

4 ADOPTION OF FIELD OF MARS RESERVE MASTERPLAN AND PUBLIC EXHIBITION OF DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT

Report prepared by: Open Space Planner
File No.: GRP/21/7 - BP21/368

REPORT SUMMARY

The Field of Mars Reserve (“the Reserve”) is the largest remnant bushland reserve under the care, control and management of the City of Ryde. It is identified in Council’s *Integrated Open Space Plan* (2012) as a level 1 park in the Ryde LGA. At approximately 50 hectares in size, it is the City of Ryde’s largest single provision of open space. The Reserve currently contributes approximately 14% of the City of Ryde’s total open space provision. The Reserve consists of a combination of Council owned Community Land and Crown Land managed by CoR. The *Crown Land Management Act 2016* requires new Plans of Management for parks/reserves that contained Crown Land.

The current Plan of Management for the site was adopted by Council in 2009 and therefore it was timely to update the document to ensure it met the contemporary needs of the community and Council. A Master Plan for the site had not previously been prepared by Council. The biodiversity, community value and role of this Reserve is significant, especially with the increasing residential density occurring in the surrounding suburbs. The *Ryde Biodiversity Plan* (2016), identifies the Field of Mars Reserve as having very high conservation priority, high conservation significance value and a high threat value. The Reserve contains threatened ecological communities and with additional designated protection as a “*Wildlife Refuge*” and a “*Category 1 Wildlife Protection Area*”.

The site primarily consists of Natural Area (bushland) and contains sections of Buffalo Creek and Strangers Creek, walking tracks, Visitors Centre/amenities building, picnic area and car park. Although the Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre is positioned within Reserve, this parcel of land and education centre facility is not owned or managed by Council – it is operated by the NSW Department of Education. The Reserve’s gazetted purpose, and thus the remit for City of Ryde’s care, control and management responsibility is for “*Public recreation and promotion of the study and preservation of native flora and fauna.*”

The draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management – Action Lists considered Stage 1 community consultation feedback (October/November 2020). The Masterplan Report was further refined, and draft Plan of Management developed with consideration to Stage 2 community consultation feedback (April/May 2021). Further details on the consultation undertaken are outlined in the body of this report.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Masterplan

Council is committed to protecting the biodiversity and recreation values of the Reserve, providing environmental education opportunities and ensuring sustainable and environmental management of the Reserve into the future. The Masterplan, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, sets out the vision for how this Park will be protected, upgraded and improved over the next 20 years.

The Masterplan does not propose any significant changes to the Field of Mars Reserve. It includes several protection measures and a range of enhancements to improve biodiversity, accessibility and environmental education opportunities. This includes improvements to the track network, accessible pathways, amenities and picnic shelters, delineation of open space zones to encourage social/recreation activities outside of natural areas, signage, entry and arrival experience.

The Masterplan also includes environmental improvements such as increased tree canopy cover, re-generation of degraded vegetation, re-vegetation areas and bio-buffer to capture nutrient run off between the cemetery and the Reserve. The Masterplan also seeks to strengthen the connection with the surrounding walking track network and encourages water quality improvements in the surrounding catchment areas.

An implementation plan is detailed in the Masterplan Report for the progressive implementation of the Masterplan. Implementation of the improvements detailed in the Masterplan is subject to Council's adoption and funding availability. Funding to implement the full Masterplan will be sought through applications for grant funding and Council's annual business planning cycle.

Plan of Management

The Plan of Management, provided in **ATTACHMENT 2 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, identifies objective, targets and strategies to protect and guide the future maintenance and management of this Reserve, in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993*, *Crown Land Management Act 2016* and *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

The Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management (FoMRPoM) provides a strategic planning and sustainable management framework for the Community and Crown lands that form Field of Mars Reserve. It reaffirms Reserve's role in providing for a range of education, recreation and natural areas to the residents of Ryde and aids the conservation of the natural, cultural and indigenous resources.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Management actions recommended within FoMRPoM are to meet current and future demands of Park users and aim to improve the manner in which the Reserve is managed, respond to the needs of the community, satisfy management objectives, clarify and formalise lease and licensing opportunities and reinforce the values of the Field of Mars Reserve.

In accordance with the requirements of the NSW *Crown Lands Management Act 2016*, Native Title advice on the areas of Crown Land covered by the FoMRPoM has been obtained. Therefore, this report recommends the FoMRPoM be referred to the Minister of Lands and Forestry for approval to be placed on Public Exhibition in accordance with the requirements of the *Crown Land Management Act 2016*. Should Council adopt the Masterplan, a re-categorisation process will occur during the exhibition of the FoMRPoM to align the land categorisations with the Masterplan design. Following this Public Exhibition, a report will be prepared outlining Council's response to feedback received, with a recommendation to formally adopt the FoMRPoM.

A recommendation of this report is that Council advocates to continue to have care control and management of Lot 7011 DP 1069836 for its current use of environmental conservation, the lot is currently Zoned E2. The draft Masterplan has this area identified as an important bush regeneration/rehabilitation zone. The Northern Metropolitan Cemeteries Crown Land Manager, who are responsible for the management of Field of Mars Cemetery, have expressed an interest in integrating this parcel of land for cemetery use. An additional recommendation is the formal closing of Wellington Rd road reserve and integrate this lot into the broader reserve. Council's Strategic Properties Team and Legal Counsel have been consulted on these land matters.

The Field of Mars Reserve provides vital biodiversity connectivity within the City of Ryde and beyond. Both of the above-mentioned recommendations will further strengthen the regionally and locally significant biodiversity corridors.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) That Council adopts Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan Report, as prepared by City of Ryde and Gondwana Consulting dated July 2021.
- (b) That Council refer the draft Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management, dated July 2021 to the Minister for Lands and Forestry for approval to place on public exhibition as per the requirements of the *Crown Lands Management Act 2016*.

ITEM 4 (continued)

- (c) That once approval is obtained from the Minister, the document be placed on exhibition and a public hearing be undertaken for the proposed land recategorisations, with submissions received for a period of 42 days and a report be brought back to Council following this process.
- (d) That Council approves the closure of the Wellington Rd road reserve, as detailed in the Field of Mars Master Plan, and that all associated administrative processes be undertaken with delegating authority given to the General Manager to undertake all tasks necessary to affect this closure and executing all the required documentation.
- (e) The Council continues to advocate for the continued care, control and management of Lot 7011 DP 1069836, for the use of environmental conservation purposes as per its current E2 zoning.
- (f) That Council write to thank the residents that participated in the development of the Masterplan and Plan of Management and inform them of this resolution.

ATTACHMENTS – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER

- 1 Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan Report for adoption by Council (July 2021)
- 2 Field of Mars Reserve Draft Plan of Management for Referral to Minister (July 2021)
- 3 Field of Mars Reserve Draft Masterplan Report for Stage 2 Community Consultation (April 2021)
- 4 Field of Mars Reserve Draft Plan of Management - Action Lists for Stage 2 Community Consultation (April 2021)
- 5 Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan and Plan of Management - Stage 1 Community Consultation Report (November 2020)
- 6 Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan and Plan of Management - Stage 2 Community Consultation Report (May 2021)
- 7 Field of Mars Reserve - Map of Wellington Rd road reserve recommended for closure

Report Prepared By:

Meredith Gray
Open Space Planner

Report Approved By:

Simon James
Manager - Parks

Wayne Rylands
Director - City Works

ITEM 4 (continued)

History of Field of Mars Reserve (the Reserve)

The traditional custodians of the land are the Wallumedegal clan of the Darug tribe. The Wallumedegal clan would have used the natural resources of the area, fishing and surviving on a diet of shellfish, birds, small game and edible native plants. Archaeological evidence indicates indigenous activities and practices took place within the Field of Mars Reserve.

The Field of Mars Common (extending from Gladesville to Beecroft) was established in 1804 by Governor King for stock breeding by early settlers. Timber for building, shingles, firewood and charcoal was transported by the Lane Cove River. In 1887 85 acres that became known as the Field of Mars Reserve (R.4785) was set apart for public recreation. In 1889 the Municipal Council at Ryde were appointed as Trustees of the Reserve. In 1920, 1924, 1926 and 1967, parts of the Reserve were removed and added to the adjoining Cemetery.

In the early 1900's the Reserve was a remote and undeveloped patch of bush. Timber cutters were active during the Depression years. Locals used the Reserve for recreation including swimming and fishing. Squatter type dwellings and shacks sprang up. Other uses has included a rifle range and for Army target practice and training purposes.

In the 1950s, the Reserve was used as a rubbish depot until 1959 for not putrescible garbage on the banks of Buffalo and Strangers Creeks. In 1965 a major tip/reclamation site for putrescible garbage was proposed in the Reserve. Community objection to this proposal gained momentum with the (East Ward) Anti-Tip Action Committee formed and the Ryde-Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society formed in 1966. In 1966 Council selected another site and resolved to developed the Reserve as a flora and fauna sanctuary.



Image 1, 2 & 3: 1943, 1961 & 1975 aerial photographs of the Reserve.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Between 1972 – 1974 additional land parcels were added the Reserve for public recreation and placed under Council's care, control and management. The Visitors Centre/Amenities Building opened in 1972. A draft Plan of Management was created by the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society in 1975, which was adopted by Council and National Parks and Wildlife in 1977. The Buffalo Creek Plan of Management was prepared in 1996. The current Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management was adopted by Council in 2009.

The Reserve was proclaimed as a Wildlife Refuge in 1975 and became a Category 1 Wildlife Protection Area in 2019. The Reserve purpose was altered in 1975 for *"Public recreation and promotion of the study and preservation of native flora and fauna"*. The establishment of a State School at the Reserve was formalised in 1988.



Images 4, 5 & 6: 1982, 1995 & 2010 aerial photograph of the Reserve.

Strategic Context

The Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, and Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management, provided in **ATTACHMENT 2 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, have been prepared in response to and with consideration to a number of strategic planning documents, including:

- *Greater Sydney Commission Our Greater Sydney 2056 North District Plan (2018)*
- *City of Ryde Biodiversity Plan (2016)*
- *City of Ryde Integrated Open Space Plan (2012)*
- *City of Ryde Sport and Recreation Strategy 2016-2026 (2017)*
- *Planning Ryde Local Strategic Planning Statement (2020)*
- *City of Ryde Resilience Plan 2030 (2020)*
- *Ryde Local Environment Plan (2014)*
- *Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Parramatta, Ryde Bushfire Risk Management Committee Bush Fire Risk Management Plan 2019 – 2024 (2021 - draft pending endorsement)*

ITEM 4 (continued)

The City of Ryde is incorporated in the Greater Sydney Commission's *Our Greater Sydney 2056 - North District Plan*. This plan identifies a number of Planning Priorities which are applicable to the Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan and Plan of Management including:

- *N15: Protecting and improving the health and enjoyment of Sydney Harbour and the District's waterways.*
- *N16: Protecting and enhancing bushland and biodiversity.*
- *N17: Protecting and enhancing scenic and cultural landscapes.*
- *N19: Increasing urban tree canopy cover and delivering Green Grid connections.*
- *N20: Delivering high quality open space.*
- *N22: Adapting to the impacts of urban and natural hazards and climate change.*

The *Ryde Biodiversity Plan* (2016), identifies the Field of Mars Reserve as having very high conservation priority, high conservation significance value and a high threat value. The Reserve contains threatened ecological communities. The Field of Mars Reserve provides significant biodiversity connectivity as it forms part of the Buffalo Creek Regional Biodiversity corridor, the Lane Cove River Regional Biodiversity Corridor and the Strangers Creek Local Biodiversity corridor. There are multiple Bushcare groups as well as Bushcare contractors who operate at Bushcare sites within the Reserve. The Masterplan and Plan of Management provide the strategic directions, priorities and recommendations for biodiversity management, protection, environmental enhancement and community education initiatives. The development of these plans have been in accordance with the City of Ryde's *Biodiversity Plan* (2016).

The *Integrated Open Space Plan* (2012) (IOSP) identifies Field of Mars Reserve as a Level 1 open space. A significant part of the City's open space is accounted for in natural areas (eg. Field of Mars Reserve), which is of regional significance. The Field of Mars Reserve is the largest at 50 Ha, providing the biggest single contribution to City of Ryde's open space provision. The IOSP give recognition to the significance of the Field of Mars Reserve:-

- *"Field of Mars Reserve is first and foremost a bushland open space there are cleared areas, particularly close to Pittwater Road that would meet passive recreation needs without compromise to its integrity."*

ITEM 4 (continued)

- *“Field of Mars Reserve is an important link to the Lane Cove National Park through Buffalo Creek, Stranger’s Creek and the Great North Walk and covers an area of over 49 Ha. Due to its topography of ridges and gullies and the different soils and aspects, the plant communities found there are both rich and diverse with over 300 species of plants from communities which include salt marsh, wet and dry sclerophyll forest.”*
- *“The Field of Mars Reserve is one of the most significant areas for passive recreation in the City and consequently, trails have been constructed through it, recently incorporating a universally accessible raised boardwalk to encourage a more leisurely and manageable approach of walking in the bush. These additional facilities include the 2.5 kilometres long Kunzea Walk which follows Buffalo Creek as a continuation of the Great North Walk.”*
- *“addressing flooding climate change with minimal necessary built form (river walls) and through long term planning (eg. facility relocation, extending flood capacity and retention of creeks through natural reprofiling. Key reserves in terms of flood impact include Meadowbank Park, lower section of Field of Mars and various other parks on the Lane Cove River and Parramatta River foreshores.”*
- *“major road barriers and steep topography limit access to the Field of Mars Reserve.”*

The *Sport and Recreation Strategy 2016-2026 (2017)* recognises the Natural Area in the Reserve as areas of unique ecological value that are maintained with minimal human intervention and are protected because of their significant ecological value for the Ryde Community. Recreation activities include bushwalking, running, Bushcare programs and bird watching. The Masterplan has been informed by the actions and priorities identified in the *Sport and Recreation Strategy 2016-2026*. This includes Field of Mars Reserve being a high priority location to *“design open spaces that support passive recreation to ensure access of people of all abilities. Create picnic areas that allow for adequate movement space for people who use wheelchairs, crutches, motor scooters or walkers etc”*.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Local Context



Image 7: Site Location: Field of Mars Reserve



Image 8: Site Overview: Field of Mars Reserve.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Site

The Field of Mars Reserve is the largest remnant bushland reserve under the care, control and management of the City of Ryde covering approximately 50 hectares. In its current form, the Reserve is comprised of a collection of forty-three parcels of land under a combination of Council, Crown and NSW Government ownership.

The Reserve is located in the suburbs of East Ryde, Gladesville and Ryde. It is bounded by Pittwater Rd, Kennedy St, Westminster Rd, Higginbotham Rd, Pidding Rd, Cressy Rd, Kellaway St, Finch Ave and Moncrieff Dr. The Reserve is predominantly surrounded by low density residential dwellings, with a small pocket of industrial land and bus depot located to the south-west of the site.

The Reserve forms part of a wider open space system and habitat corridor network which includes, to the west the Field of Mars Cemetery and linkage parks such as Pidding, Barton and Burrows Parks and to the east, the Lane Cove National Park (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) and Buffalo Creek Reserve (Hunters Hill Council).

Buffalo Creek and Strangers Creek both traverse the site and converge on the north-eastern side of the Reserve, before flowing into the nearby Lane Cove River, a major tributary to the Parramatta River.

The Reserve primarily consists of large tracts of natural area (bushland). Built form includes a network of walking tracks and creek crossing points, a small picnic area with shelters, small pockets of green space for passive recreation (eg. picnics), a Visitors Centre/amenities building (with public toilets), bitumen car park (31 spaces + 1 accessible space) and a bus turning area. The Reserve has 14 different site entry points, with the main entry off Pittwater Rd. Stormwater devices (eg. trash rack and gross pollutant trap) are located onsite to improve water quality.

The Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre is located within the Reserve. This facility includes indoor class rooms, office area, toilets and a small outdoor teaching area. The lot that the Education Centre building is located on is owned by Department of Education and is not under Council's care, control or management. Therefore, the parcel of land on which it is based and the Education Centre building is excluded from Masterplan and Plan of Management. However, the surrounding context and their use of the Reserve for educational purposes has been appropriately considered.

The Reserve is a Wildlife Refuge and Wildlife Protection Area, where dogs, cats and cycling activities are prohibited onsite. Lighting within the Reserve is kept to a minimum to as protection measure for nocturnal wildlife.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Reserve is listed as an item of “*National and State significance*” under the *Ryde Local Environmental Plan No.105 (Heritage)*.

Masterplan and Plan of Management Development – Design and Consultation

In September 2020 Council engaged *Gondwana Consulting* as natural area subject matter experts to prepare the Masterplan and Plan of Management.

Council’s Community Engagement team conducted Stage 1 and Stage 2 Community Consultations to inform the preparation and refinement of the Masterplan and Plan of Management.

Stage 1 community consultation was held in 12 October – 1 November 2021. The purpose of the first stage of consultation was to allow residents and users of the Reserve an opportunity to provide their feedback on the existing design and management of the Reserve and what their thoughts were for the future of the site. This consultation was promoted via flyer, letterbox drop (500m radius of the Reserve), park signage, local newspaper advertisement (38,000 readership), stakeholder eNewsletter (92 emails distributed), Facebook (reach of 7,109), Have Your Say webpage (367 page views) and Council eNewsletters (distribution 5,834). Due to COVID restrictions no face-to-face drop in sessions were held, however, community members could register for a one-on-one phone call with a member of the project team. The consultation generated feedback by online survey (219 respondents), written submissions (12 emails) and phone submissions (3 phone sessions).

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Stage 1 Community Consultation Report is provided in **ATTACHMENT 5 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**. The feedback received during this first stage helped to inform the preparation of a draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management (PoM). During Stage 1 Community Consultation the community told us they would like to see:-

Stage 1 Feedback	Council Response	
	Draft Masterplan	Draft Plan of Management
Improved/additional signs/information	Included	Included
Improved access to/from the Reserve		
Maintain/upgrade boardwalks and trails		
More seating / picnic areas		
Water management / quality / clear waterways	WSUD principals included.	Included
Improved facilities (toilet, café)	Review condition and functionality of Visitors Centre / Amenities Building for future consideration.	
	Café not included. Visitors Centre offers complimentary tea/coffee.	
Wildlife / habitat / nature protection	Included	Included
Protected area / no development		
Bush regeneration		
Weed management		
Managed bush fire risks	Refer to Plan of Management	Included
Regulated area		
Keep dogs / cats / bikes out		
Feral animal control		
Activities/events		
Volunteering		

Stage 2 Community Consultation was held in 26 April - 9 May 2021. This stage of consultation allowed the community to review and provide feedback on the draft Masterplan, provided in **ATTACHMENT 3 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, and draft Plan of Management - Action Lists, provided in **ATTACHMENT 4 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**. This consultation was promoted via flyer, letterbox drop (500m radius of the Reserve), park signage, local newspaper advertisement (38,000 readership), stakeholder eNewsletter (200 emails distributed), Facebook (reach of 9,061), Have Your Say webpage (285 page views) and Council eNewsletters (distribution 5,891). An onsite drop in session was held (15 attendees). The consultation generated feedback by online survey (76 respondents), written submissions (10 emails) and drop in session comments.

ITEM 4 (continued)

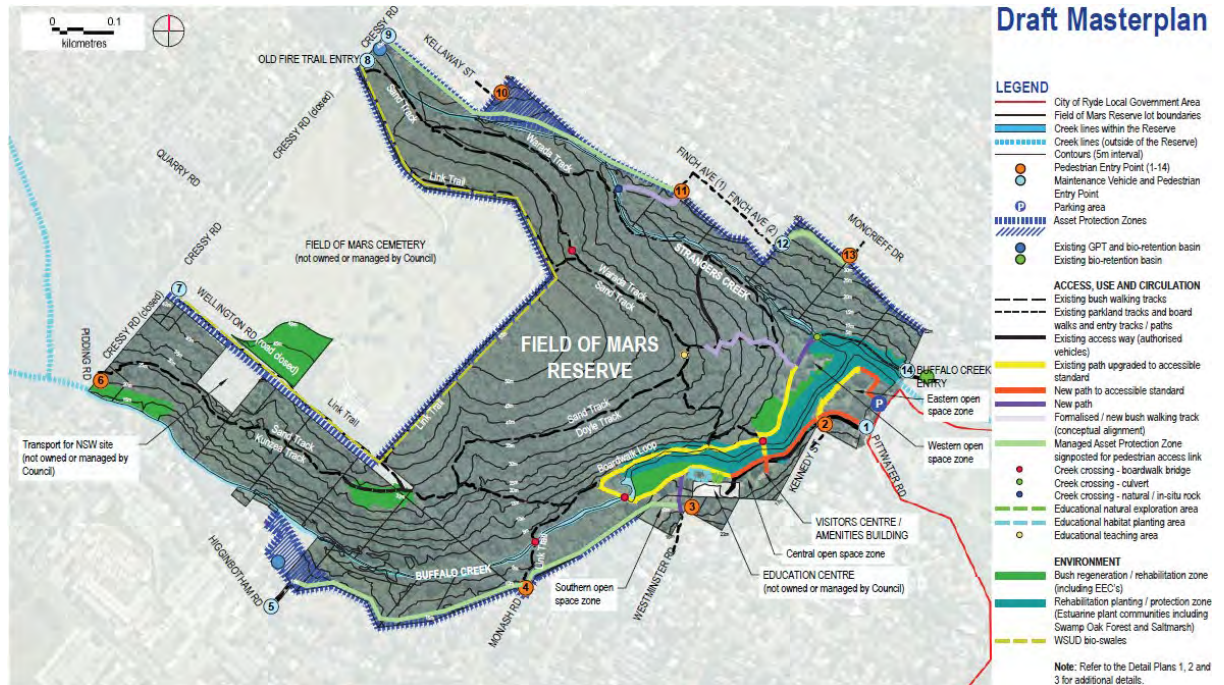


Image 9: Draft Masterplan presented during Stage 2 Community Consultation, provided in **ATTACHMENT 3**



Images 10 & 11: Stage 2 Community Consultation drop in session & Park signage.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Stage 2 Community Consultation Report is provided in **ATTACHMENT 6 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**. The Masterplan and Plan of Management responds to the community's feedback in the following ways:-

Stage 2 – draft Masterplan:

During Stage 2 Community consultation the community provided the following levels of support for the recommendations proposed by the draft Masterplan:-

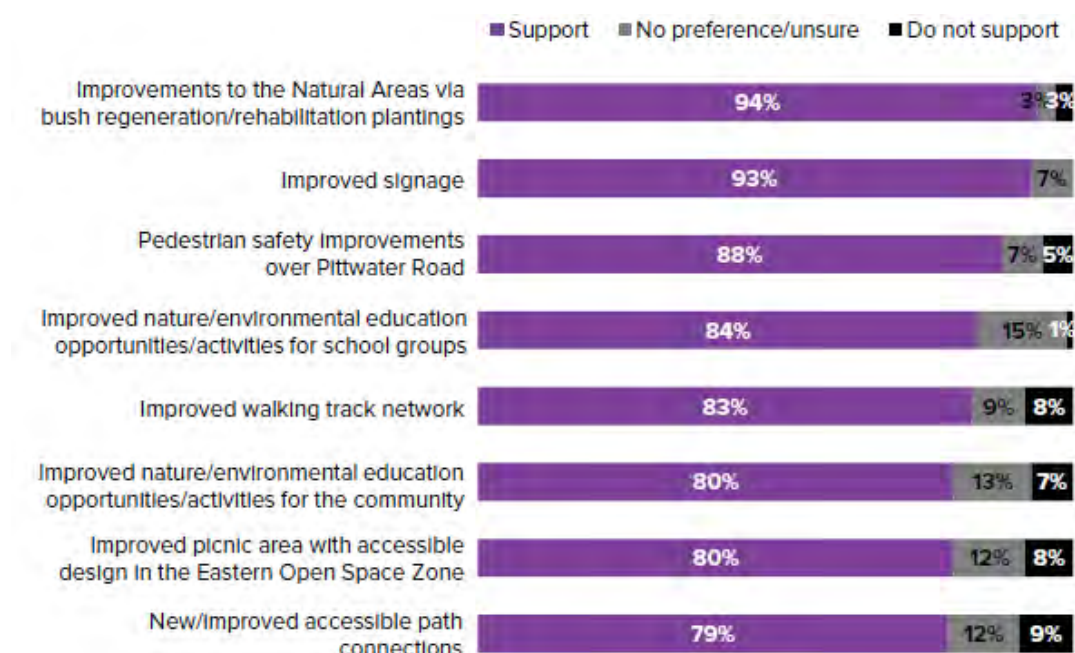


Image 12: Excerpt from Stage 2 Community Consultation Report, provided in **ATTACHMENT 6**.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Stage 2 draft Masterplan Ideas/Suggestions/Comments	Council Response in draft Masterplan for Council adoption
Keep natural/with character/minimise changes	No change. Included in draft Masterplan
Maintain/upgrade tracks/boardwalk/access	No change. Included in draft Masterplan
Pedestrian crossings/bridge/access	No change. Included in draft Masterplan
Bush habitat regeneration/protection	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
Additional signage & signage/education	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
Weed management	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
Litter management	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
Consultation with community groups	Refer to draft Plan of Management.
Bus access/parking	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
Designate as dog off leash	Not included. Field of Mars Reserve is a designated Wildlife Protection Area
Regulate/too many dogs	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
Drainage at walking tracks/entrances	No change. Drainage and track upgrades included in draft Masterplan.
Low impact activities/picnics	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and restricted to designated open space zones.
More bush regeneration	No change. Included in draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management
More emphasis/lacks vision	No change.
Removal of proposes paths	Draft Masterplan updated. Some minor path adjustments made in the vicinity of the southern open space zone.
Managed burning	No change. Included in draft Plan of Management and considered in the preparation of the draft Masterplan.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Stage 2 – draft Plan of Management:

During Stage 2 Community consultation the community felt the following areas were adequately addressed in the proposed draft Plan of Management – Action List:-

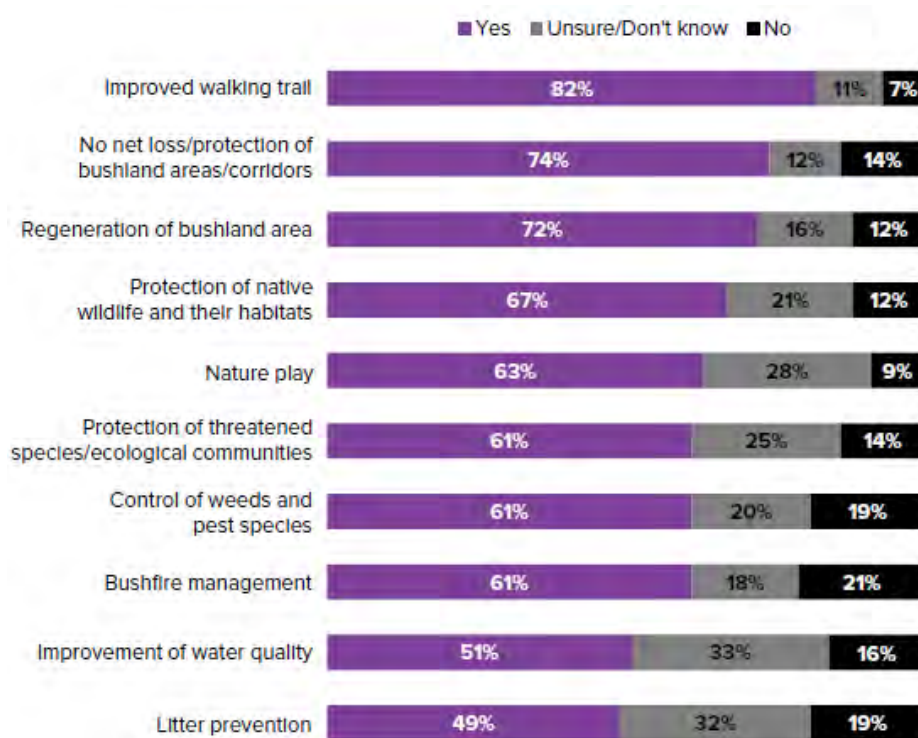


Image 13: Excerpt from Stage 2 Community Consultation Report, provided in **ATTACHMENT 6**.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Stage 2 draft Plan of Management – Action list. Ideas/Suggestions/Comments	Council Response in draft Plan of Management for Minister
Bushfire Management	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Protect environment/flora/fauna	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Resourcing and implementation	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Water quality and litter	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Increase size of Reserve/Natural Areas	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Pest management	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Regulation of illegal activities	No change. Included in Plan of Management.
Signage	No change. Included in Plan of Management and Masterplan.
Use of recycled material (eg. seating)	No change. For consideration during detailed design and following procurement processes.
Weed management	No change. Included in Plan of Management
Naming of tracks	Plan of Management updated.
Heritage recognition	No change. Included in Plan of Management and Masterplan.
Categorisation of area	Land categorisation review and public hearing for proposed land re-categorisations of parts of Field of Mars Reserve (if required) to be undertaken to ensure consistency with Masterplan once adopted.
Consultation with groups	Included in Plan of Management with minor update for greater clarification.

Throughout the preparation of the draft Masterplan and draft Plan of Management Council officers have maintained regular and open dialogue with key stakeholder groups. This has included presentations at the Field of Mars Consultative Committee and Bushland and Environment Advisory Committee meetings and meetings with the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society, Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Field of Mars Cemetery/Northern Metropolitan Cemeteries Land Manager.

Final Masterplan

The Masterplan, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, and recommended for adoption in this report, includes bushland protection measures and a range of enhancements to improve biodiversity, accessibility and environmental education opportunities. This includes improvements to the track network, accessible pathways, accessible toilet, accessible picnic shelters, delineation of open space zones to encourage social/recreation activities outside of natural areas, signage as well as enhanced entry, arrival and onsite wayfinding experience.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Masterplan also includes environmental improvements such as re-vegetation areas, re-generation of degraded vegetation, increased tree canopy cover and bio-buffer to capture nutrient run off between the cemetery and the Reserve. The Masterplan also seeks to strengthen the connection with the surrounding walking track network and encourages water quality improvements in the surrounding catchment areas.

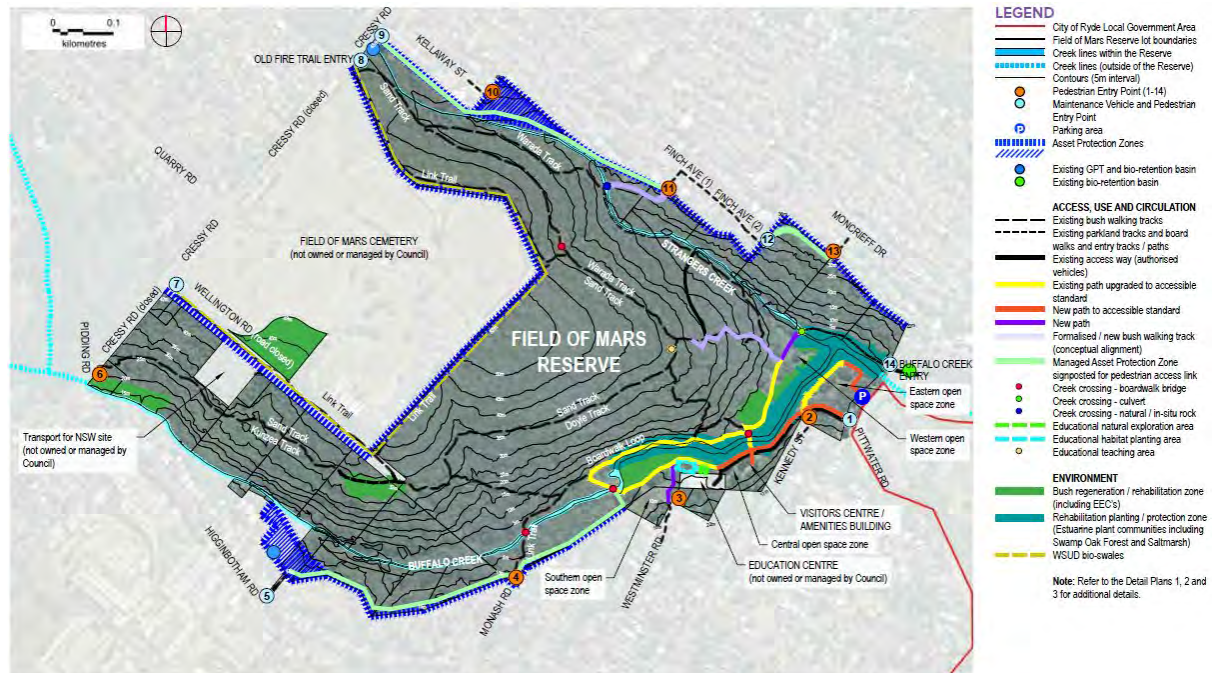


Image 14: Final Masterplan for adoption by Council, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1**.

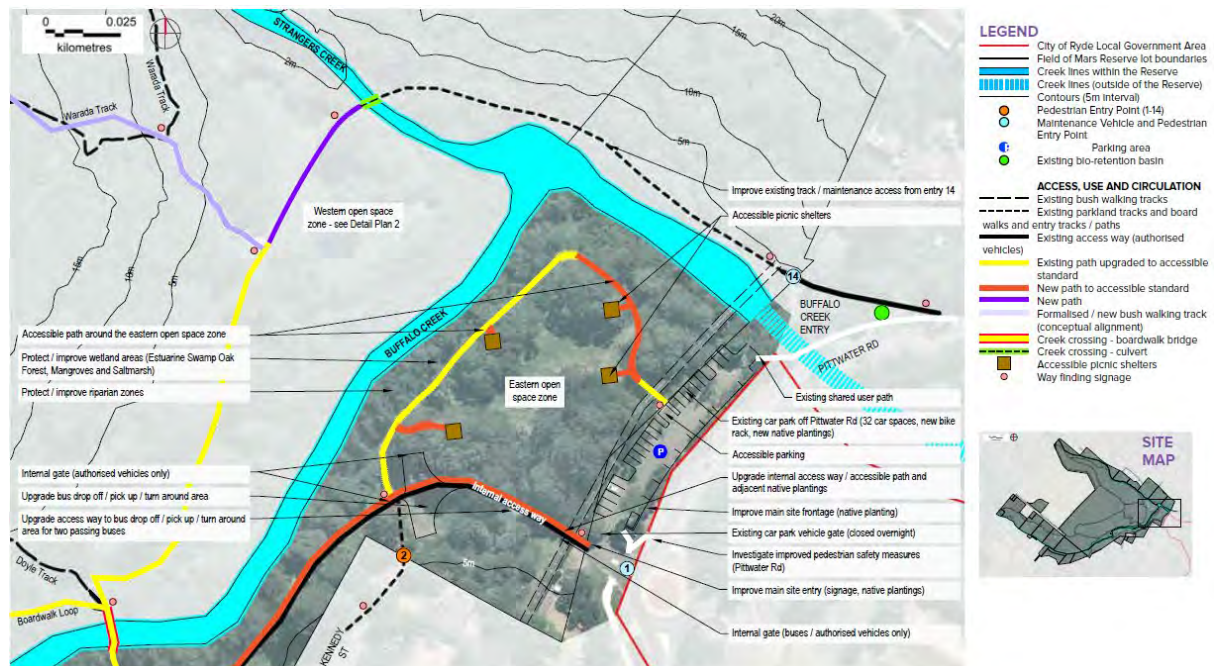


Image 15: Final Masterplan Detailed Plan for Eastern Open Space Zone for adoption by Council, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1**.

ITEM 4 (continued)

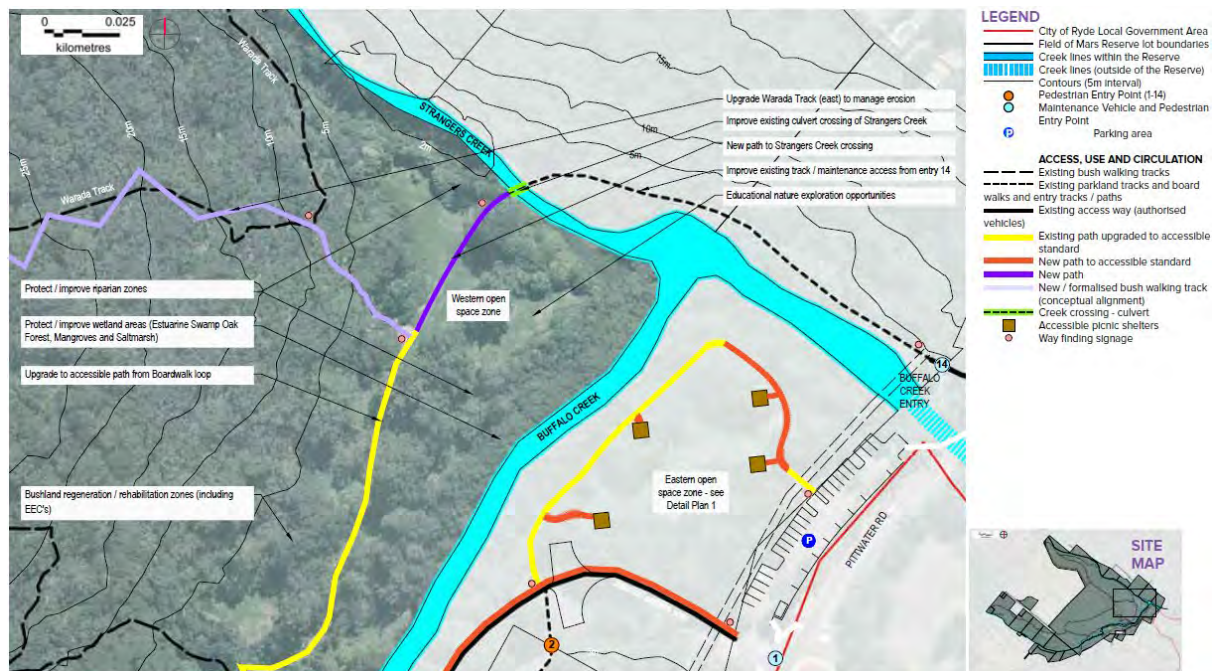


Image 16: Final Masterplan Detailed Plan for Western Open Space Zone for adoption by Council, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1**.

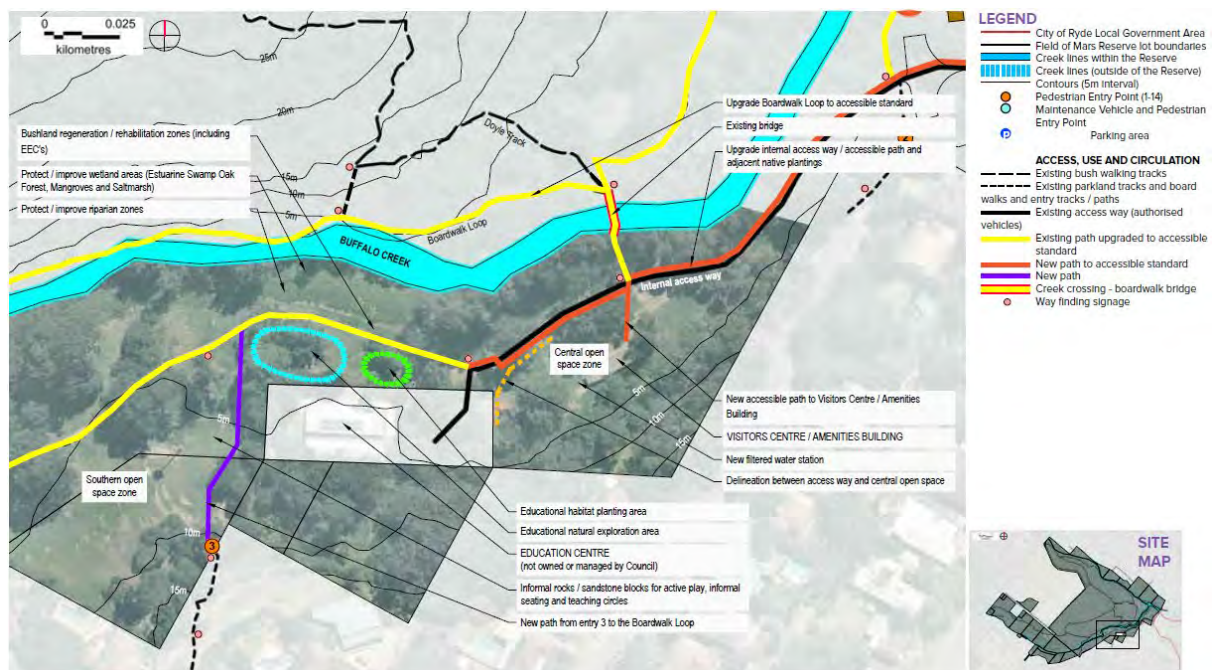


Image 17: Final Masterplan Detailed Plan for Central and Southern Open Space Zone for adoption by Council, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1**.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Wildlife Refuge, Wildlife Protection Area and Reserve Purpose.

In May 1975, the Field of Mars Reserve was proclaimed as a “*Wildlife Refuge*” under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. This status helps to protect biodiversity, conserve wildlife and native plants.

Furthermore, in August 2019 Council resolved for the Reserve to be designated as a “*Category 1 Wildlife Protection Area*” under the *NSW Companion Animal Act 1998*. This prohibits cats and dogs in the Reserve at any time and aims to reduce their detrimental impact on native wildlife.

From 1887, the original purpose of the Reserve was gazetted as being for “Public Recreation”. In June 1975 the original purpose of the Reserve was revoked and altered via Government gazette to be for “*Public recreation and promotion of the study and preservation of native flora and fauna.*”

These designations have been considered and incorporated in the Masterplan and the Plan of Management.

Visitors Centre / Amenities Building

This building was originally constructed in 1972 and the toilets were upgraded more recently in 2009. It contains a meeting room, kitchenette, storage and public toilet facilities (male, female and accessible). The toilets are open during daylight hours only. The Visitors Centre has variable opening hours and operated on a voluntary basis by the Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society (RHHFFPS). They provide visitors to the Reserve with environmental information, site advice and walking maps. Visitor logs are kept, occasional guided walks held, and passive surveillance provided via their onsite presence.

This facility is aging infrastructure and does not currently comply with Council's accessibility requirements. The Masterplan recommends a new accessible path from the internal accessway and accessible toilet upgrade as a high priority. It is also recommended that Council give future consideration to investigate/review the condition and improved functionality of the existing building for greater community environmental education purposes. Consideration to be given to land stability, flooding, climate change impacts and other environmental improvements.

The Visitors Centre/amenities building is a Council asset but is operated exclusively by volunteers by the RHHFFPS, without any formal agreement in place. The Plan of Management recommends a use agreement is developed and formalised.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre

The establishment of a State School under the *Education and Public Instruction Act 1987* at the Field of Mars Reserve was formalised via government gazette in February 1988.

Since this time, the NSW Department of Education has operated the Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre. They conduct environmental education programs for primary and secondary school groups via bookings. The land parcel that the Education Centre building is located on is owned by the Department of Education and is not under Council's care, control or management. However, their infield teaching/learning and lunch breaks are conducted in areas which are under Council's care, control and management. Council maintains a positive rapport with the Educational Centre staff and works with them to facilitate educational opportunities within the Reserve.

The Education Centre is a Department of Education asset and is operated by paid Department of Education staff, without any formal agreement in place with Council. The Plan of Management recommends that a memorandum of understanding is developed and formalised for their regular use and infield teaching in the Reserve.

Walking Tracks and Paths

The Field of Mars Reserve has an established network of tracks for walking and bushwalking that are popular with Reserve users. Stage 1 Community Consultation indicated that walking/jogging was the most popular activity in the Reserve (77% of survey respondents).

The Field of Mars Reserve provides important linkages to other local and regional track networks, such as Buffalo Creek (Ryde Park, Burrows Park, Laurel Park to Field of Mars Reserve), Lane Cove National Park (National Park and Wildlife Service), Buffalo Creek Reserve (Hunters Hill Council) and the historic Great North Walk (Sydney to Newcastle).

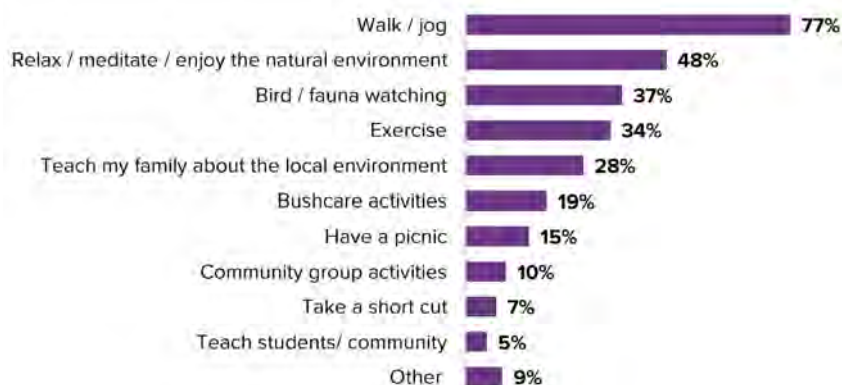


Image 18: Excerpt from the Stage 1 Community Consultation Report, provided in **ATTACHMENT 5**.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The track network consists of the Boardwalk Loop, Doyle Track, Kunzea Track, Sand Track and Warada Track, as shown in the following map.

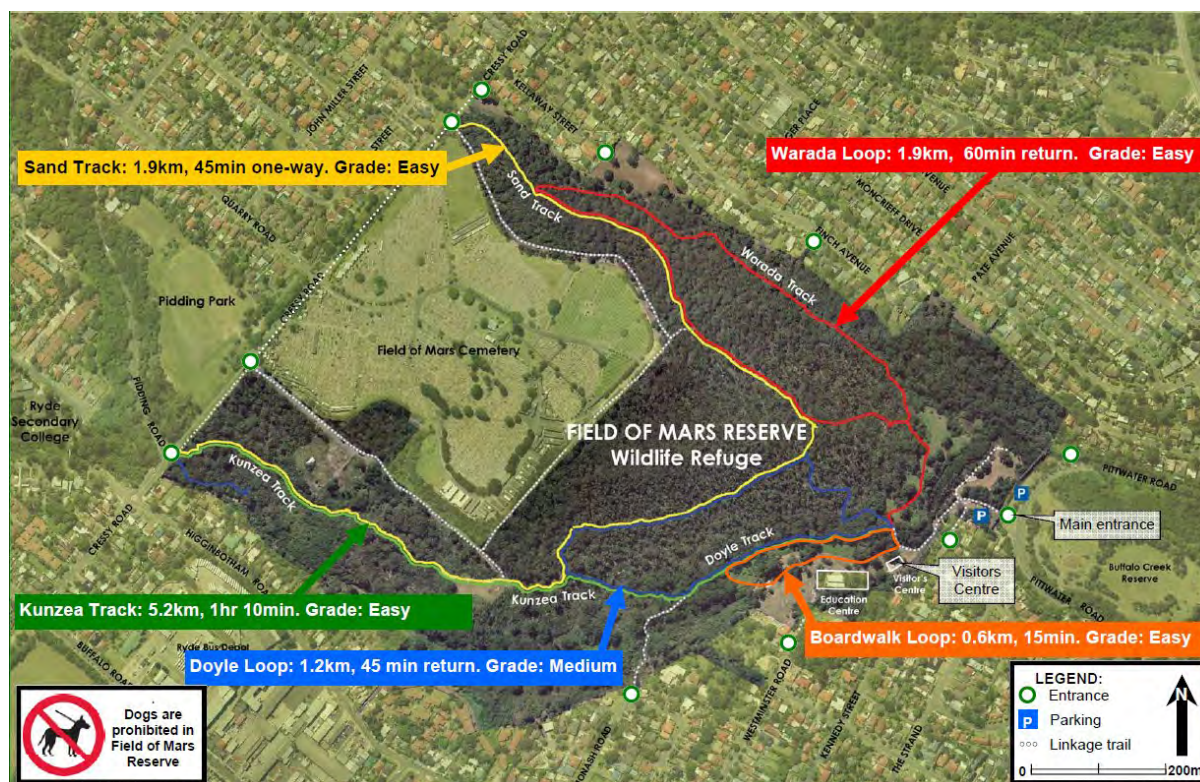


Image 19: Existing walking track network which will be further enhanced by the Masterplan and Plan of Management

Stage 1 Community Consultation indicated that Boardwalk was the most popular track (71% of respondents), with the remaining tracks also receiving a good level of use (54% - 65% of respondents).

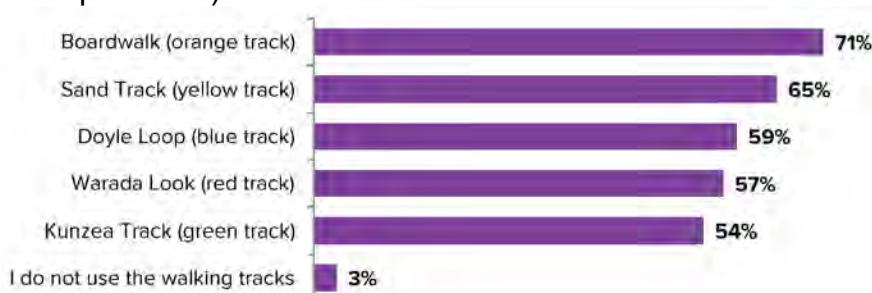


Image 20: Excerpt from the Stage 1 Community Consultation Report, provided in ATTACHMENT 5.

Stage 2 Community Consultation indicated that the community were supportive of the improved walking track network (83% of respondents), new/improved accessible path connections (79% of respondents) and improved signage (93% of respondents) as proposed in the Masterplan. The community believed the improved walking trails were adequately addressed in the draft Plan of Management – Action Lists (82% of respondents).

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Masterplan and Plan of Management seeks to establish a consistent walking trail hierarchy across the site to be consistent to the *User Guide to the Australia Walking Track Grading Sydney* and the applicable Australian Standards. A track audit is recommended with track upgrades to be implemented progressively. An accessible path network will be created linking the car park, eastern open space zone, Visitors Centre/amenities building, Education Centre, boardwalk and western open space zone. These track/path improvements will be further complimented by the development of a signage strategy and installation of entry, wayfinding, track head and interpretive signage. The Masterplan also proposes a strengthening of the connectivity to the interconnecting walking routes in the surrounding area.

Pedestrian, Cycle and Traffic Management Considerations

The Reserve has 14 pedestrian entry points which link into the walking track network. The main entry (entry 1) is from Pittwater Rd and the remaining entry points (entries 2 – 14) are from local surrounding streets. Stage 1 Community Consultation indicated walking/running was the most popular method of travel to the Reserve (58% of respondents). The Masterplan and Plan of Management recommends access, entry and signage upgrades to all entry points. The arrival experience at the main site entry, site frontage (Pittwater Rd) and internal access way will be improved with place making elements such as definition native plantings and signage.

While cycling is prohibited within the Reserve, cycling as an active transport option to travel to the Reserve is encouraged. The Masterplan recommends secure bicycle parking racks at entry points positioned on/near regional cycling routes.

The Reserve currently has an asphalt car park with 31 spaces + 1 accessible space (entry off Pittwater Rd). Stage 1 Community Consultation indicated car was a common method of travel to the Reserve (42% of respondents). The Masterplan proposes the car park is retained in a similar configuration with some minor updates for accessible parking.

Many of the school groups attending the Education Centre arrive/depart by charter bus (entry off Pittwater Rd). The Masterplan and Plan of Management recommend improvements to the bus drop off/pick up and turning circle. Alternative bus layover area (off-site) in close proximity to the Reserve is to be investigated.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The main site entry (round-about on Pittwater Rd) is an identified traffic black spot. Community feedback from park users and key stakeholders have cited this traffic intersection and pedestrian crossing point as a safety concern, and to a lesser extent the intersection at Higginbotham Rd and Pidding Rd. Stage 2 Community Consultation indicated a strong level of community support for the pedestrian safety improvements over Pittwater Rd (88% of respondents). The Masterplan and Plan of Management recommend investigations for pedestrian safety improvements and strengthen walking connectivity:-

- Across Pittwater Rd (near entry 1) between Field of Mars Reserve, Buffalo Creek Reserve (Hunters Hill Council) and onwards to the Lane Cove National Park.
- Cressy Rd (near entries 6 and 7) and along Buffalo Creek to Burrows Park and Ryde Park.
- Cressy Rd (near entries 8 and 9).

The internal access way is to become dual use; for service vehicles access and to provide for an accessible connection. The Masterplan and Plan of Management identify vehicle access to internal access way to be restricted to authorised vehicles only (eg. maintenance and emergency purposes). This is a safety and protection measure for pedestrians of all abilities and wildlife protection. Access way gates to be upgraded to key and remote electronic operation recommended for consideration.

Climate Change and Resilience Considerations

Bushfire Management Considerations

The Field of Mars Reserve is identified as bushfire prone land. The majority of the Reserve is Bushfire Vegetation Category 1, with the remainder of the site being either Bushfire Vegetation Category 2 or within the 100m bushfire prone vegetation buffer. The Education Centre, Visitors Centre/amenities building and picnic area are within the vegetation buffer. The Education Centre is a “special fire protection asset” with a high risk level rating. The Visitors Centre/amenities building is a “special fire protection asset” with a medium risk level rating.

The lands immediately surrounding the Reserve (residential and cemetery) are predominantly within the 100m bushfire prone vegetation buffer, with some smaller areas of Bushfire Vegetation Category 1 and 2. The residential areas to the north and south of the Reserve are “residential assets” with a very high risk level rating. The cemetery is a “cultural asset” with a high risk level rating.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The Masterplan and Plan of Management has been prepared in accordance with the *Hunters Hill, Lane Cove, Parramatta, Ryde Bush Fire Management Plan 2019 – 2016* (draft 2021 pending RFS endorsement), *Fire Brigades Act 1989*, *Rural Fires Act 1997* and the *NSW Rural Fire Service Standards for Asset Protection Zones*.

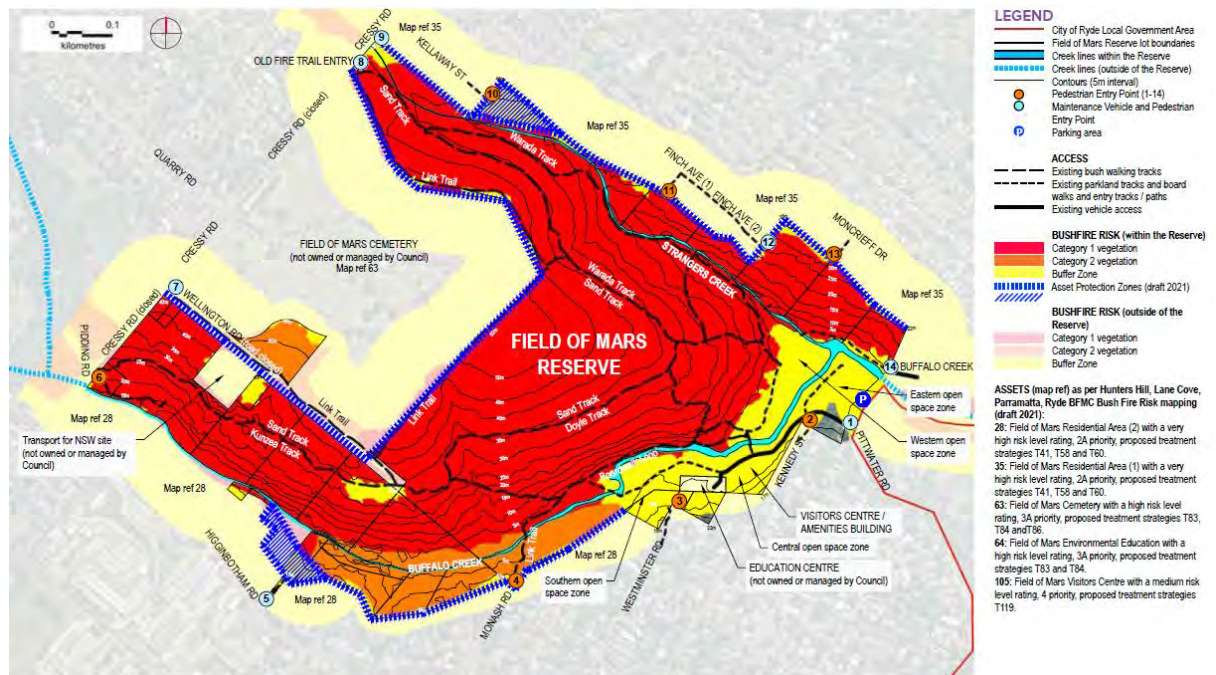


Image 21: Bushfire analysis as per Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan, provided in **ATTACHMENT 1**.

A range of treatment strategies have been identified for the Reserve, including manage fuel loads, maintenance of asset protection zones (APZs), community education and hazard reduction – mechanical and/or prescribed action. These treatment strategies and actions have been incorporated into the Plan of Management. The Plan of Management includes the provision for approved hazard reduction burns in consultation with relevant agencies, such as NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW. The Plan of Management also includes the provision to close the Reserve and cessation of management activities during Total Fire Ban Days.

Stage 1 Community Consultation survey indicated the lack of fire was one of the biggest threats to the Reserve (12% of respondents) and bushfire management was one of the important areas for future management of the Reserve (11% of respondents). A number of open text comments and written submissions raised bushfire management as a concern.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Stage 2 Community Consultation indicated that the majority of community believed bushfire management was adequately addressed in the Plan of Management – Action Lists (61% of respondents). A number of open text comments, written submissions and drop in session comments raised bushfire management including managed burns.

Flooding, Stormwater, Sea Level and Climate Change Considerations

The Masterplan and Plan of Management supports the intent of the *Biodiversity Plan (2016)* and the *Ryde Resilience Plan 2030 (2020)*. Both documents contain a range of recommendations and actions to management or mitigate the impacts to these factors.

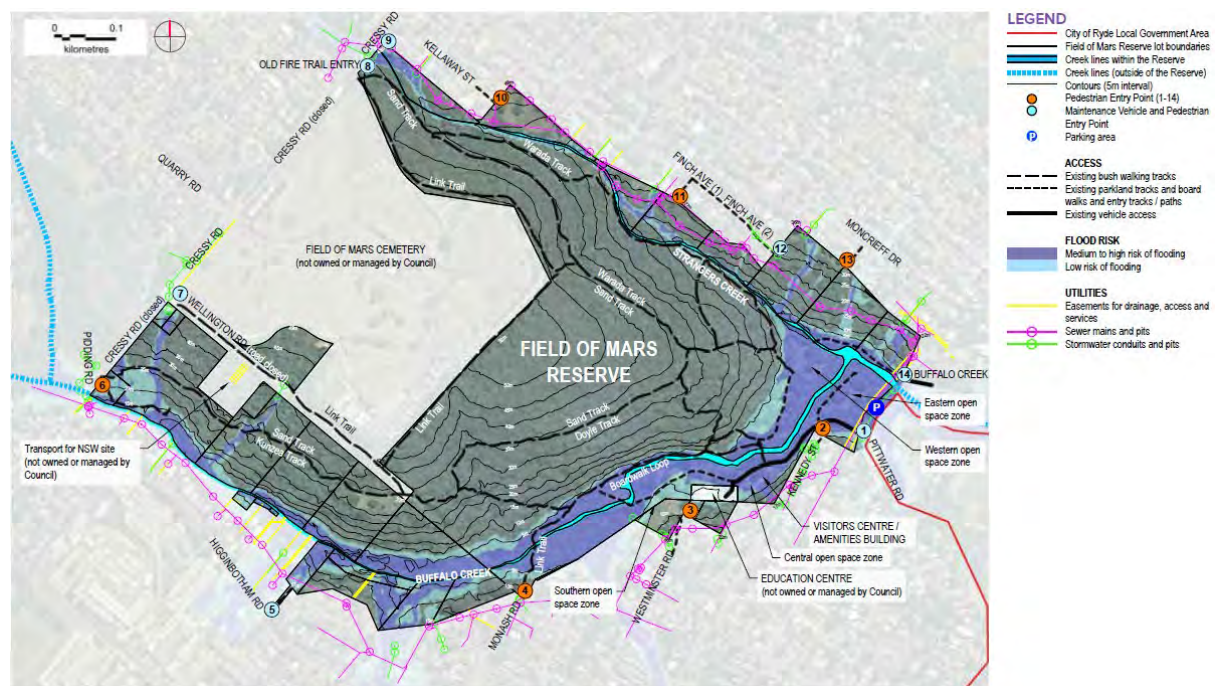


Image 22: Flood and stormwater analysis as per Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan, provided in ATTACHMENT 1.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Land Management – Zoning

Within the *Ryde Local Environment Plan (2014)* the Field of Mars Reserve is predominantly zoned as “E2 – Environmental Conservation” with some areas of “RE1 – Public Recreation” as shown in the following map.

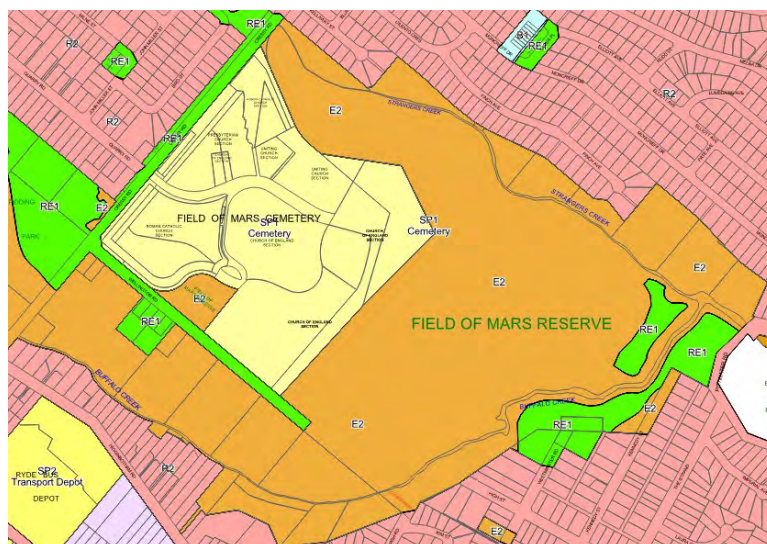


Image 23: Current zoning of the Field of Mars Reserve as per Ryde Local Environmental Plan 2014.

Should the closure of Wellington Rd occur and the transfer of the land parcels adjoining Wellington Rd from Department of Planning, Industry & Environment occur; the current zoning of “RE1 Public Recreation” is not the most appropriate zoning for this future inclusion in the Reserve as “Natural Area - Bushland”. A recommendation of this report is to re-zone the land to “E2 – Environmental Conservation” via a Planning Proposal, to achieve consistency with the use of the Field of Mars Reserve. Refer to the “Land Management – Closure of Wellington Rd” and “Land Management – Future land transfer from NSW Government” sections in following pages.

Land Management - Community Land Categorisations

Under the former *Crown Lands Act (1989)* and within the 2009 Plan of Management, the parcels of Crown Land were not required to be assigned land categorisations. However, when the current *Crown Land Management Act 2016* came into effect in 2018, Council as the appointed Crown Land Manager, were required to assign community land categorisations to the parcels of Crown Land in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993*.

ITEM 4 (continued)

The vast majority of the Reserve is categorised as “*Natural Area – Bushland*” with smaller areas of “*Park*”, “*Natural Areas – Wetlands*” and “*Natural Areas – Watercourse*” and some minor areas of “*General Community Use*” and “*Natural Areas - Escarpment*” as shown in the following map.

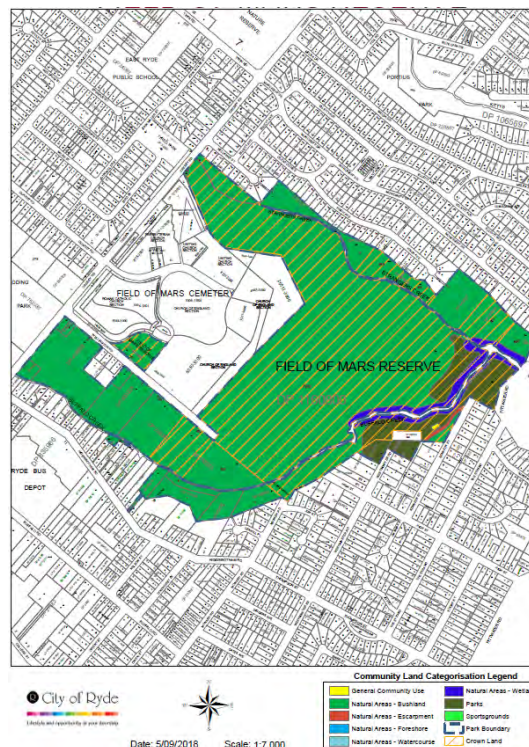


Image 24: Current Community Land Categorisations (2018)

Should Council adopt the Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan, a re-categorisation process will occur during the exhibition of the Plan of Management to align the land categorisations with the Masterplan. A public hearing will be conducted by an independent facilitator in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993*. After the public hearing and public exhibition processes have been completed, the recommended land re-categorisations and Plan of Management will be reported to Council for adoption.

Land Management – Land adjoining Field of Mars Cemetery

The Field of Mars Cemetery (not owned or managed by Council) is located to the west of the Reserve. The cemetery is bound on three sides by the Reserve.

The Masterplan recommends a bioswale is constructed in the Reserve surrounding the cemetery boundary. This measure aims to detain the nutrient runoff from the cemetery, which due to the topography, flows into the Field of Mars Reserve. This will produce improved environmental outcomes and strengthen the biodiversity value of the adjoining Natural Area.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Within the Plan of Management, a framework for regular and ongoing consultation and communication with the Field of Mars Cemetery, as a major adjoining land manager, has been identified. This aims to address and manage any environmental or boundary management matters between the cemetery and the Reserve.

A recommendation of this report is that Council retains Lot 7011 DP 1069836 as “*Natural Area – Bushland*” within the Field of Mars Reserve and under Council's care, control and management. The Masterplan identifies this area as an important bush regeneration/rehabilitation zone. The Northern Metropolitan Cemeteries Crown Land Manager, who were responsible for the Field of Mars Cemetery prior to their amalgamation into One Crown, have expressed an interest in integrating this parcel of land into the Cemetery for burial purposes. This would result in a net loss of bushland/natural area and contravene Council's resolution from 11 November 2020 which stipulated there will be no loss of bushland or natural area in the implementation of the City of Ryde's *Open Space Future Provision Strategy* (2020).

A recommendation of this report is to clarify Council's position on the matter and to continue to further the Reserve's purpose within the lot.



Image 25: Lot 7011 DP 1069836 to be retained as "Natural Area – Bushland" within the Field of Mars Reserve and under Council's care, control and management. Identified in Masterplan as bush regeneration/rehabilitation zone.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Land Management – Closure of Wellington Road

In 1974 some planning processes were undertaken with the view of closing Wellington Road. This section of road reserve travels between the Field of Mars Reserve and the Field of Mars Cemetery. It is located on the south-western area of the Reserve.

A recommendation of this report is to close the unformed Wellington Rd road reserve, as shown in **ATTACHMENT 7 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, and formally integrate this section of land into the Field of Mars Reserve. It is recommended this land be classified as “*Community Land*” and categorised as “*Natural Area – Bushland*” in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993*; and rezoned to “*E2 Environmental Conservation*” within the *Ryde Local Environment Plan*. The Plan of Management to be updated as appropriate to ensure this land is managed appropriately. This will contribute to increasing Council's open space provision, the amount of Natural Areas and the total size of the Reserve.



Image 26: Wellington Rd road reserve recommended for closure and integration into the Field of Mars Reserve, provided in **ATTACHMENT 7**.

ITEM 4 (continued)

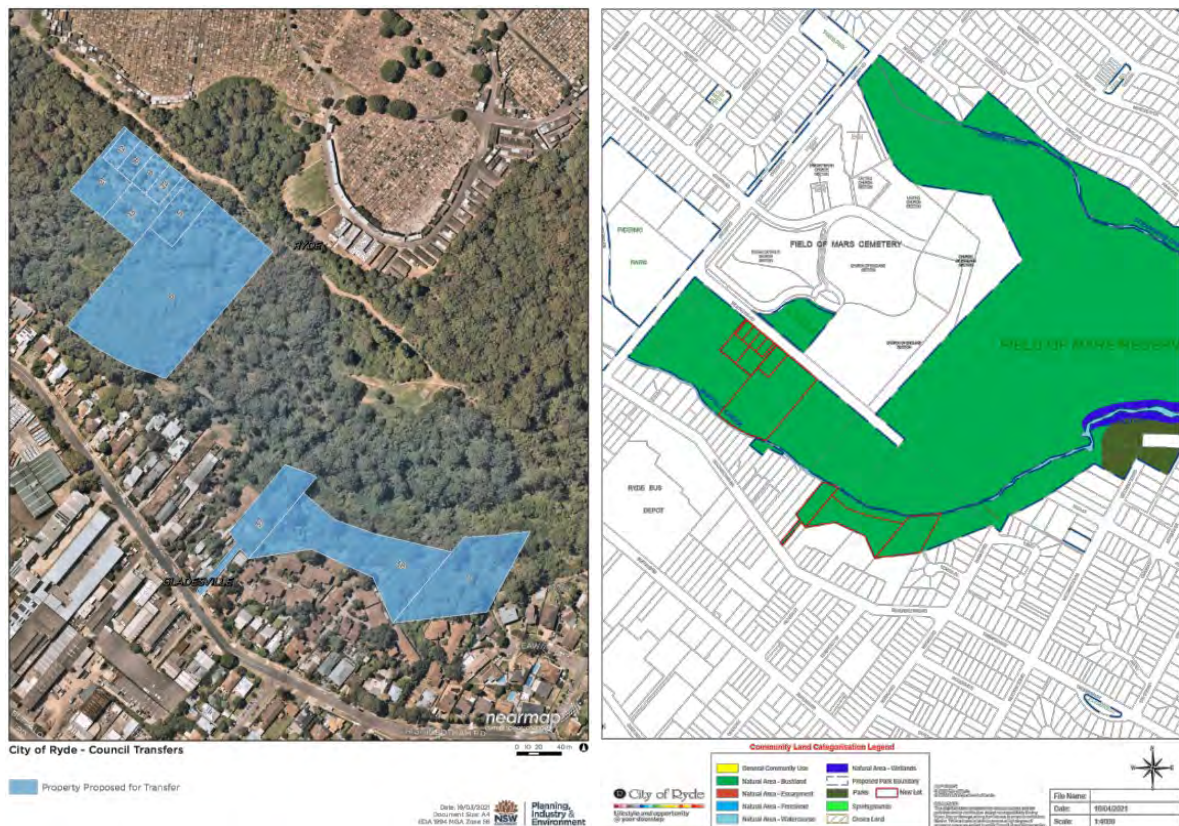


Image 27: View to the south-east of the Wellington Rd road reserve recommended for closure and integration into the Field of Mars Reserve.

Land Management – Future land transfer from NSW Government

In May 2021 Council resolved to undertake the necessary processes to negotiate land transfer of land parcels from NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment to City of Ryde, primarily for Open Space and Environmental Conservation purposes. This transfer is set to comprise of 51 parcels of land across the Ryde LGA, of which there are a number of parcels off Wellington Rd and off Higginbotham Rd, as shown in the maps below. These negotiations are yet to be finalised, but it is anticipated these lots will be formally integrated into the Field of Mars Reserve and incorporated into the Plan of Management following transfer.

ITEM 4 (continued)



Images 28 and 29: Land parcels off Wellington Rd and Higginbotham Rd Identified for transfer to City of Ryde for integration into the Field of Mars Reserve.

Masterplan - Project Implementation

An Implementation Plan has been prepared for the Masterplan and contained within the final Masterplan Report. This Masterplan will be progressively implemented over a number of years. All required planning approvals and statement of environmental effects (where required) will be completed prior to construction of the various Masterplan elements. Construction will be in accordance with relevant Australian Standards. The implementation of these stages will be considered during the business planning cycle. Implementation of the Masterplan is subject to Council's adoption of the Masterplan, community land categorisation/re-categorisation process to align with the adopted Masterplan and the availability of funds.

Masterplan - Financial Considerations

A Cost Estimate has been prepared by the consultant, who are natural area subject matter experts, giving consideration to the progressive and prioritised implementation of the Masterplan. The total costs for capital improvements identified in the Masterplan over a 20-year period is estimated at \$5.23M (exc. GST) inclusive of contingencies, preliminaries and professional fees.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Some funding for Masterplan implementation priorities will be sourced from grant funding opportunities, considered during Council's business planning cycle and adjustments will be made as appropriate through Council's annual business planning cycle.

Future external grant funding opportunities will be investigated and may include NSW Government Community Building Partnership program, NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Australian Government Stronger Community grants, environment/water/waste grants and potential grants/contributions from community groups.

Plan of Management

The current Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management was adopted in 2009. Plans of Management are generally updated approximately every 10 years. A Plan of Management guides the management of particular categories or specific areas of community land that are within the direct ownership of Council, or in the control and management of Council. The *Crown Land Management Act 2016* commenced in 2018 and required Crown Land Managers (ie. Council) to create new Plans for parks/reserves that contained Crown Land.

The Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management (FoMRPoM), provided in **ATTACHMENT 2 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, has been prepared to guide the ongoing and future management of the park in response to the needs and values of the City of Ryde community and the park users. Due to the specific nature and significance of the Field of Mars Reserve, Council has developed a specific Plan of Management for this Reserve.

The Field of Mars Reserve consists of a combination of Community Land and Crown Land and must therefore be managed in accordance with *Local Government Act 1993* and *Crown Lands Management Act 2016*.

The *Local Government Act 1993* states that all community lands are required to be covered by a Plan of Management and must identify:

- the category of the land
- objectives and outcomes for the land
- the means by which Council proposes to achieve objectives and outcomes
- the way by which Council proposes to assess its performance and
- expressly authorises any leases, licences or other estates.

The land categorisations of the Field of Mars Reserve is detailed in the section above. The FoMRPoM has been prepared based on the Core Objectives for these categorisations as specified in the *Local Government Act 1993*.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Plan of Management – Native Title Advice

As per the *Crown Land Management Act 2016*, Council is required to engage a qualified 'Native Title Manager' to oversee and approve dealings and actions that may affect native title. Native Title Managers must have training or qualifications that have been approved by the Minister. Council, as Crown Land Managers, must obtain the written advice of at least one Native Title Manager where it grants certain interests in the land, including leases, licences, easements, mortgages, covenants and other restrictions on use. Council engaged *Lands Advisory Services Pty Ltd*, to provide Native Title advice for the draft FoMRPoM.

Plan of Management - Public Exhibition

The *Crown Land Management Act 2016* requires Plans of Management involving Crown Land to be referred to the NSW Department of Industry to seek Ministerial approval for public exhibition. The recommendations contained in this report seek a Council resolution to make this referral to the Minister.

Following the receipt of Ministerial approval, and under the requirements of the abovementioned legislation, the period for the public exhibition of the draft FoMRPoM is 28 days with a further 14 days allowed for comments to be received. During this period, a re-categorisation public hearing will also be held. At the end of this period, the submissions will be reviewed.

The community will be notified of this public exhibition via Council's website, Libraries, Customer Service areas, stakeholder emails, advertisements, Council eNewsletter and park signage. During the exhibition period, a copy of the draft FoMRPoM will also be provided to the convenors of relevant advisory committees for their review and input.

If the submissions are of a minor nature, then changes will be made and the Plan will then be returned to Council for adoption. If there are major issues identified through the community consultation, then officers will determine how to appropriately manage these prior to reporting to Council for final adoption.

Financial Implications

Adoption of this report has no financial implications for Council. All actions required to recategorise the land is allowed for in Council's existing allocated budget.

Once the Plan of Management has been approved and adopted, any identified priorities and recommendations with financial impacts will be incorporated into operational costs, Masterplan implementation and/or subject to Council's future budget planning processes.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined in this report, it is recommended to Council to adopt the Field of Mars Reserve Masterplan, prepared by City of Ryde and Gondwana Consulting, dated July 2021 provided in **ATTACHMENT 1 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**.

The Masterplan includes a number of protection measures and a range of enhancements to improve biodiversity, accessibility and environmental education opportunities. It recommends improvements to the track network, accessible pathways, accessible toilet, accessible picnic shelters, delineation of open space zones to encourage social/recreation activities outside of natural areas, signage, entry and arrival experience. The Masterplan also includes environmental improvements including increased tree canopy cover, re-generation of degraded vegetation, re-vegetation areas and bio-buffer to capture nutrient run off between the cemetery and the Reserve. The Masterplan also seeks to strengthen the connection with the surrounding walking track network and encourages water quality improvements in the surrounding catchment areas.

The Masterplan and the recommended closure of the Wellington Road road reserve, as shown in **ATTACHMENT 7 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, retention of Lot 7011 DP1069836 and the future land transfers from NSW Government will realise a positive increase in the City of Ryde's open space provision and the amount of the Natural Area in the LGA.

Pending Council's resolution of the recommendations within this report, the necessary legislative planning processes will be undertaken.

Funding to implement the full Masterplan over its 20-year life will be sought through applications for grant funding opportunities and through Council's annual business planning cycle.

For the reasons outlined in this report, it is recommended to Council to refer the Field of Mars Reserve Plan of Management, provided in **ATTACHMENT 2 – CIRCULATED UNDER SEPARATE COVER**, to the Minister for Lands and Forestry for approval to place on public exhibition.

A subsequent report will be brought back to Council after the public exhibition of the Plan of Management and the public hearing for any proposed land categorisation/re-categorisation of any new land parcels to be added to the Reserve and/or parts of the existing Reserve.

ITEM 4 (continued)

Council is committed to protecting the biodiversity and recreation values of the Reserve, providing environmental education opportunities and ensuring sustainable and environmental management of the Reserve into the future.

The Masterplan and the Plan of Management for the Field of Mars Reserve seek to retain the character of the Reserve and provide improvements for public and environmental benefit. These documents will enable the necessary management practices to ensure the Reserve is protected and managed appropriately for current and future generations of City of Ryde residents. It will further re-affirm the status of the Field of Mars Reserve as the largest and most significant remnant bushland reserve under the care, control and management of the City of Ryde.