

Acquisition of Land at Cranebrook for a Nature Reserve

NSW State Plan Targets:

E4 – Better environmental outcomes for native vegetation

State Ministers:

The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt MP, Minister for Climate Change and the Environment

Summary

At its Ordinary meeting of 4 August 2008, Council resolved to lobby the State Government to acquire the Infracorp site at Cranebrook and dedicate it as a Nature Reserve.

The Federal Government has made \$15m available for the acquisition of Cumberland Plain vegetation under its National Reserves System funding program.

Previous State Government Ministers for Climate Change and the Environment have stated to the public, over a long period of time, that:

- the site has significant biodiversity and Aboriginal heritage values
- the site is a Western Sydney Priority Area for conservation
- the site has virtually no development potential
- protection of the site is a priority.

It is suggested that this provides the State Government with an opportunity to work with the Federal Government to access these funds and contribute the required additional funds to acquire the site.

Background Information

Infracorp proposal

Council received an application for rezoning on September 2006. The initial rezoning proposed approximately half the site for conservation and half for rural-residential development.

Subsequent advice from the DoP indicated that the proponent should also prepare a Sustainability Assessment so that the proposal could be considered by the Land Supply CEOs Group meeting in November 2007.

The proposal outlined in the Sustainability Assessment report had evolved significantly from the original scheme, with the scale and intensity of residential development greatly increased to that equivalent of a standard residential subdivision.

Council is still awaiting advice from the Department of Planning as to whether the proposal has been included in the MDP.

Infracorp Conservation Significance

Vegetation Communities

The 181 hectare (ha) site supports four vegetation communities covering about 120ha. The balance of the site (60ha) is cleared grasslands.

The Castlereagh Swamp Woodland and Cooks River / Castlereagh Ironbark Forest are listed as Critically Endangered Ecological Communities under the Threatened Species Conservation Act (TSC Act). The Shale / Gravel Transition Forest is listed as an Endangered Ecological Community under the TSC Act.

Castlereagh Scribbly Gum Woodland is not listed as an endangered ecological community under the TSC Act.

Threatened Flora

The site supports 7 plant species that are listed under the TSC Act. The concentration of so many listed plant species on one site is very unusual in the Penrith context.

Threatened Fauna

The Freetail-bat and the Cumberland Land Snail are the only animal species recorded on the site that are listed under the TSC Act.

Conservation Significance Assessment

About 69% (124ha) of the site has high conservation significance. A further 20% (37ha) of the site has moderate conservation significance.

Conclusion

The site is currently the only known area, of some size, where a mosaic of four distinct vegetation communities provides habitat for at least 9 listed plant and animal species. The site could reasonably be described as a 'biodiversity hotspot' in Penrith.

From the information currently available, it is evident that most of the site has significant conservation values, that should be protected in an holistic manner.

The State Government has an opportunity to work with the Federal Government to access the available \$15m and contribute the required additional funds to acquire the site and dedicate it as a nature reserve.

COUNCIL'S REQUEST

That the State Government acquire the Infracorp site, and dedicate it as a Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, to conserve its unique assemblage of vegetation communities.

Council seeks that:

commitment be given by the Minister to pursuing the opportunity of funding from the Federal Government for the acquisition of Cumberland Plain vegetation under its National Reserves System funding program