

Celebrating 50 years of Sutherland Group 1963-2013

6 May 2013

John Rayner
General Manager
Sutherland Shire Council
Locked Bag 17
Sutherland NSW 1499

Dear Mr Rayner

Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve, Kareela

I am writing on behalf of all the members of the Australian Plants Society, Sutherland Group, to express our concerns about the lack of communication from Sutherland Council about the implementation of the Masterplan for Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve at Kareela.

The Australian Plants Society is a major stakeholder in the Reserve, with involvement since the late 1960s, contributing volunteer labour and expertise including producing plant name labels. Council awarded us Volunteer of the Month in May 2011 for our contributions. We have been eagerly anticipating the development of the Masterplan since our letter of concern to you and Councillors in early 2009.

We were asked to provide comments on the draft final Masterplan (version 6) on 6 February 2013 and were offered a meeting. We emailed our comments promptly on 12 February 2013 and suggested times for a meeting, but we received no acknowledgement of our comments, no meeting, and the Masterplan was not amended at all before it went to Council. We were not informed that the Masterplan was submitted to Council or that it was approved by Council. We found out by accident while looking at the Council website. The approved Masterplan is still not on display at the Reserve 2 months after it was approved. We understand the staff member who was responsible for the Masterplan is on leave, but this makes the matter of communication even more important. Who is now responsible for the Masterplan?

We seek information and consultation on the following issues.

1. Timing of the implementation

We seek information on the timing of the implementation of the Masterplan. When will Stage 1 be implemented? The timing will affect our volunteer work at the Reserve and planning for events. We would like to remove any plants and plant labels which may be damaged in the works, and relocate the storage unit for the plant labels.

2. Storage facility for plant name labels

Currently, unused plant name labels are stored in the work compound. However the work compound will be relocated in Stage 1 of the Masterplan. We would like to store the labels in the storage space between the toilets. However, we are having trouble finding the appropriate person in Council to discuss this with and progress. Sutherland Group is happy to pay for and build the new storage rack. Our volunteers are covered by insurance as both Bushcare volunteers and as Australian Plants Society volunteers.

3. Vegetation communities plan

We provided extensive comments on a draft of the vegetation communities plan in 2012, but have not seen a final version. The vegetation plan is important as it affects planting in areas throughout the Reserve, including areas otherwise unaffected by the Masterplan works.

Celebrating 50 years of Sutherland Group 1963-2013

There are a number of other issues related to the Reserve, which should not be dependent on the Masterplan, which we would like to discuss. These include:

4. Opening hours of the Reserve

It was acknowledged by Council very early on in the development of the Masterplan that the hours of the Reserve should be reviewed and extended. The Reserve is already open earlier than advertised on the weekend. The longer hours could be achieved relatively easily, quickly and cheaply by amending the Council website, brochure and signage, and by directions to security staff. This is not a construction issue. Who is responsible for implementing the changes to opening hours?

5. Pedestrian access from Bates Drive

Given there is already an existing gate on Bates Drive, pedestrian access can be provided relatively easily, quickly and cheaply by ensuring Reserve and security staff unlock and open this gate when they open the top gate, and by including a sign on the pedestrian gate about the hours it is open.

6. Timeframe for new brochure and information signage

With the Stage 1 changes to the paths in the Reserve, a new brochure will be required. What is the time frame for the design and production of the new brochure? We don't want this to be left to the very end of the process. When we inquired about making our temporary information signs throughout the Reserve permanent in late 2011, we were told that signage would be addressed as part of the Masterplan. Again, we seek information about the timing and process for this. Many of our temporary information signs are in areas unaffected by the Masterplan and could be replaced by permanent signs while Stage 1 works are underway. Sutherland Group is happy to pay for and organise converting our temporary signs to permanent signs.

7. Signage on streets surrounding the Reserve and entry sign

The signage on the streets surrounding the Reserve, directing people to the Reserve, could be improved. This should not be dependent on the Masterplan. The decaying timber sign outside the Reserve in Manooka Place needs to be replaced with the correct name (Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve) and in the Council branding style.

8. Funding for future Stages

The Masterplan identifies several stages of work. We understand Stage 1 is funded in 2012/13. However, is funding for Stage 2 included in Council's budget for 2013/14? What is the process for including funding for future stages in future budgets?

We look forward to your response on these issues. We have relied on informal contact, however it is not working and we are not being kept informed or able to discuss and resolve ongoing issues. Our members, who are very committed to Joseph Banks Reserve, are very frustrated at the lack of information and consultation. It may be appropriate to form a Sub-Committee of Council for Joseph Banks Reserve similar to the Sub-Committee that exists for the Camellia Gardens.

We are happy to meet with Council staff to discuss our comments further.

Yours sincerely

Rhonda Daniels
Secretary, Sutherland Group
Australian Plants Society

2a Glenelg St, Sutherland NSW 2232
rhodaniels@bigpond.com
Ph 9521 8381