

STEP Position Paper UTS Rezoning Proposal, Ku-ring-gai Campus (November 2003)

1 History

STEP has been involved for over ten years and I attach a report written for STEP members that gives a brief history. Local residents will know about this but the consultants may not.

2 Stewardship of the site

UTS has always professed good intentions in regard to the bushland under its care but appears to have failed to fully implement the management plans that it has developed. Stormwater is uncontrolled, weeds flourish and fertilizer use continues.

3 Use of the site

STEP believes that the best use of the site is for education with all the bushland outside the existing developed footprint being permanently conserved. We do not accept for a minute that skilful marketing and, if necessary, addition of appropriate facilities, will not produce the additional few thousand students apparently needed. We are in favour of the playing field being removed and any new structures being built there or on other vacant but developed areas.

The community must look at education demand over an extended time. If the population of Sydney grows at only 1.2% pa it will have a population of over 30 million in another 200 years. It's unthinkable that a university will not be appropriate on this site and unacceptable that short-term minor financial goals will be allowed to override all other considerations.

4 Housing

STEP is not in favour of housing on this site unless it is constructed without lawns and so that the keeping of pets is made very difficult. If housing must be constructed we therefore prefer high-density development covering a relatively small area, for instance the playing field. The matter of higher density housing is of course a contentious one in Sydney and STEP opposes the intrusion of higher density development into Ku-ring-gai for reasons including the loss of tree cover and bushland and the additional pressure placed on infrastructure which inevitably results in pressure for natural areas to be given over to roads and the like. In this case, however, we would support such housing if all the bushland on the site were permanently preserved.

5 Bushland and Rare Species

There seems to be a lack of understanding of what constitutes bushland. It must be viewed as a living ecosystem made up of countless plants, fungi, bacteria, animals and all the other living things within the bush which continuously interact with one another. It thrives within the fire, water and nutrient regimes with which it has evolved. It is not therefore just a collection of trees.

Plants which are isolated from the bush ecosystem are, in the long term, doomed. They may be used for seed or cutting gathering or for exhibition – a bit like the last Tasmanian Tiger was exhibited. There is therefore no sense in which preserving isolated *Darwinia biflora* specimens in the midst of the built environment is preserving a threatened species. On the contrary, this is a classic example of the process by which threatened species are made extinct. The options are to restore the surrounding bushland, and therefore the ecosystem, or to see the plants fade away in those locations.

6 Stormwater

One of the greatest degraders of bushland, especially Hawkesbury Sandstone bushland, is stormwater. This is because it carries nutrients into low nutrient soils and chemically disturbs the ecosystem. These nutrients come from the presence of people. Dogs, cats and fertilizers are prime sources. At our last meeting we heard of the latest technology for treating stormwater. This involves mechanical and biological filters. It is our understanding that the former have to be cleaned and the latter mown or otherwise disposed of on a regular basis. If this is the case then such devices cannot be guaranteed to protect the bushland below them for the centuries ahead. Additionally, it may be that it cannot be demonstrated that 100% of the nutrients above a natural level are removed and, if this is so, the devices would be useless. Nutrient build-up at a lower rate is, in the end, just as deadly as rapid build-up. Having the bushland degraded in 100 years rather than in 10 years is no more acceptable.

We believe that the only way of ensuring long term exclusion of stormwater is to physically prevent it from entering bushland and to pipe it to the river. This could be via a treatment site so long as it was located below the bushland.

7 The tyranny of small decisions

The bushland of the Lane Cove Valley has for many years been lost little by little. A road here, a scout hall there and a playing field somewhere else all seem like such small impositions at the time and are of course facilities that we all need or like to use.

Then there are the losses that happen almost accidentally. A typical example is the construction of UTS Ku-ring-gai. It was built to sit in the bush with gardens retaining or being planted out with natives of the area. One could hardly ask for a better attitude to the Australian landscape. Yet the stormwater from the site has degraded some of the bush and we have heard argument that this means that it is worthless and will be no loss and that it can be replaced with housing. Of course the housing will in turn, little by little, degrade the National Park below it so that in another 30 years or so our successors will be able to sit around and argue that the bush there is so degraded that it can, with clear conscience, be bulldozed for some development or other.

8 Bushland preservation and the Australian landscape

We believe that the need to preserve bushland within a major city is self-evident. For those who cannot see the point, however, we point to the values in biodiversity,

in having a natural area in which one can escape from the pace of the city and to the wonder of having on our doorstep a very ancient ecosystem with more plant species than in the whole of the British Isles. Animals such as the Powerful Owl need large areas over which to range, they need good bushland rather than bushland riddled with power lines, freeways and buildings. The same sort of argument applies to many other components of the ecosystem.

Bushland, rather than ordered woods and gardens, helps define the differences between Australia and the world and gives us much of our sense of identity as a nation. The average Australian does not visit the world of Lawson or Paterson but can relate to the bushland on the doorstep.

We believe that the botanical cringe, where roses are seen as more appealing and valuable than banksias, is regrettable to the extent that it still exists. We encourage pride in Australian landscapes and discourage pale aping of foreign styles. UTS is now a good, albeit not perfect, example of integration of Australian landscape with the built environment.

9 Our participation in a process

Over two hundred years ago a process began which has changed the physical face of Australia into what we have now. If that change continues unchecked we shall, in another 200 years, have virtually no natural ecosystems left, nearly everything will be gone or greatly modified. As a society we have to decide whether to acquiesce in this process or whether there is some point at which a halt should be called. We must appreciate therefore that the decisions being made about the future of UTS involve us in this process of modifying Australia and that we cannot escape the responsibility that we have to do so thoughtfully.

The principle of intergenerational equity suggests that we should not make all the irreversible decisions now. Future generations will probably make better, more informed decisions and will thank us for giving them the opportunity. The precautionary principle encourages us to resist change where we are not certain of the outcome.

The community is involved in reversing the massive damage we have done to our river systems, in reversing the disastrous impact of salinisation and there are teams of bush regenerators involving thousands of people battling the damage we have done to Sydney's bushland. These are all examples where we have changed too far too fast, where we have overshot the mark and destroyed our resources and landscapes and caused the threat of a bleak future.

The Lane Cove Valley bushland is a valuable community resource. We intend to fight for every square metre.

John Burke
STEP Inc
November 2003

UTS Development Proposal, Ku-ring-gai Campus (Report prepared for STEP members, mid-2002)

The proposed access road from UTS Lindfield to Lady Game Drive has been an issue for a long while and it is now time to bring STEP members up to date.

The DMR was involved as early as in 1969 when it advised that it did not favour a road to Lady Game Drive but rather a connection to the freeway planned parallel to Millwood Avenue in the Bluegum Creek Valley. This corridor was later abandoned along with the Lane Cove Valley Freeway corridor through West Pymble. This was a success for STEP and others who had fought the freeway proposal. From this point initiatives came from residents affected by the Eton Road access.

Following considerable lobbying the College (as it then was) had an engineering design carried out in 1976 and sought a \$420,000 grant to fund construction. The money was not forthcoming and the debate continued as the College expanded on the site during the 1980s.

In 1991 Council produced a report which referred to the environmental qualities of the site and noting the harm that the proposed access road would do. It quoted a report from consultants, Kinhill, which referred to the probable expansion of the campus from pressure to decentralise from Broadway and to take advantage of the "lower building and land costs as well as the more serene setting". No doubt they forgot that replacing the bushland with buildings and roads would also degrade the serenity! Kinhill added, "The early determination of a preferred route for the access road is a fundamental requirement for the master-plan of the site".

A traffic study was carried out in 1985. This analysed present and future volumes and considered public transport, car pooling, other traffic management initiatives and a new access road. This report indicated that the new road would be a waste of money because it would create additional traffic and not ease any problems around Eton Road. However the report concluded by recommending the road. Council supported this.

STEP prepared a report in April 1991 which was distributed to Aldermen, politicians, NPWS, UTS and other interested parties. We recommended, inter alia, that the campus should be restricted to its current size, that UTS expansion should take place where there was public transport and that all bushland be transferred to the SRA (as Lane Cove NP then was). Other groups such as the West Lindfield/Killara Residents Action Group (WLKRAG) and KUBES as well as individuals were also involved.

In June 1991 senior UTS staff met with representatives of KUBES, WLKRAG and STEP and some meaningful dialogue took place. In September 1991 UTS produced a Community Information Bulletin setting out the problem and the alternatives as it saw them. This invited response. A public meeting was held on 18 September and STEP wrote to UTS saying that it was obvious that residents were coming to appreciate that the road would not solve their traffic problems and that the UTS was suspected of wanting the road for expansion. The pro-roaders then brought up the issue of the additional access road adding to safety in a bushfire emergency. This concept foundered once it was appreciated that the new access road, built through dense bush,

would be most unsafe during a bushfire. In November 1991 STEP wrote to the papers advocating a shuttle bus service from the railway station.

In February 1992 UTS produced a Review of Environmental Factors (REF), in support of the access road, which STEP recommended be rejected. The SRA was the consent authority and rejected the proposal.

In July 1992 a meeting was held between UTS, UTS consulting engineers, residents, the SRA and STEP. The options were discussed and it became apparent that the favoured route for the road, which went through the most sensitive part of the bushland at College Creek, was predicated on a road standard for a 40Kkph speed limit. When it was realised that a lesser speed limit, 30 kph, would be adequate for this short access road then more options for its location occurred. At a second meeting in August STEP proposed that a road may be acceptable if its location was moved away from College Creek and all of the adjacent bushland preserved permanently by means of a Conservation Agreement. This group became the Rear Access Road Consultative Committee.

STEP made the decision to support the road in the revised location because not to have done so would have left the whole site liable to development in the longer term. With a conservation agreement in place the bushland would have long term protection.

Then followed a period of intense activity with the residents, UTS, Council, community groups and others all involved. In May 1993 a new REF was produced with the road in its new location. And a DA was lodged in June. On 1 July STEP told UTS that it would not support the DA unless the Conservation Agreement was agreed to and the boundary of the area to be conserved was then agreed. In a letter dated 16 August 1993 UTS undertook to "enter into a deed of agreement ... not to build within the area of the UTS land, as shown on the attached map". It seemed that a win-win-win solution had been found in the interests of UTS, the residents and the environment. The DA was approved on 24 August.

The Consultative Committee continued to meet as the road plans became bogged down in planning. The access road would have to traverse small pieces of land owned by CALM and by Council. Bureaucratic problems delayed things but in November 1994 UTS hoped to have construction complete by Dec 1995. An EIS was produced. A new DA had to be submitted to Council and NCC suddenly entered the argument in opposition to the road because it is opposed to the loss of any bushland in any circumstances. So is STEP but our view was still that it was best give a little now to preserve the remainder in perpetuity rather than to lose the lot.

Delays continued to occur and it became apparent that the shuttle bus service and other traffic management measures had reduced the residents' problems considerably. In July 1998 UTS produced a Progress Report which concluded that construction should start in mid 1999. In 1998, however, another factor appeared – the Parramatta-Chatswood rail link. UTS did not know whether this railway would have a campus station and just what it meant for the future. There was considerable community opposition to a rail bridge over the National Park. During this period, however, it became apparent that UTS was losing its desire for an access road. This is good news only if a Conservation Agreement can be concluded for the whole of the UTS bushland including that on which the road was to be built. In April this year it was announced that there will not be a UTS railway station.

There have been ideas floated and rumours abounding. Evidently the idea of moving Chatswood High onto the UTS site has been abandoned and presumably, now that there will not be a station, the fear of Meriton buying the site for high rise residential development has receded.

The current situation is therefore one where UTS has to adapt to the current realities and make its plans. The concept of a Conservation Agreement seems to be looked on favourably by UTS but there are some senior staff changes occurring and even that cannot be guaranteed.

STEP will continue to work to save the whole of the bushland on the site.

John Burke
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21 June 2002