

A view to future Hill usage

BY SAGE SWINTON

NEW walking track heads will be established at Munibung Hill while some existing trails will be blocked to trail bikes and vehicles under a new plan for the picturesque site.

Lake Macquarie City Council is exhibiting the draft Munibung Hill Management Plan with a view to identify the area's recreational opportunities over the next 10 years and capitalise on the area's 360-degree views.

Parts of Munibung Hill were contaminated by the Pasma-Cockle Creek Smelter and other heavy industry. Council said remediation was well advanced, which had enabled transformation of the land use.

The plan proposes new track heads off Blaxland Road in Macquarie Hills, and off Quarry Road in Speers Point, each of which will incorporate off-road parking and facilities like picnic tables, signage and toilets.

"We're planning to upgrade the tracks to and along the main north-south ridge crest from these trail heads," Council manager community assets Brendan Callander said.

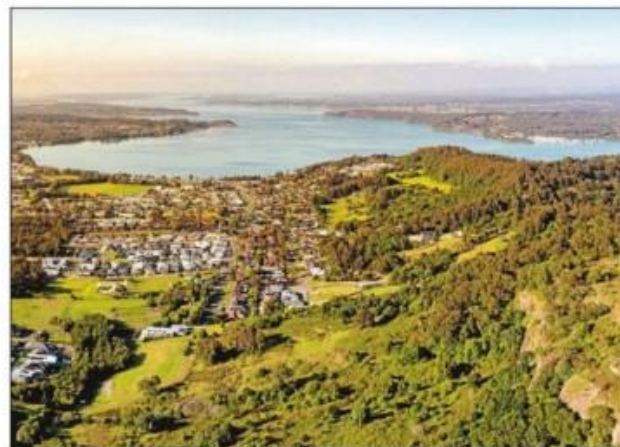
But the project does not include accessibility for mountain bike riders or vehicles, due to the steepness, disturbance from installing and using bike tracks, including potentially contaminated soils, and the risk of user conflicts if paths were shared by walkers and riders.

Mr Callander said the plan focused on protecting Munibung Hill's natural and cultural values while making it more accessible.

"Anyone who has made the climb to the top would agree this is one of the Hunter region's best-kept secrets. The views of the lake, the Watagans and across the city's suburbs are incredible," he said.

The plan incorporates 172.7 hectares of land, 67 hectares of which is owned by council. The remaining 105 hectares of private land is currently zoned for conservation and not subject to a rezoning proposal.

Mr Callander said the other land owners had contributed to the process.



SCENE: 360 degree views from Munibung Hill.

Objectives of the plan include protecting Aboriginal cultural values, reducing erosion impacts and increasing visitation while ensuring the activities provide public, not private benefits.

Councillor Kevin Baker

said the site was unique and it was important to get the planning right to protect it.

"You don't get many Munibung Hills," he said. "You don't get many places like this around Australia so it's really, really key that we get

it right. This place is too good and if we get it wrong it's gone forever."

Councillor Barney Langford said Munibung had the potential to be "another jewel in the crown in terms of enviro and recreational areas within our city".

"I think this is a really, really positive first step in achieving that," Cr Langford said.

The draft plan and a separate draft concept plan are on public exhibition until December 20.

An in-person information session about the project will be held at council's administration building on November 24, and an online session on November 30.

Go to lakemac.com.au for more information.

