

**The Lane Cove Council General Manager,
and All Councillors**

**Additional funding for bushland reserves in the Lane Cove Council
Budget 2024- 2025**

Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society calls for an increase in the funding allocation for ALL Lane Cove Reserves in Council's 2024-25 Budget, to enable restoration of bush tracks, improved vegetation management and amelioration of stormwater impacts.

The Society (and other community members) made a similar call last year at the time of Council budget exhibition. It was argued then (in Council's report) that Council already spent considerable funds on bushland and there were no available funds as they had been allocated to other areas, including technical matters which had arisen at a late stage in the budget process (re Emergency Services Levy, greater than expected increase in Award salaries and wages, and legal expenses allocation).

However, I write to remind you of the unanimously supported Motion to the Ordinary Council meeting, 22 June 2023 to **ADDRESS THE NEED FOR INCREASED FUNDS FOR MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF BUSHLAND AND TRACKS.**

We hear that no extra funding has been available to be allocated to bushland at the quarterly reviews referred to in Clause 2 of this motion:

2. Should the 2023/2024 and following annual budgets be approved, the allocation of any surplus at the end of each financial quarter (for the upcoming financial year) be considered after Council has considered each quarterly budget with a view to prioritising allocation of the surplus to supplement the bushland budget, and that these allocations be reported to council.

We wish to reiterate key points made in our submission last year regarding the urgent need to increase funding for bushland maintenance, but also make two additional points:

- While Lane Cove's bushland confers great amenity to all areas of Lane Cove as it is threaded through the LGA placing bushland in close proximity to almost all residents, this also brings a higher need for maintenance than in other LGAs. In Lane Cove virtually all bushland is long and narrow in shape and lies downslope of developed urban areas. Both these factors result in enormous pressure on the bushland and its vegetation with a consequent need for greater levels of maintenance to retain it as healthy bushland and to deal with major threats such as increasing stormwater inputs.
- And the question is not how much Council spends in absolute terms, but is it allocating sufficient to maintain healthy, relatively weed-free bushland?

Much as a park requires mowing and gardening and cricket ovals or football fields require both mowing and seasonal rejuvenation, bush has to be maintained both in its own right and as a recreational resource. Just as the grass keeps growing in the parks, the weed seed keeps falling into reserves, blown in from gardens or dropped by birds that have eaten the berries elsewhere.

Key points made previously:

- Regeneration work has become more expensive than in the past.
- Bushland budgets were not fully restored after cuts during the Covid period and a 3.5% increase last year does not keep pace with inflation, let alone deal with problems emerging from the last few years of Covid and wet weather.
- Stronger and longer La Niñas, from late 2020 on, brought a long period of much wetter weather than usual, promoting prolific weed growth and reversing past regeneration efforts in many reserves. Wet weather both turbocharges the weeds and inhibits regeneration work.

- There is a special problem with rampant vines— many of the current weed problem areas are where vine growth is spiralling up the trees. Vines kill trees in one of two ways – by smothering the canopy, or by creating a warm humid atmosphere around the trunk that encourages fungi which then attacks and kills the tree. This process applies whether the vines are native or weed species.
- New species, even natives, can be identified as causing a problem that requires management. For example, in Bushland Park several prolific species have recently been identified as either non -native to that reserve or expanding so much they are becoming invasive and threatening other species. Their management requires additional work. This work has commenced but additional funding for this reserve would enable better progress.
- Track maintenance and new works are not funded but there have been significant forces in the past few years which have damaged tracks, resulting in erosion, undercutting and track collapses.
 - Walking in bushland has been a widespread community activity for many years but Covid lockdown restrictions meant the tracks were hit by particularly heavy use. Dirt tracks cannot withstand this level of use, particularly on slopes.
 - Months of wet weather including heavy rainstorms from La Niñas brought further damage, causing collapses requiring funding to repair (e.g. on the Doug Stuart track in Bushland Park). In other reserves, long boggy sections which remain well after rain has stopped, have resulted walkers creating damaging new tracks to circumvent the bogs. Some track repair has been completed but at least some of this work has been completed at the expense of the regeneration budget, resulting in less funds for the vegetation.

The Society would appreciate an update on what has been achieved in respect of the various clauses and subclauses of the Motion passed at the 22 June 2023 meeting

Yours sincerely,

Shauna Forrest on behalf of Lane Cove Bushland & Conservation Society
bushlandpresident@gmail.com