

GLENFERN RD GREEN WEDGE INFORMATION SHEET

The Glenfern Green Wedge (GGW) property at 157–173 Glenfern Rd, Upper Ferntree Gully is situated in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges in Victoria. It lies outside the urban growth boundary and comprises an area of 31 hectares. It forms a buffer zone to the Dandenong Ranges National Park and the adjacent Glenfern Bushlands Reserve and Gilmour Park wetland as well as a northern buffer to the beautiful Lysterfield Valley and is classified by the National Trust. Aesthetically, it provides a spectacular vista and a rare example of natural, scenic landscape in the city of Knox. Apart from the vital function of such Green Wedge areas as the “lungs of Melbourne” and as critical wildlife corridors in suburbia, these open spaces are increasingly recognized as essential to the psychological wellbeing of communities.

In 2010, the owners of the GGW applied for a permit to subdivide the property into seven housing lots. A petition of 1090 signatures against the development was submitted to Knox Council and 47 separate objections were lodged, including from the National Trust, Yarra Ranges Council, and the Friends of the Glenfern Valley Bushlands. On 25 January 2011, the council voted unanimously to refuse the application, stating that “it does not achieve the objectives of state and local planning policies” and that the property “is a community asset of incalculable value to the people of Greater Melbourne and should be retained for future generations as our generation’s commitment to a sustainable city in a sustainable world”. The developer then referred the application for subdivision to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. This application was refused on 16 November 2011 (VCAT reference P433/2011). New plans for a 5 lot subdivision were submitted and in response a petition of over 3148 signatures was presented to council. The application was refused on 24 July 2012 and the developer, Hellier McFarland-Cityplan, has again referred the case to VCAT, due to be heard on 22–26 April 2013.

The importance of preserving this property must be considered in the context of Knox Council’s own research stating that within Knox there is less than 4% remnant vegetation remaining and that 53% of indigenous plant species in the areas are threatened with local extinction. Knox’s “green leafy image” is of great importance to residents and of high priority in the council’s vision for the city of Knox.¹ Furthermore, a systematic study by leading ecologists Professor Ralph MacNally, Professor Andrew Bennett and Dr Jim Radford in northern and central Victoria over the past fifteen years has shown that two-thirds of bird species including species once thought to be secure have declined dramatically.² In an era of such drastic decline in biodiversity, as well as the overwhelming evidence of the effects of climate change, it is of the utmost importance that remaining areas of green corridors and remnant vegetation be protected for future generations. The property lies within an extensive wildlife corridor that extends from Jells Park along Dandenong Creek to Churchill National Park, through the Lysterfield Valley to the Dandenong Ranges.

Zones, Classifications, and Overlays

The GGW property is subject to the following zones and overlays: Green Wedge Zone Schedule 2, Erosion Management Overlay, Significant Landscape Overlay Schedule 1, Special Building Overlay, Vegetation Protection Overlay (to be replaced by ESO 2 in the C49 Amendment), as well as statewide native vegetation controls (NRE 2002a: Victorian Planning Provisions). The property is classified by the Knox Council as “regionally significant”. As part of the Lysterfield Valley, it is classified by the National Trust as significant “due to its attractive landscape character and its importance as a buffer between Metropolitan Melbourne and the Dandenong Ranges” (L355 2/3/1981). The property was recognized as “Biologically significant” by Water Ecoscience (1998, Site 27). It is also classified by Aboriginal Heritage Victoria as “an area of cultural heritage sensitivity” and aboriginal artifacts have been discovered on the site (see details below).³

Flora and Fauna

The presence of rare flora and fauna on the site makes this property add to its conservation value. The property is part of an important wildlife corridor formed by Jells Park, Churchill National Park, Lysterfield Park, and the Dandenong Ranges National Park and encompassing Ferny Creek, Dandenong Creek, and Corhanwarrabul Creek. This claim is supported by a report by Euan Moore from the Birdlife Australia (Vic) Conservation Committee. Moore’s report draws on articles by

¹ Knox City Council, *Urban Diversity: Why is it important?* (pamphlet).

² Victoria Alliance Naturally, Fact Sheet (21 October 2009).

³ Matthew Barker (Heritage Insight), *Cultural Heritage Management Plan for Proposed Residential Subdivision at 157–173 Glenfern Rd, UFT Gully, AAV 11252* (17 August, 2010), pp. 93-95.

leading ecologists and ornithologists to show that the property is part of a network of remnant vegetation, which he argues plays an important role in the conservation of bird life. He states that the immediate vicinity of the GGW property has been subject to a total of 2063 surveys since 1998 and 200 bird species have been recorded within a 5 km radius. Twelve birds identified in Moore's report are subject to the Australian Government's bilateral agreements with Japan (Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA)) and China (China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA)). Moore also lists 11 Endangered, 16 Vulnerable, 4 Critically Endangered, and 4 Near Threatened species of birds likely to appear in the area.⁴

Bird Data “custom lists” obtained from Birdlife Australia pertaining to the exact area of the GGW property identify 92 bird species. Among them is the Powerful Owl, listed as Threatened by the Victorian Government's Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). Wedge-tail eagles and other raptors are regularly sited by residents in the area. These birds are protected, and require open grassland for hunting, which is rare in Knox, but is provided by the Glenfern Rd property and the Lysterfield Valley. A Bird Data search of the Upper Ferntree Gully postcode (3156) yields a further eight Threatened (DSE) species: Intermediate Egret, Little Egret, Grey Goshawk, Red-Chested Button Quail, Caspian Tern, Swift Parrot, Barking Owl, and Sooty Owl. The Swift Parrot and Barking Owl are also listed respectively as Endangered and Near Threatened on the Federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) list of Threatened species. A 1997 report on Gilmour Park at the Ferny Creek Retarding Basin records the Australian King Parrot (Regionally Threatened) at Gilmore Park.⁵ As well as being a wildlife corridor, the property is part of a “dark corridor”, which is comparatively free from light pollution and an increasingly rare occurrence in suburbia.

Graeme Lorimer's *Sites of Biological Significance* survey commissioned by the Knox Council (revised 2010) identifies the property as Valley Grassy Forest, which is listed as regionally Vulnerable and is rare in the Dandenong Ranges. Because permission was not granted to enter the property, Lorimer's inspection was done from the fence and from aerial photographs. Despite this, he was able to determine that “many regionally rare fauna species have been observed on adjoining land and there is strong potential for some of these species to be found within the site if a survey were to be conducted ... There are substantial numbers of very large, old Manna Gums on the creek banks, as well as several locally rare shrubs (eg. *Gynatirix pulchella*)”. Significantly, 51 indigenous plant species were recorded on the Glenfern Rd site, including 4 plants of significance: Forest Bindweed (Rare or Threatened in Melbourne and Vulnerable in Knox), Curly Pondweed (Rare in the Melbourne area but Secure in Knox), Candlebarks (Vulnerable in Knox) and Hemp Bush (Rare in Knox). In reference to the adjacent Gilmour Park site, Lorimer noted the many large large eucalypts that would suit roosting or nesting of certain birds and mammals. A platypus was found in the creek during a 1996–97 campaign, but no surveys have been conducted since. The creek “is likely to have a reasonable habitat for stream invertebrates”.⁶

Frogs are also likely inhabitants of Ferny Creek, the adjacent retarding basin at Gilmour Park, and the floodplain on the GGW property itself. Twelve frog species are listed in Melbourne Water's Frog Census for Knox and thirteen species in the area of the Dandenong Ranges including Vulnerable species such as the Southern Toadlet and the Growling Grass Frog. Another possible inhabitant of the floodplain and creek area of the GGW property is the tiny fish Dwarf Galaxia, which is known to inhabit the Corhanwarrabul catchment including Ferny Creek. A 1998 Melbourne Water report by Vincent Pettigrove states that such habitats should be monitored and conserved to protect this vulnerable species.⁷

There are approximately 180 trees on the property, some of which are hundreds of years old. Lorimer states that the site “contains some fine specimens of Yellow Box and there are Candlebarks, which are rare in Knox and the Dandenongs” ... The density of the trees probably reaches pre-European density in some parts ... Even when the trees are very sparse, the ground flora is often native pasture with a large or substantial component of indigenous ground flora.”⁸ Lorimer argues that from an ecological point of view, the Glenfern Rd property should be considered in conjunction with Gilmour Park and the Glenfern Bushlands. He states, “Some fauna no doubt rely on each site to provide different habitat needs eg. the lake in Site

⁴ Euan Moore (Birds Australia), *Glenfern Rd Woodland Report*, 6 September 2011.

⁵ Knox Council and Melbourne Water, *Management Plan for Gilmour Park at the Ferny Creek Retarding Basin*, December 1997, p.17.

⁶ Graeme Lorimer, *Sites of Biological Significance in Knox*. Vol 2. (Draft) Site 1, pp.4,5, Site 2, p.9.

⁷ Vincent Pettigrove and Rhys Coleman, *Waterway Assessment in the Dandenong Valley*. Report prepared for Melbourne Water (October 1998).

⁸ Lorimer, Site 1, p.5

2 [Gilmour Park] provides water for woodland birds that forage in Site 1 [the site of the GGW property]. Native birds and mammals are often seen moving across New Rd”. Further emphasizing the role of the area as a wildlife corridor, Lorimer continues, “Some native birds, mammals and insects that reside in, or visit, the treed neighborhood to the north no doubt use the creek corridor as a source of water and food and as a refuge from hot weather.”⁹ He also notes that many migratory birds have been recorded at Gilmour Park. The fauna of special significance identified by Lorimer in Gilmour Park include the following: Hardhead, Darter, White-Necked Heron, Nankeen Night Heron, Whistling Kite, Wedge-Tail Eagle, Australian Hobby, Peregrine Falcon, Buff-banded Rail, Black-Fronted Dotterel, Little Corella, Australian King-Parrot, Little Grassbird, Clamorous Reed Warbler, and Peron’s Tree Frog. Fauna observed in the the Glenfern Bushlands (and therefore likely to occur on the Glenfern Rd property as well) include the Koala, Sparrowhawk, Little Eagle, Brush Cuckoo, Olive Whistler, Satin Flycatcher and Fairy Martin. Similarly, the Glenfern Bushland’s Management Plan (GBMP Feb. 2004) lists 15 flora species of “regional significance” in addition to 122 species of “local conservation” significance. In relation to native fauna, the GBMP also lists 2 species of state significance (the koala and the Powerful Owl), 9 species of regional significance and a further 87 species of “local conservation significance”.

Lorimer assesses the site according to the Victorian Government’s Department of Sustainability and Environment’s BioSites criteria, concluding that a conservation significance rating of Medium applies to at least some vegetation on the site “and it is possible that the highest quality vegetation may reach High conservation significance. As a consequence, the site meets BioSites criterion 3.2.3 for vegetation of at least Regional significance. According to Lorimer, if a more detailed site inspection was allowed, it is possible that the significance rating would be increased to a level of State significance.”¹⁰ In preparation for the council meeting and decision on the planning permit, Lorimer was given permission to return to the site for brief inspection in November 2010. The full results of his findings have not been made public, apart from an excerpt in the Council report (25 January) which states: “there are five patches where native grass represents at least 25% foliage cover...It is possible that wildflowers may also be found ... one of the grasses found is *Austrotipa rudis*, which is listed by the DSE as Rare throughout Victoria”. In his report to Council on 25 May 2011, Lorimer called for a full biological assessment to be conducted. To date, this has not been done.

Aboriginal Heritage Significance

Aboriginal Heritage Victoria classifies the site as “an area of cultural heritage sensitivity”. The Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP 17/8/2010) pertaining to the property identifies two indigenous archaeological sites containing aboriginal artifacts. These sites are considered to be of “high social and cultural value to the Aboriginal community” (p.92). Statements provided by the Bunurong, Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri people confirm this. For example, The Bunurong and Boon Wurrung “consider that the archaeological sites located within the Glenfern Road Activity Area are of high cultural significance as they present evidence of a cultural landscape in which Bunurong ancestors hunted and gathered and in which they lived their lives for many thousands of years” (p.94–95). The statement from the Wurundjeri makes it clear that the landscapes once lived in by their ancestors “are physical reminders of the cultural lives of the Wurundjeri ancestors and a special connection therefore exists between those places and contemporary Wurundjeri people. This special connection underpins the high significance of these places (p.95).”¹¹

Historical significance

The property is classified by the National Trust as an “attractive pastoral landscape” and is the centre piece of a larger historical precinct which also includes remnants of the Lysterfield Dairy and a single-lane, village- road system based on the original alignments of the mid to late 19th Century. Its European history traces back to when the district was first surveyed and subdivided around 1860. Information is available from books such as Helen Coulsen’s “Story of the Dandenongs” and also from the Knox Historical Society.¹² We are currently preparing a document which provides more details about the fascinating history of the property and its surrounds, including the many painters, poets and musicians who have found continued inspiration in the natural beauty of the area.

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⁹ Lorimer, Site 1, p.5.

¹⁰ Lorimer, Site 1, p.6.

¹¹ Barker, p.92-95.

¹² Coulsen, p147-156; 310- 314. For Knox Historical Society see <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~khsinc/about.html>