

Munibung Musings

No.3 - Winter 2019

Munibung Hill property sold to undisclosed buyer

The Speers Point property was "sold through a tender process and interest came thick and fast," reports Renee Valentine (Newcastle Herald 22 June 2019) <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6233674/developer-buys-munibung-hill-early-interest-in-residential-lots/>

It was sold with Development Application (DA) approval for 115 residential lots on a small part of the site, which is bordered by Boolaroo, Warners Bay and Macquarie Hills.

According to Barry Price of Ray White Newcastle: "It ended up going to someone who has told us their intention is to work with the current development approval that is on the land. That is for residential housing lots on approximately 11 hectares of the land and to maintain the rest of the land with its environmental zoning for the good of everybody."

The property was sold for an undisclosed sum and the buyer was locally based but did not wish to be named.

Interest has continued since the sale with enquiries now coming for the residential lots.

"Blocks in that area with good views sell pretty well," Mr Price said. "From day one I got enquires asking when will land be available, how much will it be and what are the views like, so I think it will be popular. There's not a lot of land available with lake views."

He indicated marketing of the residential lots could begin by the end of the year, says Renee Valentine.

NOTE: This news story generated a lot of interest — 313 comments on The Herald Facebook page.

Munibung Hill is caught between a rock and hard place

Council has set aside funds for future pedestrian and bike tracks on Munibung Hill.

When asked why Council has not been proactive in the past the response has been, "We don't have tenure over the land."

Representation to LMCC Councillors in 2017-18 was well received, but this year it has fallen on deaf ears.

The sale of this 80 ha (198 acres) was a once in a lifetime opportunity for Council to consolidate a large portion of Munibung Hill with existing public land.

The community is very supportive of doing this, but there is a high degree of inertia within Council.

This toing and froing can't go on indefinitely. There has to be a circuit breaker somewhere along the line.

The question remains: **when?**

Before European settlement the Awabakal people's name for Munibung Hill was Kona-konaba .. a place where ochre is located.



Could declaring Munibung Hill a heritage park be the start of an urban forest plan?

Lake Macquarie is lagging behind in the area of urban forestry. Munibung Hill provides the city with an ideal location to put principles into practice.

In every respect it makes sense. From a work, education, housing, healthcare, tourism and social cohesion perspective, urban forests deliver in spades.

The spin off benefits from embracing green city principles include enhanced biodiversity, a stronger economy, reduced health costs, cooler streetscapes, respect for heritage, increased outdoor activity and so on. These are undeniable advantages that result from urban forestry and greener cities.

Around the world cities are embracing forests in two ways—by retaining what they have as natural assets and by reforesting areas so as to reap the benefits that flow from these natural living infrastructure projects. It's well within our capacity, with so much expertise on tap. And it doesn't require reinventing the wheel—see below ...

Urban Forest Management Plan toolkit

<https://ufmptoolkit.net/>

City of Freemantle: council-strategies/urban-forest-plan

City of Sydney: Urban-Forest-Strategy-Adopted

The editor's desk

The situation with Munibung Hill remains unclear.

The 80 ha portion has been sold. This has created a great deal of interest with expressions of concern such as those contained in media reporting as noted here ...

Media

- > April 4, **Munibung Hill needs greater protection**, Stuart Carter (Letter to editor, The Herald) expressing grave concerns about the sale of 80ha of land that included approval for a 115 lot housing subdivision in what were two former quarries;
- > April 12, **Battle for Munibung Hill** by Scott Bevan, (Front page story NH) with responses by Mayor Kay Fraser relating to community concerns. The message from Mayor Fraser is a bob each way and leaves Munibung Hill in limbo land. (See separate story)
- > April 20, **Munibung Hill memories from childhood**, (Comment, Damon Cronshaw, Newcastle Herald);
- > April 18, **Stop break-up along lake**, Tobias Husband (Letter to editor, N Herald);
- > April 20, **Munibung a hill to die for**, Robyn Johnson, (Letter to editor, N Herald);
- > April 27, **Don't deprive kids the magic of Munibung**, Bob Cook (Letter to editor, Newcastle Herald)
- > June 22, **Munibung Hill property at 1a Raymond St, Speers Point has been sold**, Renee Valentine (NH)

Submissions to LMCC

- > April 18, **Night time economy draft plan** – Astro-nomical Observatory;
- > April 30, **Aboriginal Community Draft Plan – Bayikulinan** – submission highlighting geological and cultural heritage;
- > June 1, **Events and Festivals Strategy and Action Plan** – submission proposing an Urban Forest Festival.



Munibung Hill qualifies as an urban forest

Wildlife corridors

Munibung Hill is an important link in the chain of green areas from the coast to the Watagans. Places like Blackbutt and Glenrock and Tingira along with Munibung Hill provide pathways for wildlife, especially birds. To ensure their survival it is critical that they can access food and nesting sites within their migration routes.

Conservation areas

Munibung Hill is home to over 60 species of trees and 100's of smaller plants connected by millions of fungi; 80 species of birds, an array of mammals and millions of ground dwelling insects.

Geological and cultural heritage

There is absolutely no life on earth that is not underpinned by geological diversity and what it is able to support. Therefore geological heritage comes before everything else. Equally, it is crucial for any civil society that it respects its cultural heritage—in this case indigenous and then co-jointly with European culture. There is no getting away from the fact that this land was not vacant and terra nullius. There was and remains a sophisticated living culture as described in **Dark Emu** by Bruce Pascoe.

A network of paths and trails

The proposed trails will allow visitors to experience the urban forest landscape from 169 metres above lake level—to appreciate the natural beauty—to see across a vast area to all points on the compass,

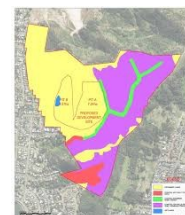
An **Urban Forest Festival** would be a wonderful way of recognising the amazing and valuable contribution that trees and forests make to our city.



Part 12 – Precinct Area Plans – Munibung Hill, Speers Point Quarry

1.3 HISTORY OF THE SITE

The study area is located within the boundaries of the Awabakal people, the Aboriginal people of the Lake Macquarie area. The range of high hills we now know as Munibung Hill was important in the spiritual and ceremonial life of the Awabakal people (Threlkeld in Gunson 1974:64).



1.5 BIODIVERSITY

Four vegetation communities are present across the site:

- ☐ Coastal Foothills Spotted Gum – Ironbark Forest (the dominant forest type on site)
- ☐ Coastal Narrabeen Moist Forest
- ☐ Coastal Wet Gully Forest (an Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) covering approximately 3.97 ha)
- ☐ Disturbed Lands.

As shown in Figure 2, potential opportunities for conservation across the site include retention of Coastal Wet Gully Forest (EEC) and Coastal Narrabeen Moist Forest areas along drainage lines, and areas of Coastal Foothills Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest along the steeper slopes. The conservation of such areas will provide habitat areas for local species (including the threatened Squirrel Glider), stop-over habitat for highly mobile species, and habitat areas for less mobile species within the landscape.

The high ecological value land is within the E2 Environmental Conservation zone and encompasses land mapped as native vegetation on Council's Native Vegetation and Corridors Map. The high ecological land is generally located to the north east, east and south east of Pit A. The retention, conservation and rehabilitation of the environmental corridors are an important priority. Minimal development (e.g. walking paths and potential future low impact eco-tourism) will occur in areas zoned E2 to ensure ongoing ecological function of the conservation areas. Roads and other infrastructure will be required in parts of the E2 zoned land to service the proposed development. They need to be designed to minimise visual and environmental impacts on land zoned E2.

1.6 DESIRED FUTURE CHARACTER: It is envisaged that the site will be remediated and redeveloped to provide a residential area which:

- ☐ respects the cultural value of Munibung Hill to the Awabakal people, and reflects these values in the planning and design of open space lands contained in the area plan
- ☐ retains the scenic amenity and visual prominence of Munibung Hill, and that urban development responds to and enhances the significance of this landform to the Lake Macquarie viewshed.
- ☐ provides shared pathway infrastructure that physically links the site to surrounding town centres (Glendale, Boolaroo, Warners Bay), schools and existing/planned pathway networks to meet active transport principles, which encourages walking and cycling.



E2 land will be identified in a future EPI (Environmental Planning Instrument) as being of high Aboriginal cultural significance.

Battle for Munibung Hill

by Scott Bevan (The Herald, April 12, 2019).

This front page story, continued on pages 4 and 5, revealed that Munibung Hill is not safe from future development as we have been led to believe.

What follows is extracts from this report exposing the vulnerability of Munibung Hill to what can only be described as an uncertain future.

"It's probably quite iconic in the Lake Macquarie area," Cr Fraser says. "I walked up there, and it's absolutely spectacular from the top."

Councillor Fraser has responded to the society's [MHCS] concerns, saying the 69 hectares is protected by its environmental conservation zoning. The Mayor guarantees that parcel is safe - for now.

"Well, as the Mayor, I can give that guarantee now, but obviously future councils may wish to change that zoning," Cr Fraser says. "We can never say anything in perpetuity. It's impossible to say that."

But Cr Fraser says that is not about to happen.

"My understanding is that council considered it, but it's not viable for us at this particular stage," she says.

"It would be a fair amount of money to purchase that, and council has a responsibility to its ratepayers, how we spend the money of our ratepayers."

The Mayor says she would "love to see Munibung Hill very accessible for everyone in Lake Macquarie, and from outside Lake Macquarie". She talks about the city missing out on opportunities that could attract more visitors to Munibung Hill, but Cr Fraser doesn't see buying this land as one of them. "I think it's a bit premature for us to go in and start purchasing land until we have a full overview plan of what we want, how

we see Munibung Hill working for us," she says. While she can't give guarantees for the future, Cr Fraser cannot see why the environmental conservation zoning would be changed on those 69 hectares of land. "There's a lot more land to be developed elsewhere in our city, so there'd be no reason for council to consider rezoning that land," she says.

"Council would be going down a slippery slope to do that. And there would be a great outcry from the community, so any council that would do that would be turfed out the next election."

This confirms our worst fears—that Munibung Hill is not safe, that the E2 zoning is not guaranteed. The assurances, if we could call them that, are verbal motherhood statements. Council is kicking the security of Munibung Hill down the road to another time.

To say that Munibung Hill is "iconic" and "spectacular" but not worthy of long term protection is hard to fathom.

The allocated budget of \$2.23 million seems to be in the never-never.

SWOT thinking required

One of the hindrances to moving ahead with any projects listed for action at Munibung Hill is contamination from the Pasminco industrial site.

It seems these are only hindrances when you don't want to do anything.

As with most closed doors, it depends on your level of commitment as to whether or not these remain barriers or whether you work out solutions to overcome the issues.

In this case there is more than one way of overcoming the perceived problems.

In the case of pedestrian and bike surfaces these can be managed by sealing, replacing soil with clean fill or installing elevated surfaces just above the problem areas.

Funds for such works can be accessed from grants especially when this infrastructure would be to enhance the conservation, heritage and tourism potential of Munibung Hill.

The case for declaring Munibung Hill a public park

By Council's own assessment Munibung Hill is a place worth preserving, so much so, there are requirements to do so as stated in the Precinct Area Plan.

The question is: how will the requirements be adhered to in the future ... And if they are not, will Council serve notice on the land holder to ensure they are? And if these notices are not complied with, will Council impose penalties to ensure they are?

The best way to take uncertainty out of the equation is to bring Munibung Hill into the public sphere. That way the community and indigenous people can know without doubt that Munibung Hill and all its heritage and conservation values are protected for keeps—only then will the words have substance and the community be assured that their calls for protection have been heard.

Magnificent heritage site in limbo

Pre 1821 Munibung Hill was a significant landscape within Awabakal people's land management practices. This had been the case for possibly 60,000 years;

Today 190 years later, we have a situation that has Munibung Hill recorded as a place of significant indigenous heritage, trapped in a void between what is envisaged and what is actually taking place;

In 2209 (190 years into the future) what will be situation for Munibung Hill?

Saying one thing and doing another

What's the point of saying that Munibung Hill has all these qualities and can provide all these social and conservation benefits, if nothing is going to be done to bring them to fruition?

An old adage comes to mind: "If not now when? If not us who?"

As Ray Anderson (Interface Inc.) not so long ago said: "Unless somebody leads, nobody will—why not us?"

Fivefold Vision for Munibung Hill



Website Blog Posts

A call to recalibrate our relationship with the land—August 13, 2019

Art meets science in Speers Point Park—August 12, 2019

When learning and play are one
August 3, 2019

When sound science and vision combine for the common good—July 29, 2019

On the right side of time—July 22, 2019

Children and food and our connection with nature—July 15, 2019

Songs of birds as sung by Paul Kelly
July 8, 2019

In praise of tree hollows and the urban forest—June 24, 2019

250 in 2020—June 17, 2019

Lifting the fog on the history of this land—June 10, 2019

Facing the truth about human expansion—June 5, 2019

Five (plus one) benefits of nature according to scientists—June 2, 2019

Bee-haviour and democracy
May 25, 2019

Nature deserves some TLC
May 22, 2019

Seeing trees in a totally different light—May 13, 2019

The earth is in need of a good lawyer—April 26, 2019

Ignoring geological heritage denies indigenous connections with land—April 22, 2019

Ecological squeeze—April 20, 2019

Communicating by means other than words—April 19, 2019

Pollie Picnic with Aaron Kearney

1233 ABC Newcastle
12th March 2019



Question: What is your position on the purchase of land at Munibung Hill for recreation purposes?

Answers: *All the candidates spoke strongly in support of Munibung Hill being declared a recreation area.*

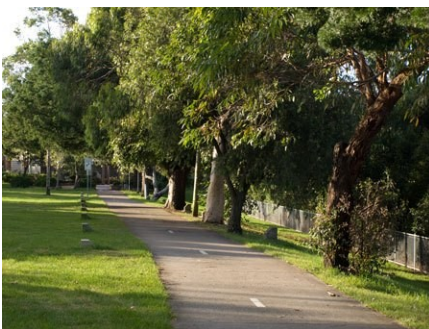
<https://www.facebook.com/1233newcastle/videos/363819097565323/>

"You can't just sit around waiting for hope to come,"

Swedish school student, Greta Thunberg
2019-02-21 in Brussels.

<https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/>

Rethinking The Urban Forest Conference

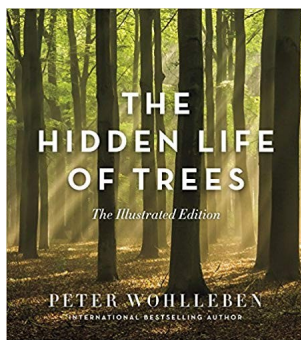


With the sale of Munibung Hill on our minds, this was a very timely event.

Around the world cities are embarking on re-greening programs and urban forests are important components of these.

This conference brought together arborists, academics, activists, ecologists, planners, project managers and politicians from Sydney and beyond to discuss the benefits and the roadblocks to achieving a scaling up of urban forest planning and implementation in the face of climate change, habitat/biodiversity loss and a fast-growing city.

Held on 24 May, 2019 at Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville, MHCS was there. Our report is on the web at the Blog drop down menu. Scroll down to June 24 <https://www.munibunghill.com/in-praise-of-the-urban-forest/>



The Hidden Life of Trees—what they feel and how they communicate, by Peter Wohlleben



Threatened species

Powerful owl, White-bellied sea eagle and the Squirrel glider.

Tourist potential

Following a story in the Newcastle Herald (Dreamtime Plan for Munibung Hill, 4.09.11) the Herald asked for reader feedback about the idea in an online poll ...



TODAY'S QUESTION *Should Munibung Hill be opened to the public and developed as a tourist attraction?* September 5, 2011

YESTERDAY'S RESULT

Yes: 80.5% No: 19.5%

Total votes: 303 - September 6, 2011

Mayor visits Munibung Hill



Cr Kay Fraser
4 October 2018
Facebook post

Earlier this week I had the pleasure of walking to the top of Munibung Hill - and what a great view it is. I know I'm not the only one who can see immense potential in enhancing the area, as interest from land owners and community groups in its future vision continues to grow.

Notices

Australian Plant Society – Hunter

7.00pm 1st Wednesday of the month
Hunter Wetlands Centre, Shortland
Enquiries: Maree McCarthy:
0410 405 815

Hunter Bird Observers Club

2nd Wednesday of the month
Hunter Wetland Centre, Shortland
Enquiries: Robert Stewart:
0401 283 305

Newcastle Astronomical Society

More information:
Alan Meehan: 0408 782 908

Late News 21Aug.: Greg Piper

After years of stalemate and the relentless efforts of many, the State Government has agreed to acquire the former Pasminco site at Boolaroo.

More about this story in the next issue.

