

Parks & Playgrounds Movement Inc.

50th Annual Report 2002

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Parks and Playgrounds Movement have completed its fiftieth year of operation in the Northern part of NSW. Until its incorporation it was the Northern Parks and Playgrounds Movement. It is amazing that a public interest organisation such as the Parks Movement that has virtually no resources has been able to achieve so much over the fifty years. It's not been a large organisation but during the battles for Blackbutt Reserve our membership was up to 150. Annual subscriptions cost a staggering \$1.00 per membership. This movement has been the instigator of many public benefit projects from the Newcastle Harbour Foreshore to the Barrington Tops National Park. Many ideas were generated within this movement and a great deal of the campaigning has come from members.

Our Website <http://www.geocities.com.parksandplaygrounds/> will give you some idea of the movement's activities over the years. Use the links to other organisations too for the overall picture.

This Year has been a very sad year with the death of our long serving treasurer Jack Shield. Jack has been a tower of strength to the Movement since 1966. He worked so hard for the Regional Botanical Gardens and URGE too. Our sympathy goes out to Daphne and family. Jack as a friend and colleague is sadly missed.

Your Committee has continued across the broad field of conservation. We don't have the luxury of determining the issues as they are regrettably just thrust upon us. Some of the important matters dealt with this year are listed below.

- Coal River Convict Precinct, Coal River Historic Site, Coal River Festival Coal River, Newcastle East Heritage Tourism.
- The Conservation Subregional Strategy, Austeel, Hunter River Estuary, and Hexham Wetlands.
- Tank Paddock amendment LEP1987, Colliery Lands, Tomalpin, Catherine Hill Bay.
- Fame Cove Mountain and Port Stephens.
- Wallsend Brickworks Park
- Fighting for Community Land, Failure to categorise Community Land.
- City Development: Lake Macquarie, Coastal Lands, Belmont Wetlands, Green Point Reserve plan of Management, Openspace at Kahibah Rd/Pacific Hwy., The Fernleigh Track
- Newcastle: The Mall Markets, the Railway cleanup and improvements, Lack of Landscape Planning, Cultural Precinct an arbitrary concept, Heritage in Trouble Lack of Transparency at Newcastle, BHP Endowments, Heritage Committee. Honeysuckle

Deception, Merewether Street Wharf, Cottage Creek Cemetery, Submissions to LEP exhibitions Lake Macquarie and Newcastle.

- Council Tree Destruction, Civic Park and Phoenix

Coal River Heritage Masterplan

We were disappointed with the way the tiny amount of money obtained for the Coal River Historic Site Heritage Masterplan from the Commonwealth has been squandered by council as a Newcastle East Heritage Tourist Plan and we still don't have a Coal River Heritage Masterplan.

We have expended so much effort over the past thirty-five years through the community groups and the Movement on Newcastle East the foreshore and Fort Scratchley and here on the eve of Newcastle's 200th anniversary of the settlement (2004) and we are still trying to have the Coal River Heritage Masterplan in operation. Cynthia Hunter's excellent preliminary document completed at modest cost, has not been extended in the much more expensive tourism document.

The coal mining settlement at Coal River is a significant turning point in the history of this place we call Newcastle. However we have a hole in our history at that stage, which must be researched, authenticated and located on the ground.

The tangible focus for the expression of the convict history is through the Coal River Historic Site - Nobbys, Macquarie Pier, Fort Scratchley, the Convict Coal Mines and the Convict Stockade Lumber Yard.

We believe this historic area must be officially recognised as part of the convict fabric of Newcastle and identified and conserved before the anniversary, which will be at noon on the 30th of March 2004. The Movement proposed in our prospectus prepared for the Lord Mayor in Oct 1999 that a Heritage Master Plan be developed. This was so that Council could control the day-to-day operation of the whole site and have a base for future capital funding.

The Prospectus cost over a thousand dollars in colour copying and distribution but we did it because of Newcastle's 200th anniversary. The various authorities have unfortunately treated the site in an arbitrary way over the years without reference to its significance. (Remember we started on the Historic Site in response to the Council's decision to build carparking area under Nobbys 1969)

Conservation Subregional Strategy

The region has suffered through the lack of an official conservation strategy since the days of the old Northumberland County Council. However it is even more important now if Ecologically Sustainable Development is to be anything like a reality in the next thirty years.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement together with Nature Conservation Council and Total Environment Centre met with PlanNSW in support of the proposed subregional conservation strategy. It remains to be seen if the strategy can be as effective as the Newcastle/Lake Macquarie and the Planning Commission Coastal Study 1984. That study provided the policy framework for the Glenrock SRA and the Belmont wetlands. The Plan First approach in the new strategic initiative should set Government policy but will not be a statutory document like the Regional Environmental Plan. The Regional Environmental Plan remains in place, however Government has not always implemented the REP. (Honeysuckle, Wallarah Peninsula and

Tomalpin are examples where the REP was disregarded).

Because of the lack of a clear conservation framework we have missed the opportunity in the exit of the major landholders BHP and Coal and Allied Operations Pty Ltd, from the Lower Hunter to obtain real planning benefits for conservation and Ecologically Sustainable Development. The BHP deal with the state has the seed of success but its not a public policy and may be lost in time with changes of government. Unless the professional conservation studies are done and the wetland Reserves, the ocean- front parks and the wildlife corridors through the estuary to the forested ranges are conserved in public reserves and parklands the ideas may just remain as proposals.

Who would have thought that a state government in this age of ESD would offer for a steelworks, a pristine floodplain and estuarine wetland site affecting a nationally significant Nature Reserve? It is as though the political wisdom of our time has not learnt anything since the Newcastle Iron and Steelworks Act of 1912. That Act gave Newcastle's botanical garden to the BHP and began the degradation dredging and reclamation of the South Arm of the Hunter River. Having destroyed one arm why put the other one through the mincer. The Kooragang site on former BHP land within the railway arc is already debilitated and immediately adjacent to the South Arm Port Facilities and could be made available to Austeel rather than destroy the North Arm of the river as well. We have sent letters to every Councillor and Council in the Lower Hunter Region and to members of parliament but much more effort is needed from members.

Abandoned Colliery Lands

Coal and Allied Operations Pty Ltd a Rio-Tinto company has extensive holdings in the Hunter including the old J and A Brown mining empire. We asked the Government to take the lead in the planning of the abandoned colliery lands through a conservation strategy rather than just allow the local Councils to be individually targeted. Some of the recent parcels of land affected include:

Coal and Allied Operations Pty Ltd land in Lake Macquarie near Minmi has been rezoned and cleared for the Cameron Park Industrial estate and

Coal and Allied land at Tomalpin in Cessnock has been rezoned for industrial development. Lands at Catherine Hill Bay/Crangan Bay in the Wallarah peninsula of Lake Macquarie and Wyong have recently been sold to Catherine Hill Bay Development Pty Ltd and pressure for rezoning for development is being mooted.

A company known as Beltray Pty Ltd, is proposing the rezoning of C&A land for subdivision of the wooded margin of the nationally significant Hexham Wetlands at Minmi. (Tank Paddock).

Fame Cove Mountain

What has the government done to stop the degradation and alienation of Fame Cove and Piggies Beach? It is a little bit of paradise, a white sandy beach that locals and tourists have enjoyed freely before the land was sold to private interests in 1996. The thousands of people that visit Fame Cove and Piggies Beach could not believe that the Government would allow this special place to be alienated.

The only secure way of preventing the ongoing degradation of this unique high conservation

quality environment is for the Government to resume the land in the public interest and transfer the area to NSW NPWS. The Service currently own 45ha at Fame Point.

Fame Cove Mountain was officially identified for conservation 20 years ago and like the Yacaaba and Tomaree must ultimately be included in the National Park estate. Public. Urgent action is sorely wanting.

Wallsend Brickworks Park

The Movement is generally opposed to the sale of lands identified as parkland and held in trust by Councillors for the benefit of the general public. We find the concept of selling parkland to pay for the development of parkland as objectionable. Newcastle Council resolved to develop the Brickworks Park in 1986 in accord with a concept plan (T 1303 8C March 1986). The area was zoned 4(a) light Industry and the land should have been classified Community Land when the 1993 Local Government Act came into force. It was again resolved by full Council in 1992 that all the lands within the parcels known as the Brickworks be parkland open space.

The Community Land provisions of the Local Government Act don't seem to work unless local communities campaign for their parks. The Wallsend case could be tested in the courts. (High Court of Australia Bathurst Council V's PWC Properties Pty Ltd)

We had to make a complaint to the NSW Ombudsman because the city council would not provide the Movement with the relevant council decisions and the park plan. Without that vital information we were unable to present evidence at the reclassification Public Hearing for the parkland area off Victory Pde.

However the Movement is pleased that the Council has not continued with the reclassification of all the Victory Pde. Openspace and we want to see more emphasis placed on the heritage in the interpretation within the design of the park. The 19th Century industrial activities associated with the site includes the Brickworks complex, New Tunnel Colliery, Jesmond Colliery, and branch railway and sidings and the Purified Coal & Coke Works.

Community Land (Parkland) should be shown on LEP Maps

Member of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement should write to their Member of Parliament and the Minister for Planning demanding that new planning schemes should not be gazetted unless public parks, public reserves and public openspace is shown clearly on the LEP scheme maps. The Draft Lake Macquarie and the Newcastle LEP zone public parks under a number of different zones.

The community needs to know that when they view a statutory Planning Scheme LEP that they will be able to see the Public Reserves and the Community Land for which their Council is responsible. In the past such lands were shown as Dark Green 6(a). It is confusing for ordinary citizens not to be able to clearly see this vital information on official maps. In the future this public information will only be available to those who go to the expense of searching Deposited Plans and Land Titles. Councils should keep a public land register. Not all Councils do and they are never readily available.

City Development

The Movement has worked hard to help Lake Macquarie City Councillors keep to their adopted

Plan of Management for Green Point Foreshore Reserve. We have had to write over 200 letters on this issue and are pleased that Council has kept the integrity of the PoM in place. The cycle path being constructed to the Leichhardt Rd. is supported by the Movement because it is part of the adopted Plan Of Management. The future main entrance and picnic area for the reserve is off Green Point Drive and we have agreement from the Committee and the Councillors that there should be a cul-de-sac turnaround and an attractive entrance that is sympathetic to the reserve and in keeping with the domestic scale of the street. This is the next most important development needed for the reserve. Unfortunately no funds are available.

Green Point Foreshore Reserve is one of the great achievements of the Movement and the Lake Macquarie community. The Lunn family are still pursuing the Share fraud relating to how the Coal Company land was sold to a development company and it is hoped that the matter will be resolved soon so that the full story of how Green Point was achieved can be told.

The first stage of the Fernleigh Track is taking shape and the tunnel is being restored without the need for a concrete liner that would have turned a beautiful railway tunnel into a sort of common concrete sewer. We have been lobbying hard for the better heritage solution and we must thank Cr Tol and Cr Scully for shaking the system to obtain the more appropriate result. Only the deformed section of the tunnel will be concreted and the majority of the tunnel has been cleaned and the brickwork restored where necessary.

The openspace landscape at the Kahibah Rd and Pacific Highway intersection has been under threat for road widening and bus turnaround and we have been able to galvanise the local community into demonstrating to the RTA that their proposal was totally unsatisfactory and positively dangerous. The Lake Council however wants to erect a series of art hoardings on the land as a Lake Macquarie gateway. We are as one with the local community in rejecting this proposition, which would be dangerous, distracting and not nearly as attractive and appropriate a gateway with green grass and tree plantings. The Movement believes that Councils should value those green spaces and tree plantings at roadsides even if they are on road reserve land.

Newcastle

We believe that Newcastle Council has not adequately considered the heritage of the city.

The planning bungle of the Merewether Street Wharf development, which is contrary to the Government's Regional Environmental Plan No 3 and the principles of opening up the waterfront, should not have occurred.

The Minister has bypassed the planning instrument but he should have been required to justify this action by the Newcastle City Council requesting a Commission of Enquiry. Council failed to ask for the enquiry and the facts behind the planning bungle were never officially acknowledged or explained. Condominium owners now have a gold plated foreshore at public expense and the city has the blank backside and traffic canyon without the planned open access and public vistas.

In the unlawful destruction of the old doctors residence at Longworth Ave Wallsend there was no DA and no consent and no heritage consideration. The Ombudsman found that it was a mistake. A DA was later brought to Councillors to regularise the matter and cover up the mistake unfortunately the damage had been done.

The approval of a building on the Cottage Creek cemetery without heritage assessment was an

outrage never effectively reported. The Movement had to bring the development to the attention of the Heritage Office of NSW after work had started and an archaeological investigation was only done after the Movement reported that the builders were bringing up human remains in their foundation bores! The opportunity for a full archaeological investigation for this important site was not realised and it was quietly covered up.

The approval to demolish a timber church at Adamstown without Heritage consideration even though the item was an Exhibited Heritage Item in the Newcastle LEP is another case of careless assessment that we brought to the attention of the ombudsman. The Ombudsman found that it was a mistake.

We are dismayed that the Adamstown Military land has not been handed over and added to the Glenrock SRA? The trade-off agreement in 1999 was to finalise the issue of bringing this park-zoned land into park management. This issue that goes back to 1952 County Scheme! The Military Land trade off for part subdivision was one of the first actions of this Council and should have been finalised when agreement was reached. Questions need to be asked.

Hunter Street Mall needs an independent approach that addresses its needs. It has four nodes.

1. The David Jones Victoria Theatre node with Bus Stop and Foreshore link.
2. The Dangar Axis node with link to Foreshore, to Parking Station and to the Cathedral.
3. The Former Post Office Heritage node with linkages to the Railway and Law Courts.
4. The Pacific Street node with links to the Beachfront and Convict Stockade and Harbour.

The Movement is opposed to cluttering up the public concourses with permanent structures.

The Weekend Markets should be outdoors with portable structures & umbrellas.

Emphasise the spontaneity and use the opportunities that are on site now.

The focus should be in the Mall & on the axis and spread to the Parking station.

The Link through and around Market Square should be stressed.

The Parking Station is the anchor that will make the whole project work.

Lang Street (Parking Station) must be made more interesting and active both sides.

Traffic across the mall at Wolfe Street to aid inner city traffic circulation should be allowed. Our garden bed on railway land needs to be extended to the east with colourful groundcovers and some shrub grouping. We have the ideas but have no funds nor do we have authority.

The disgraceful untidiness of the rail corridor must be cleaned up

The refugee type fencing along the railway should be replaced with neat heritage fencing.

The black eunuchs chained together should be replaced with something more interesting.

The Japanese Wind sculpture designed for the area could be returned.

Plumes Caf' should be removed from the street and portable furniture and umbrellas used.

Feet sculptures should be on a polished surface to provide reflections.

The concrete bricks are untidy. The feet would be better on pavement in the mall and a green mound restored at Perkins St

The foundations of the AA Hunter St Bridge and the old fencing must be presented neatly.

Trains should not be stabled on the corridor frontage.

The railway decorative brick wall and light standards near the station should be cleaned/restored.

Emphasise views down streets to harbour and improve the disgraceful toilets at the bus stop.

Honeysuckle should look after Caf' de Wheels. Its not appropriate at the Perkins Street steps.

Lighting must be improved at the Rail Bus Stop south side of Scott St between Watt & Bolton Sts.

Tree Destruction

Landscape and mature trees are so easily destroyed but it takes so many years to replace them. Newcastle Councils tree destruction policy must be resisted. It is folly to claim that old trees must go when they give the city its essential character. A city landscape should be treated with care. Newcastle Council desperately needs a Landscape department and a good landscape design team who are prepared to protect our mature trees and work to support the improvement of our Parks and Community classified lands. Justification after destruction is not satisfactory and legal process must be adhered to.

The destruction of the Pacific Park landscape symbolises a problem. Slogans and public relations but little action on the ground. The costly sign at Pacific Park that reads 'Sustainable Parks Maintenance Biodiversity Planting' The sign is badly bent and knocked over. It is in a hundred Sq metre of sterile garden bed with a few miserable Casuarina tree plantings!

The Newcastle Herald fountain in the background is out of action and the coastal fore dune planting hacked away.

Parks and Playgrounds Movement is also concerned at the destruction of 21 mature Ficus Hillii Tree on the Club Phoenix property lot 100 DP 801831, 32 Industrial Drive Mayfield. We were unable to sight a DA consent for the work when we enquired at the Newcastle City Administration and we have asked that the destruction cease and that a Development Application from the club be required for any further work. The 21 mature trees were cut down between the dates 15th to the 23 of July. This stand of mature Ficus Hillii formed a significant natural feature and was sufficiently large to make an important contribution to the landscape structure of the city.

We have asked Council to show cause why it should not begin proceedings against the Club for the destruction of the 21 mature fig trees without development consent. No answer yet.

The front page of Council News Spring Edition 2002 sends a disgraceful message for spring. Just when Council should be encouraging the ratepayers with the clean green city image we get the apologists justification for the chop a tree down approach.

The destruction of the Civic Park tree opposite NESCA was another outrage against the landscape, the people who care and the people of tomorrow. More are going to be cut down if there is no protest. The corner tree had not stopped the electricity from running in the wires or the water in the pipes or the traffic control lights. It was cut down because it was stated by the arborist that if they cut the roots for the new concrete pathway it might cause destabilization of the tree. The destruction was contrary to the adopted plan of Management for the park.

In moving the adoption of our annual 50th annual report I would like to especially like to thank my committee for their work and support. Its been another hard year of slow incremental progress.

Doug Lithgow
President 28/10/2002

Actions speak louder than words