



## **SUBMISSION TO BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL**

## **LEURA CASCADES PRECINCT PLAN & CARRINGTON PARK LOCALITY PLAN**

**JANUARY 2023**

### **Introduction**

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group thanks Victoria Patterson for attending our meeting on 23 November, and for her presentation on the planning process for the Leura Cascades/Carrington Park area. Several of our members also attended the public consultation meeting at Solitary Restaurant on 26 November, and the community organized meeting – attended by council staff - at Carrington Park on 11 December. We congratulate Victoria and her team for their creative thinking and for their consultative approach.

The Catchment Group is broadly supportive of the planning work undertaken to date, and the majority of the ideas outlined in the consultation document. There are a number of areas where this submission will put forward some alternative or additional ideas.

### **Who we are**

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group is an environmental conservation planning and advocacy body consisting of local residents and Bushcare volunteers who take an interest in the natural areas of Leura Falls Creek catchment. Bushcare groups currently active within the catchment are:

- Banksia Park Bushcare Group
- Leura Park/Cascades Bushcare Group
- Vale Street Bushcare Group
- Govett Street Bushcare Group
- Gordon Falls Bushcare Group
- Everglades Bushcare Group
- Everglades Landcare Group
- Sublime Point Bushcare Group
- Prince Henry Cliff Walk Bushcare Group (NPWS)
- Gun Gun Bushcare Group (NPWS)

The Catchment Group works closely with Blue Mountains City Council, and with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, who participate in all our meetings.

## Leura Cascades Precinct

The Catchment Group has the following responses to the numbered “Key Opportunities” summarised in the consultation document:

1. *Chelmsford Bridge and the lower portion of Chelmsford Drive are closed to vehicular traffic.*  
SUPPORTED
2. *Existing non-compliant toilets are closed, and new accessible toilet facilities are constructed*  
SUPPORTED
3. *A vehicle-free zone is created in the vicinity of the track head and heritage structures*  
SUPPORTED
4. *Parking in the upper area is upgraded and rationalised to provide more spaces*  
SUPPORTED. It is agreed that tourist buses should not be allowed within this zone; minibuses might be accommodated. While some non-native trees might be beneficially removed to rationalise parking, there is one magnificent eucalypt in the centre of this area which should be retained as a high priority.
5. *An accessible path is provided connecting the upper and lower areas, with stair alternative route*  
SUPPORTED
6. *An open parkland feel is retained at the upper level to allow for flexibility of use, picnics and small-scale events. Facilities are upgraded including accessible seating, picnic settings and BBQs*  
SUPPORTED
7. *New children’s play facilities*  
SUPPORTED
8. *Leura Cascades night walk and the floodlighting of Chelmsford Bridge and environs is reinstated*  
NOT SUPPORTED. Despite the fact that funding has already been obtained for the night walk, and the history of night lighting in this location, we do not believe this is a desirable move, because of:
  - The likely negative effect on wildlife;
  - The fact that there are already more accessible areas of floodlighting and night walks available very close by, at Echo Point and Katoomba Falls;
  - Possible risks to public safety because of the relative isolation of this area at night.

The Catchment Group has a number of additional suggestions:

- While this is an area of great natural beauty, the creek has been turned into an exceptionally ugly concrete drain through the picnic area, then through a pipe under the lawn in the area of the former men’s baths. All this concrete is no doubt a legacy of the old baths, but is an aspect of heritage which does not merit preservation. It is suggested that council give consideration to “re-naturalising” this section of the creek. Council has developed considerable expertise in this kind of activity, and work in this very public location will provide a great showcase for council’s commitment to Water Sensitive Urban Design, and to better management of our catchments.

- There is also a problem with the drainage system in the northern part of the former men's baths, adjacent to Chelmsford Drive. There is often surface water on the lawn, and it is evident that there are also drainage problems in the area below the retaining wall defining the eastern side of the old men's baths, which is badly weed-affected. Drainage in this area needs to be re-designed, and the whole area below the retaining wall needs to be rehabilitated.
- Pedestrian access to the Cascades – and connection to the Grand Cliff Top Walk - will be improved by rehabilitation of the existing walking track to the Leura town centre and station, via Malvern Road. This track is currently in poor condition. Consistent with the draft Katoomba Master Plan, council should investigate the possibility of constructing a new and more direct walking track to the Katoomba town centre and station, utilising the existing Waratah Street road reserve. As well as improving access, this would have the additional benefit of providing the impetus for addressing one of the worst weed infestations in the catchment.
- There is a need for traffic calming measures where the Great Blue Mountains Trail crosses Cliff Drive to join Chelmsford Drive, currently also the location of a bus stop for east-bound buses. Sightlines for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians are very poor in this location.
- It is suggested that east-bound and west-bound bus stops on the Cliff Drive should be co-located at the western end of Chelmsford Drive, where the sightlines are safer. Traffic calming measures will also be necessary in this location.

### **Carrington Park, Cliff Drive and Solitary Restaurant sub-areas**

The Catchment Group has the following responses to the numbered "Key Opportunities" summarised in the consultation document:

1. *Utilise existing unformed road to bypass the section of Cliff Drive below Solitary Restaurant*  
SUPPORTED, with modifications. The bypass is supported, but it would be preferable not to destroy the existing natural vegetation in the Merriwa Street road reserve. Subject to the detailed site investigations, it may be preferable to utilise the area of the current side road and grassed area for the proposed bypass.
2. *Utilise existing section of Cliff Drive for active transport only*  
SUPPORTED.
3. *Contrast paving treatment/traffic calming at areas of high pedestrian activity*  
SUPPORTED
4. *Kiah Lookout improvements including refurbishment of directional cairn and stone paving, new seating and management of vegetation to enhance views towards Mt Solitary*  
SUPPORTED
5. *Rationalise existing car park layout to provide an increased quantity of spaces and improved traffic flow*  
SUPPORTED
6. *Upgrade Solitary Restaurant Parkland strip, including consideration for restaurant and visitor parking, short-stay coach parking and new picnic facilities*  
SUPPORTED

7. *Install interpretive signage at Solitary Restaurant to explain the connection it formerly had with Leura Cascade Baths*

SUPPORTED

8. *Consider narrowing of existing intersection (Cliff Drive and Merriwa Street) to slow vehicular traffic and facilitate a safer crossing for pedestrians*

SUPPORTED. Narrowing the intersection is only one component of the actions necessary to address the complex issues of this intersection. The design challenges are considerable, but the challenges need to be faced as part of the current planning process. This is one of the relatively few spots on the Southern Escarpment where people get a spectacular view from their car or bus. It is a better view than from Kiah Lookout or Carrington Park. As a consequence, vehicles often pause to admire the view and take photographs, and often seek to park there. It is also planned that the Great Blue Mountains Trail will traverse this corner, but no detailed planning has been done of how this will be achieved. Potentially a cantilevered structure might be built for the GBMT, and also possibly for a lookout area to get the photographers and sightseers off the road. The problem is that an improved lookout area would only encourage even more passing vehicles to stop there, and the potential parking space is very constrained. Members of the Catchment Group are particularly conscious of the problems associated with this corner because of our participation in the Prince Henry Cliff Walk Bushcare Group. There is a very bad infestation of weeds in the national park on the steep slope below this corner, down to the Prince Henry Cliff Walk and beyond, but the weed problem cannot be comprehensively addressed until the council has a clear plan for the infrastructure on this corner

9. *Upgrade Carrington Park including new accessible grade pathways, picnic facilities, entry treatments and playspace. Opportunity to create an accessible lookout area.*

SUPPORTED. In addition to the upgrades flagged in the consultation document, there needs to be a commitment to more appropriate planting and vegetation management in Carrington Park, in light of its location adjacent to the national park. One of the most obvious problems is that there are presently large areas of agapanthus plantings in Carrington Park, and they have inevitably spread across Cliff Drive and into the national park. Additionally, the steep bank on the edge of Carrington Park adjoining Cliff Drive is home to a heavy concentration of weeds such as blackberry, tutsan, broom and many others, and these have also spread across the road. Better planting and weed management will not only improve the appearance and amenity of Carrington Park itself, but will also have very significant flow-on effects on the national park and the World Heritage Area.

In addition to the ideas put forward in the consultation document, the Catchment Group has some further suggestions:

- Council should plan with NPWS to build the “missing link” in the Prince Henry Cliff Walk/Grand Cliff Top Walk below Kiah Lookout. Currently walkers are forced to climb up and walk along the road for 50 metres or so, before descending again to the walking trail on the other side of Kiah Lookout. Perhaps this was a deliberate design feature to channel bushwalkers to the kiosk? In any event, our observation is that many walkers are confused at this point, and this confusion is exacerbated at present by the poor signposting. If council succeeds in completely eliminating

vehicles from this section of Cliff Drive, and if new consistent Grand Cliff Top Walk signage is in place, the problems will be lessened. However most bushwalkers prefer to be walking in the bush, and the Catchment Group continues to advocate for the construction of this relatively short section of track to make the missing link.

- The council needs to design the route of the Great Blue Mountains Trail along the Southern Escarpment as a matter of urgency, ideally as part of the present strategy process. The Catchment Group has engaged in the past with council in relation to design and construction of the two stages of the trail through Leura Park. We are therefore aware that funding for the most recent section, from the Cascades to Kiah Lookout, was originally supposed to cover planning for the next section of the trail to Echo Point and Scenic World. However that planning has still not happened. As noted in point 8 above, that is leading to uncertainty in planning for the Solitary Restaurant and Carrington Park areas, and exactly the same problem will arise when the time comes to look at Honeymoon Lookout and Silver Mist Park, which also fall within our catchment area.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input to this important planning process. Members of the Catchment Group will of course be very happy to discuss any of these issues and suggestions with you or members of your team.

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