides fruit, pollen and nectar resources, while also creating beautiful public spaces. Diverse vegetation with an emphasis on indigenous species and local provenance ensures a greater continuity of supply resources for local fauna.	The understorey is currently almost 100% exotic. A VMP will be prepared and implemented to increase the native vegetation cover.
Sensitive and skilled management	Urban landscapes must be managed with consideration for wildlife and biodiversity, for example, by reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides and mowing.	Bush regeneration techniques will be identified in the VMP.
Connected across scales	From small to large, no space is too small to be valuable, to build corridors and create stepping stones. One green roof here, a rain garden there or a beautiful pocket of naturalistic planting will have some local small-scale effects. But it is the connecting of these elements on a city scale that will make them transformational.	The parks within West Gables are of varying size and will be connected via street tree plantings.

Whilst allowing humans into areas of biodiversity value does come with risk of impact, that risk is mitigated in this instance by a comprehensive approach to protection and management of the biodiversity values. In our opinion, the biodiversity values of the proposed parks can be protected and maintained over the long term whilst allowing for passive open space use.

Regards,

David Bonjer
Principal Planner