



Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society Inc

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19 January 2023.

Coordinator Parks and Urban Spaces,
cc. The GM, Mr Craig Wrightson, Lane Cove Council
The Mayor, Andrew Zbik, and All Councillors

Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society
SUBMISSION re. THE URBAN FOREST STRATEGY

The Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society clearly shares the aims expressed in the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) and Greening Sydney legislation: the protection and retention of existing canopy cover of trees; increasing the canopy by planting more trees both on public land and private land; increasing community support for, and the monitoring of, urban forest.

The Society is concerned about the implementation of the strategy. We question which specific provisions in the Strategy would address each of the real incidents that we have listed below of

tree damage/ vegetation and tree clearing/ loss of recent years:

14-16 Orion Road - DA59/2021

E2/C2 zoned bushland surrounding Lane Cove Golf Course

Tree loss on the Lane Cove Golf Course precinct

The Pathways site

Tree poisoning in Warraroon Reserve near Tambourine Bay

Urban forest is rare, precious, and increasingly important for the physical and mental health of the community. Lane Cove's remanent bushland became significant during the pandemic lockdown and was an outlet for people who were otherwise confined. Added to this, all trees and understorey are habitat, both food and shelter, for wildlife that exists throughout the suburbs.

The Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society have long been concerned about the loss of trees and understand that in most instances residents are required to replace them with another.

We have therefore taken extracts from the Council Snapshot Reports to learn the actual number of individual trees that have been removed over a year and these probably do not even include those that are removed through development applications. Therefore, the number of 792 could be a minimum of the tree loss being incurred in the individual residential sector and could amount to over 1000 trees lost due to either individual or other requests. Action should be taken to ameliorate those losses and we make the first recommendation, following ...

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. A follow up letter reminding the resident of the condition on which the tree removal was given and reminding them of their obligation to replace it.
2. The letter includes a form which they must fill in, advising whether the tree had been replaced, the date when it was carried out and perhaps the type of tree which had been replanted.
3. Where a tree or trees have had been removed because of a Development Application, the Conditions of Approval should include a condition that trees be replaced before the Building Certificate is issued.
4. That a portion of the \$80 tree fee be put aside for the follow up.

As the loss of trees is of paramount importance to the improvement of our tree canopy, the above is the minimum we ask to ensure the increase in tree canopy.

**TABLE: EXCERPT FROM SNAPSHOT REPORT – LANE COVE COUNCIL AGENDAS
LIST OF TREES PROCESSED FOR REMOVAL AND REMOVED FROM NOVEMBER 2021 TO NOV. 2022**

MONTH Trees Processed	Trees Processed for Removal	Trees permitted to be removed	Street and Park Trees Removed	Street Trees Planted
Nov/Dec/January	124	120	11	0
February	95	85	0	0
March	47	37	10	*69
April	42	♦43	3	0
May	48	34	10	0
June	To be included in July numbers		19	0
July	120	103	10	36
August	104	97	20	15
September	124	♦136	24	0
October	58	♦61	5	0
November	61	♦76	0	4
TOTALS INDIVIDUAL TREE REMOVALS		792	112	55

*Street Trees Planted - Connecting Street Canopy Corridors, Longueville

♦Including additional trees requested at time of inspection.

Please note that we have not included the statistics of the “*Total Number of trees processed within the Applications*” in the Snapshot Report as it is not clear what those numbers refer to. However, as those numbers seem quite high in comparison to the individual, it may mean a much larger overall loss of trees, so we repeat some action is needed.

CANOPY LOSS

The Urban Forest Strategy is associated with the 2019 Climate Emergency and the aim of no net canopy loss. A recent assessment of urban forest cover which correlates with aerial vegetation imaging confirmed Lane Cove as one of the leading metropolitan councils for tree canopy cover. **Yet Lane Cove is losing trees and canopy cover at the rate of up to 2,500 in 3 years, 2018-2020, from parks, streets and private properties, excluding those under DAs, and we only just meet the target of 40% cover.** As nesting hollows only form in trees at least 50 years old, retaining mature trees should be a priority and preferable to replacement following removal.

PRIVATE LAND

Preserving urban forest and promoting tree canopy on public land has its difficulties but these escalate in relation to private land. In the Lane Cove Council area 65.3% land is privately owned and therefore has a major influence on urban forest. Urban forest on private land is an issue at both the level of domestic housing and with major developments and trees are often targeted because they are a challenge for designers and city planners.

The Society naturally agrees that this aspect should be addressed as a priority in future community engagement given that the area private property takes up is a large majority of the total LGA. Apparently although most residents want to see an increase in tree and canopy cover overall, there is a potential reluctance to host these trees in their own properties, possibly due to concerns raised over risk of branch failure, root damage and leaf litter.

Monitoring and controlling trees on private domestic properties to mitigate tree damage, poisoning and removal by owners for the sake of views or house design is another major problem in the LGA. It is easier to denude a site of vegetation than design around it. Street trees are a valuable green asset and tree canopy can improve the value of a property.

These pressures have already been felt in Lane Cove with the **requirement to provide 6,400 dwellings between 2016 and 2036** which will put an enormous pressure on existing canopy trees as more dwellings have to be squeezed onto lots with existing trees. The buildings and the increase in population will place additional pressure on parks, recreational facilities, and urban forest.

The Strategy does not really address this directly, yet it must intersect with landscaping requirements for developments. We suggest that these should be reviewed in conjunction with this strategy.

According to a statement in the Urban Forest Strategy published by the Council, “Developers should make a concerted effort when designing a new site to protect and retain existing trees and to consider them an asset to the community,” but what action can Council’s Urban Forest Strategy pursue to effect this change? When damage occurs to existing trees **the incentives or fines are inadequate**. The developers of the **Pathways site** at the intersection of Longueville and Northwood roads repeatedly damaged the trees and bushland below the site due to excavation run off but the fines they received seemed to be treated as simply part of the cost of building.

14-16 ORION ROAD / DA59/2021

There are several sites where urban bushland has been cleared from a development site and council was unable to prevent it. Take for example, 14-16 ORION ROAD / DA59/2021. The site was important for local wildlife, given its location in the Stringybark Creek corridor yet bushland protection and management were not notified due to its position in industrial area.

The proposal was for a two and three storey warehouse and two levels of parking over half a hectare of bush where most of the species were Australian natives. The proposal required the **removal of 0.52 ha of native vegetation including 193 trees to be replaced by 44 trees- See photos on next page**. At the time the tree officer considered that there should have been more of an attempt by the applicant to retain mature trees that would contribute to the future canopy cover of the site.

The Biodiversity Credits Scheme was applied but as compensation is not applied locally in the LGA where the loss has occurred, tree loss occurs for Lane Cove.

Replacing mature trees with new, young alternatives is also extremely problematic as they **can take up to 50 years to provide the advantages of the older trees** for carbon sequestration, shade and hollows in which birds can breed.



14-16 Orion Road



The site from above before and after clearing.

The proposed Sport and Recreation Centre at the Lane Cove Golf Course precinct

This is another example where the aims of an Urban Forest Strategy collide with development proposals. According to Mayor Andrew Zbik, the landscaping works include extensive tree planting which would exceed council's 2:1 tree replacement commitment. 79 trees are to be removed and a total of 226 trees are proposed to be planted to compensate for canopy loss but the same applies: it will take decades for the new planting to equal the old and meanwhile the habitat corridor from the golf course to the Lane Cove Bushland Park will be disrupted.

Then based on a complaint that there were trees overhanging the golf course that needed to be trimmed, **contractors felled trees on both the east and west sides of the Golf Course in E2/C2 zoned bushland** of high conservation value, and meters up into it. It is estimated that on the western side alone, around 100 trees, including very large trees were felled to stumps and woodchips dumped **in bushland and watercourse on the east side**. The failure by Council Management and staff to adequately monitor and supervise the work in this area to protect urban forest of high conservation value does not inspire confidence that an Urban Forest Strategy would be adequately monitored.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To be effective, Council needs to allocate funds and resources to carry out the strategy.
- **The Biodiversity Credits Scheme must be challenged by Council so that any offsetting be located or applied locally**, an issue for the success of the Urban Forest Strategy.
- As state legislation determines the fines **for illegal tree removal by developers, Council should pursue a campaign to increase these fines** to make them a more effective deterrent.

- Work to strengthen the 'Blue Book' guideline for stormwater which has proved inadequate with the effects of a changing climate (La Nina in 2022), affecting seedbanks, vegetation and trees for land downslope of development, as evidenced by the Pathways site.
- Council should consider the landscaping requirements for developments be reviewed in conjunction with this Strategy due to Government pressure to increase density on housing lots.
- Increasing communication between Council's departments, so that protection of urban trees is fundamental across departments, and better notification between departments occurs when approval for tree removals are sought. A system should be developed to liaise between council authorities, such as the office of parks and spaces, the tree officer, BMAC and Street Tree Master Plan. Larger complex developments would require communication between departments and trees should be seen as assets to be managed. **All the policies in the world are of no use unless staff are vigilant and care about protecting the trees.**
- Council management and staff must put a more reliable and stronger process in place to adequately supervise and monitor arborist contractors where approvals have been granted in Council areas of high conservation value (eg. the Golf course surrounds).

LCBCS RECOMMENDS FOR TREE LOSS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY:

- that Council research what strategies have been successfully used by other Councils to engage the community to mitigate tree damage and loss on private property, as one suggested strategy of engaging children in schools would be a difficult and a very long-term solution.
- A program for residents/property owners who need assistance to understand and properly maintain their trees so that dangers or nuisance are minimised; and assistance with selecting the right species for the location when planting new trees.
- improvements to be made, or a strategy used to stop the loss of trees that are often illegally removed on the weekend when query or complaint calls go to a Call Centre, and only a few Council Rangers are available, with little knowledge of trees or access to DA's etc.

Yours sincerely,
 Shauna Forrest – President
 on behalf of the Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society.
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