

## SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE FERNHILL ESTATE DRAFT LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN

### INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Fernhill Estate Draft Landscape Masterplan (The Draft Landscape Masterplan).

Fernhill Estate is a significant cultural landscape of the Mulgoa Valley and is of exceptional significance to Western Sydney and the Penrith community as a cultural and recreational facility. Council has long held a vision that Fernhill Estate's unique offering be preserved and celebrated through appropriate activation that allows greater public access without jeopardising its iconic attributes and idyllic rural setting.

We are generally supportive of the Draft Landscape Masterplan as it seeks to describe how the Estate will open to the public for recreation activities, and over time become a major attraction for Mulgoa Valley and Greater Sydney. It supports Council's vision and aspirations for the site, as identified in Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement and Green Grid Strategy and aligns with our city-wide Sport and Recreation Strategy which supports a regional scale open space facility offering a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities. The Draft Landscape Masterplan also appears to broadly accommodate the community's desire for connected, multi-use, inclusive participation opportunities for different recreation types, while linking recreational, cultural, heritage, and natural values to the site's first nations and colonial history.

We understand the Draft Landscape Masterplan focuses on the initial public opening phase over the next 12 months and acknowledge that plans for the site will continue to be developed and evolve over the next five years. In this context we appreciate the exhibition material (summary brochure) is light on detail, presenting only an outline of the various initiatives for each key design move. Therefore, in addition to providing comments on the Draft Landscape Masterplan and its ten key design moves, we reiterate comments made in our previous submissions provided to Greater Sydney Parklands (GSP) on the Future Use Options Paper, the Foundation Plan of Management (PoM) and the Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Bill 2021, which remain relevant to the Draft Landscape Masterplan (copies attached for reference).

We look forward to continuing working with the NSW Government to realise the vision for this incredible asset, and particularly as the various proposals related to community use of the site are refined and progressed.

The following comments are based on the summary detail provided in the Draft Landscape Masterplan brochure and our understanding of the PoM.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

### Community interest in Fernhill Estate

The Fernhill Estate is a significant asset in our LGA and of special interest to the community. We are aware that there are several stakeholders with an ongoing interest regarding the future of Fernhill Estate. Council values positive and transparent engagement and encourages GSP to continue to engage directly with the various stakeholder groups to provide clarity and avoid any misinterpretation and/or misconceptions around planning for the site.

Council respects the views of the community and their desire to protect, restore, utilise and capitalise on the opportunities presented by the public use of Fernhill Estate. Council shares the basis of these desires as described in this submission.

### Heritage

The Draft Landscape Masterplan is generally supported from a heritage perspective. In particular, we support the ongoing focus on restoring, refurbishing and adaptively re-using Fernhill House and commitment to make good the Estate, acting as caretaker of heritage buildings and interpreting the heritage stories. We also support the key design moves that capture the natural and cultural heritage of the Estate and interpret these layers through sensitive design solutions.

In particular, we reiterate the importance of the viewshed from Fernhill House to St Thomas Church from a heritage perspective. The preservation of this visual corridor should be a key consideration in all future planning and design work for the Estate to ensure its particular scenic and historic values are preserved against development or other change.

It is suggested that the GSP actively engage with relevant expert members of the local community with respect to the various heritage items on site, including Cox's Cottage and potential utilisation of the Colonial Heritage of Western Sydney App\* (HoWS App).

*\*Penrith Council has formed a Cultural Tourism Group consisting of heritage staff of Penrith, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Camden, Blue Mountains and Blacktown Councils. The collaboration is known as the 'Heritage of Western Sydney' (HoWS) group. The HoWS group has recently produced a heritage app whereby heritage sites of each Council are linked to other Councils sites. Thus, individual sites visitation is enhanced by linking to all other heritage sites, creating short and longer tours. Fernhill is currently on the HoWS App and Penrith Council sees Fernhill as a key component in the invigoration of tourism of the region's communities that will provide long term cultural and economic benefits.*

### Water management

We suggest that in developing the site with any new buildings or infrastructure including roads and car parks etc., that water sensitive urban design (WSUD) measures should be

incorporated to ensure that stormwater is managed in a manner consistent with Council's WSUD policy objectives.

It is also suggested that the water management principles that have been identified in the Western City District Plan, including the planning priority to protect and improve the health and enjoyment of the District's waterways, should be considered. Further, any works near waterways and wetlands would need to be carried out in accordance with any NSW Department of Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) requirements.

### Traffic

The Draft Landscape Masterplan supports a range of future uses for the Estate which are likely to increase traffic intensity along Mulgoa Road and within the site. We have previously provided comments and suggestions in respect of traffic and access arrangements for the site to be considered and acted on as plans progress. They remain relevant in the context of the Draft Landscape Masterplan as follows:

- Necessary infrastructure upgrades must be identified to cater for any increased traffic volumes, both on-site and within the affected surrounding road network.
- Mulgoa Road, in both its form and function, as a primary State Road transport 'movement' corridor, must not be compromised.
- Where future activities are expected to attract more traffic, an upgrade of the access arrangement at Mulgoa Road (in consultation with Transport for NSW as Mulgoa Road is a State Road) must be investigated, especially if events were ever to be held at the Estate.
- As the speed limit on this section of Mulgoa Road is currently 80 km/h, a dedicated right turn lane (and possibly left turn deceleration lane) should be investigated as it would allow turning traffic to stop and queue without becoming a potential safety hazard. An alternative option would be an overtaking lane, such as at the intersection with Roscrea Drive, but this would only be appropriate if traffic generation were low (ie. no events held and very sporadic traffic movements such as would not cause any queuing).
- If the Estate were to become a significant destination, connectivity to the airport and Northern Gateway (Sydney Science Park) would likely be facilitated via Littlefields Road, which means it may be appropriate to plan for a potential future roundabout at the intersection with Mulgoa Road. As a general upgrade this would support the overall accessibility of Mulgoa as a potential tourist destination, as well as for the Estate.
- For large scale events, a site-specific overarching Special Events Traffic Management Plan must be developed and promote sustainable transport modes. The plan must identify overflow parking and incorporate broader 'park'n'ride' principles.
- Other factors to consider include extending existing cycle network along Mulgoa Road to Fernhill, parking on-site and public transport options.

## Biodiversity

We reiterate the comments made in our previous submission on the PoM concerning biodiversity. Specifically, while the PoM appears to acknowledge the importance of continuing to implement the biobanking agreements that apply to the Estate, there is less emphasis on the need to assess impacts to biodiversity outside of these areas. Regrettably, the Draft Landscape Masterplan is also largely silent on this issue. As several threatened fauna species have been identified on the Estate in recent years, the key design moves and future uses should be developed having particular regard to any likely impacts to threatened species and ensuring their habitat is retained and protected.

## KEY DESIGN MOVES

The Draft Landscape Masterplan identifies ten key design moves to help achieve the vision for Fernhill Estate and deliver on the PoM to 2026. These two important plans set out a series of actions to bring Fernhill Estate to life over the next five years, contributing to this important attraction in Mulgoa Valley and Greater Sydney.

Council supports the intent of the ten key design moves which build on feedback received from the community and stakeholders during early consultation in May 2021. However, it is suggested that they could be strengthened by the inclusion of a set of guiding principles that articulate the overarching planning and management objectives for Fernhill Estate. For example:

- Environment and biodiversity: (guiding principle) Recognise the site as a significant environmental asset and its role in providing habitat for endangered species, including the Regent Honeyeater.
- Natural and cultural heritage: (guiding principle) Recognise the significant Aboriginal cultural and historic European heritage values of the site.
- Landscape Character: (guiding principle) Recognise the site's unique and varied landscape setting, including its context within the Mulgoa Valley and connections/views to the Nepean River and Blue Mountains.
- Land use opportunities: (guiding principle) Recognise the potential of the site for walking, cycling, picnicking, tourism and events.
- Protecting and activating the estate: (guiding principle) Recognise the importance of responsible custodianship to protect Fernhill's significant landscapes, buildings and biodiversity.

These fundamental principles should be at the core of the masterplan and underpin the key design moves to help ensure that they are embedded in the detailed plans for implementation. This approach would strengthen the next iteration of the Landscape Masterplan and help to deliver a coordinated vision for the Estate and each of its precincts.

## Northern Drive

*Creating space for recreation – The Northern Drive will be a place where people can enjoy picnics and strolls, featuring a pedestrian path and seating connecting Fernhill House to the Hayshed and Orchard. Its meandering path will offer places to stop and enjoy sweeping views of the landscape.*

We support the proposal to open the Northern Drive for a range of low impact recreation activities such as walking, cycling and picnicking. This space forms an important connection between 'activity spaces' within the Estate (Fernhill House and the Hayshed) and therefore has potential to be well utilised during peak times. We strongly encourage the separation of vehicle, cycling and pedestrian uses for both safety and enjoyment. The area generally should also be accessible with paths wide enough to accommodate walkers, wheelchairs, prams and children on bikes. This should be in addition to a dedicated (separate) cycle path/lane.

Appropriate traffic management will be important along the Drive to ensure low speeds and long sight lines. Pedestrians and cyclists should have priority way. The Draft Landscape Masterplan describes a 'one-way' road, however the direction of flow is unclear. Careful consideration and management from a safety perspective needs to be given to any internal intersections along the drive (eg. to access the Northern Dam area, new entry road).

Notwithstanding its prime position and potentially significant role in providing access and movement within the site, this drive should be retained for very low speed, people-oriented recreation uses.

### Fernhill House Gardens

*Enhancing the parkland's natural beauty – The gardens surrounding Fernhill House will reflect the 1840s agrarian setting of open grassed slopes and elements from the Sorenson era, such as the northern pergola and secret garden. Plants will add to the beauty of the planter beds around the house.*

We support the proposed restoration of the agrarian setting of Fernhill House, including the conservation of certain elements from the Sorenson era. However, as previously outlined in our submission on the PoM, we do not support the removal of Sorenson's works/stone retaining walls from the site.

We strongly support and encourage the restoration and long-term conservation of Fernhill House to provide for a range of complementary uses supplying the local community and visitors with a unique venue. Council is supportive of opening Fernhill House to a range of events and would welcome the opportunity to see additional detail such as the type of events supported – eg. weddings, conferences, major events, markets.

We reiterate the need to ensure appropriate infrastructure is provided to the house to support anticipated future uses, including adequate power supply and Wi-Fi. We have also previously identified the need for upgraded infrastructure and amenities and the creation of a catering kitchen as key event-logistic requirements. We look forward to continuing the conversation with GSP around possible future commercial uses for the house in line with our previous submissions.

We also continue to assert the need for an appropriate mechanism to ensure the ongoing upkeep of Fernhill House and associated heritage elements. We reiterate our comments made in previous submissions to GSP that the costed maintenance plan (referenced in the Conservation Management Plan) should be for a minimum of 25 years

and thoroughly detailed. To this end, it should include mechanisms for ongoing funding such as establishing a fund to return income from activities on the Estate towards maintenance over time.

In addition to potential uses for Fernhill House itself, we support the use of the open grassed slopes surrounding the house as an outdoor amphitheatre presenting an ideal opportunity for future concerts, outdoor movies and the like. We have also previously suggested an outdoor art gallery or sculpture walk as a unique opportunity to leverage the natural setting.

Furthermore, we support the concept of expanding opportunities for filming and growing jobs in the arts/cultural sector. This aligns well with our city-wide Cultural Plan which targets 5000 jobs in the LGA. There is also opportunity for heritage tours inside the estate and we encourage the GSP to continue conversations directly with key stakeholders that may be best positioned to deliver this initiative.

### **'Ngunyul' – The Big Arc**

*Restoring indigenous landscape – Ngunyul restores the primacy of Country and First Peoples' cultural landscape experience. This arc of indigenous garden planting extends from the hilltop of Fernhill House to the edges of the Northern Dam and will feature a place for cultural activities.*

We commend the concept of Ngunyul as a powerful gesture of indigenous landscape. It is an important representation of the heritage of the site and a significant design element that provides a clear expression of the values of the Fernhill Estate in the greater context of Mulgoa Valley and wider park network in Western Sydney.

We support the development of a meeting place for community gatherings and cultural activities and note there may be an opportunity to include an education component as part of this design element, to raise perceptions of Fernhill Estate as a special place for visitors and the general community. This could be explored for future stages of development.

It is strongly recommended that GSP continue to engage with local Aboriginal groups to ensure this design element is truly representative of the local indigenous community.

### **Mulgoa Scenic Road**

*Enhancing access to the park – Providing access to Fernhill Estate, this rural thoroughfare will help to slow traffic, creating a safer environment for vehicles and pedestrians entering the park. The entry to the estate will be attractive and welcoming and will provide enhanced pedestrian connections from the park to Mulgoa Village, Mulgoa Creek precincts and St Thomas's Anglican Church. This road in a park will strengthen the Estate's appeal as a special and scenic village corridor that is part of the community.*

We support the development of Mulgoa Road as a 'road in a park'. This aligns with our vision for a scenic corridor connecting, preserving and enhancing the environmental, cultural and heritage values of the area. We also support enhanced pedestrian and

cyclist connections to Mulgoa Village, Mulgoa Creek precincts and St Thomas’s Anglican Church subject to appropriate consideration of traffic, access, biodiversity values and habitat areas.

However, whilst the stated concepts for Mulgoa Road appear to have strategic merit, at this stage the Draft Landscape Masterplan does not provide the level of detail needed for Council to accurately assess and comment on the particulars of the key design move, such as speed limits, location of pedestrian/cycle paths, landscape treatment and intersection treatments.

We note that Greater Sydney Parklands and Transport for NSW (TfNSW) cosponsor the Mulgoa Scenic Road Project and are currently progressing the Mulgoa Scenic Road Strategic Concept Plan. We understand the Plan will address these and other issues to deliver on the community’s aspirations for Mulgoa Road. Council officers will continue to collaborate with TfNSW to develop the Mulgoa Scenic Road Strategic Concept Plan.

Penrith Development Control Plan (DCP) 2014 includes objectives and controls to protect the value of key precincts, including Mulgoa Road (Part E9). The DCP currently states:

*“An important part of the Mulgoa Valley Precinct and appreciating its landscape is the drive along Mulgoa Road. Roadside vegetation, hills, gullies, bends and the changing views of heritage items and the landscape are the main attributes.”*

Council is also progressing work on a ‘Statement of Significance’ for Mulgoa Valley and Wallacia that will strengthen and support the current controls.

As further work is undertaken on the Draft Landscape Masterplan and the Mulgoa Scenic Road Strategic Concept Plan the landscape elements of Mulgoa Road, including its winding nature over hills and gullies following the natural landform, its framing by mature native vegetation and views to rural and heritage properties, will be key elements to protect and conserve.

Enhancing access to Fernhill Estate via the key design move ‘Mulgoa Scenic Road’ should have consideration for Council’s current vision, objectives and desired future character for Mulgoa Road. Any potential upgrades to Mulgoa Road to cater for growth in tourism and recreation at Fernhill Estate, should be sensitive to the existing and desired future character for this section of Mulgoa Road.

### **Moving around Fernhill**

*Enhancing connections to open space – Getting around the Estate will be easier with a new park road that will link the reinstated historic entry directly to the Northern Drive, new walking track connections and proposed visitor amenities at the Hayshed and Northern Dam.*

The proposed new park road is supported in so far as it seeks to improve access to and within the Estate. However, this road should be carefully considered and managed to ensure it is fit for purpose – ie. pedestrian/cyclist friendly, but with sufficient capacity to cater for large-scale events to be held at the site in the future without conflict or

bottlenecks. The suggested one-way traffic flow for the Northern Drive is supported. There may be merit in considering this approach for other roads within the site.

Council has recently endorsed a Green Grid Strategy for our city. Fernhill Estate is a key part of the City’s green grid for recreational, ecological and hydrological reasons and the Draft Landscape Masterplan appears to support this by identifying linkages for walking and cycling in most directions. The extension of the existing Great River Walk along the Nepean River and the provision of tracks to connect the Estate to it are supported. Walking and cycling connections from the Littlefields Creek Precinct to Mulgoa Park and Gow Park would also be favourable. We note however there is a fine balance between growing visitation and visitor experiences to maintaining the rural landscapes, as well as conflicting land use pressures.

We look forward to working further with GSP on the creation of broader walking and cycling connections to and through the Fernhill Estate.

**Hayshed and Orchard**

*Offering opportunities for play, leisure and movement in one place – The Hayshed will be a place for Community events, with a café and space for events. It will feature improved amenities, parking and an inclusive play space in the nearby Orchard.*

The Hayshed and Orchard precinct presents a unique opportunity to develop the site as a tourism destination and potential events hub. We support the future use of this area for farmers markets, concerts and the like. Council is working on connecting our known farmgate/small farm producers to opportunities around market days or potentially even having an urban cellar door, winery and brewery concept. This lends itself to invite investment in this space.

We strongly support the inclusion of a large, themed, inclusive play space at The Hayshed and Orchard precinct. The play space should provide a very high level of accessibility and features, including a wide choice of play features for all ages.

The PoM notes that community feedback suggested the use of the Estate by filmmakers. Fernhill provides a great opportunity for attracting film makers to the area and injecting valuable dollars into the economy along with potential promotion of the area. This would need to be balanced with other uses to ensure the venue is open to the general public for the majority of the time and ensure strict measures are in place to protect the natural attributes of the property.

**Northern Dam**

*Incorporating diverse cultural and recreational activities – The Northern Dam will be a place where visitors can enjoy diverse activities, from participating in cultural events and activities to walking alongside the dam wall, picnicking, and kayaking with friends and family.*

The Northern Dam proposal encourages positive activation of the site, offering picnicking and access to the water for personal watercraft activities. We support this design initiative and encourage further consideration of how it can contribute to cooling the

environment. Our water bodies are highly valued on hot days and play a significant role in cooling our city. We strongly support the development of both active and passive recreation in this area to take advantage of the cooling effects of the Northern Dam. Long term planning for the site should aim to create a swimmable area.

The proposal for the Northern Dam may need further pedestrian support from ancillary facilities like seating, shade shelters, bike racks, bins water bubblers that will support and encourage the proposed uses.

### Native Farm Gate

*Offering a place to experience and celebrate food production – The western slopes behind Fernhill House will become an indigenous garden abundant with bush tucker and will offer opportunities to experience food production.*

We support the initiative to develop an indigenous garden offering bush tucker and food production experiences as part of an events program encompassing a 'Native Foods Farm Gate' using indigenous planting/bushtucker grown onsite. This garden has potential to link to the a 'Big Arc' educational/cultural experience and potential future commercial/function activities (eg. cooking school) in Fernhill House.

As previously noted, Council is supporting our known farmgate/market gardens/small farm producers to connect with opportunities around local fresh food market days or potentially even having an urban cellar door, micro winery and brewery concept. To this end we note a range of different models available, and we encourage these be explored further in future iterations of plans for the Estate.

### Fernhill Drive

*Providing safe access and scenic views – The existing drive will become a controlled access road for service vehicles only. Along the tree-lined edge of the drive, a meandering pedestrian path will offer opportunities for walking, with bench seating and small picnic spots for everyone's use and enjoyment.*

We support the proposal to embellish Fernhill Drive to support pedestrian activity. We also encourage the provision of a dedicated cycle path as part of a continuous circuit/loop around the Estate. Similar to the Northern Drive, we encourage the separation of vehicle and pedestrian uses and for the space to be accessible to people of all abilities.

We support the provision of seating and small-scale picnicking facilities at key vantage points/views along the route.

### Wetland Discovery

*Greening the dams – The Estate's network of dams will provide an ecological zone with tree and edge plantings. From the Hayshed and Orchard, visitors will be able to enjoy views to Fernhill House and activities like birdwatching from a dedicated boardwalk.*

We note the site is located within the 13 km wildlife buffer of the future Western Sydney Airport and therefore improvements to wetland habitat or activities on the site will need to consider and assess what the wildlife attraction risk will be, and it may need to be addressed in the PoM or provide a separate management plan as active monitoring and management may be required.

### **Equestrian and specialist sports**

The Draft Landscape Masterplan does not include a key design move in respect of the existing equestrian areas on the site. It is therefore still unclear what the future of these spaces will be, and whether equine activities will continue to be supported at Fernhill in the long term. We previously queried this as part of our submission on the PoM.

Similarly, the key design moves do not cover specialist sport and activities as listed in the PoM. Council is supportive of creating opportunities for specialist activities but would like to further understand the specific details of the opportunity. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with GSP and the Department of Planning industry and Environment on the potential provision of specialist sports.

### **Legend**

The use of green shades in the legend on the Draft Landscape Masterplan are too similar and the use of green can be confusing to people who are colour blind. It is recommended different colours are used so it makes it easier to differentiate between the different areas.