

Fernhill Estate.



FOUNDATION PLAN OF MANAGEMENT TO 2026



Greater
Sydney
Parklands



Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and sky of the Mulgoa Valley, Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains and pay our respects to all Elders past, present and emerging.

We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains today.



Prepared by Greater Sydney Parklands ©
NSW Government 2021

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Caring for

Country relates to the nation or cultural group and land that Aboriginal people belong to, yearn for, find healing from and will return to. **Country means much more than land; it is a place of origin in cultural, spiritual and literal terms.**

Country includes not only land but also skies and waters. It incorporates both the tangible and the intangible, for instance, all the knowledges and cultural practices associated with land.

People are part of Country, and their identity is derived in a large way in relation to Country

Daniele Hromek (2019) –
Budawang/Yuin, Researcher and spatial designer

Country



Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges that Fernhill Estate is on Darug Country, close to Gundungurra Country, and within the boundaries of the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Aboriginal people cared for Mulgoa Valley for tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of the British in the late 18th century. Before the valley was occupied, fenced and enclosed by the early colonists, First Nations people sustained the landscape, maintained their knowledge and practices and were in turn sustained by their Country.

Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges the rights of First Nations people to be involved in the ongoing management of their traditional lands and will work in a respectful manner with the traditional custodians of the lands of this Estate, the Local Aboriginal Land Council and the First Nations communities of Western Sydney.



Welcome

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Michael Rose AM
Chair

Earlier this year the NSW Government put forward a 50 Year Vision for Sydney's Open Space and Parklands with an ambition to grow, connect and care for our city's parks. Fernhill Estate is a significant part of this bold vision.

Fernhill Estate is a place of great natural beauty with bushland, landscaped farmland, creeks, and lakes. The Estate is recognised for its significant Aboriginal and Early Colonial landscapes as well as for the majestic Fernhill House. As the manager of Fernhill Estate, Greater Sydney Parklands intends to balance public visitation and enjoyment of the Estate with the conservation of its significant natural and cultural heritage, to ensure its legacy for future generations.

This Plan of Management establishes the vision and key initiatives for the Estate over the next 5 years. Greater Sydney Parklands will continue to work with our valued stakeholders in the promotion and protection of this important place, to ensure that it is to open to, and loved by, the people of Sydney.



Suellen Fitzgerald
Chief Executive

Fernhill Estate was purchased by the NSW Government in 2018, bringing this significant Estate into public ownership for the first time. In December 2020, the Estate was vested with Greater Sydney Parklands, securing its future as a key iconic park in Sydney's Green Grid.

As custodians of the Estate, Greater Sydney Parklands is committed to promoting and protecting its significant natural and cultural heritage. In preparing this 5 year plan, we aim to both welcome the public to enjoy what has previously been a private estate but also to understand its special environment and heritage as the foundation for our ongoing stewardship.

Over the next five years, we will deliver the priorities set out in this plan to open up the Estate for the community to meet local needs and also to recognise the changing context of Western Sydney as its population grows. Thank you to everyone who contributed in the preparation of this Plan. We look forward to building on these important relationships as we continue to welcome the communities of Mulgoa Valley, Penrith, and Greater Sydney.



Fernhill Estate is an idyllic rural parkland, now open for all to enjoy.

A place of **natural beauty** on the edge of the Cumberland Plain at the base of the Blue Mountains.

A place of **quiet contemplation, to feel part of nature.**

A place to share the legacy and stories of our past and for the future. A place to be **active and feel healthy.**

To achieve this, we will work with the community, stakeholders and partners to: Inspire and **support custodianship of the Estate's natural and cultural heritage.**

Open the Estate over time as a place for relaxation, recreation, programs and education. Enhance **people's connectivity to open space** within the Mulgoa and Penrith valleys, the Blue Mountains and Greater Sydney.

Be **environmentally, financially and socially responsible.**

Vision

About

this Plan

Fernhill Estate Foundation Plan of Management to 2026 establishes the custodianship and stewardship for Fernhill Estate. It has been developed with the community and stakeholders to shape and guide, plan for, protect, activate and celebrate this special place over the next five years.

The NSW Government acquired Fernhill Estate in 2018 to bring this significant site into public ownership for the first time. The Estate was vested to Greater Sydney Parklands in December 2020 to secure its future for the recreation and amenity of the people of NSW.

Fernhill Estate is a place of great natural and cultural beauty that deserves protection, especially as many more people will be living in, working in and visiting this broader area of Greater Sydney in the future.

Over the next five years, Greater Sydney Parklands will look to find more ways for the community to access and enjoy the Estate while completing a range of key assessments and plans.

This includes a final Conservation Management Plan, with reference to key guidelines such as the Burra Charter and the NSW Government's heritage guidelines, as well as key views, landscape and environmental assessments. Once these more detailed plans are in place, we will develop a longer-term plan of management, again with community input.

The future planning and activation for Fernhill Estate is supported by the NSW Government's *50-year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands*.

We take a cultural landscape approach to protecting and enhancing the Estate's natural and cultural built and landscape values. In this way we think of a cultural landscape as the complex interaction between landscapes and natural systems and how these elements are intertwined with the cultural uses and values from the past and today.

WHAT IS A PLAN OF MANAGEMENT?

Plans of management are statutory documents that establish the vision, objectives, key strategies and management priorities for a place.

This is our first plan of management for the Estate, and we've used this opportunity to set the tone for opening up the Estate and establishing it as one of the emerging key public parklands in Western Sydney.

Using a five-year timeframe, the plan guides new management priorities that will open up the site for the public to enjoy and use, while protecting its natural and cultural heritage and its idyllic rural and bushland setting. We will prepare successive plans in consultation with the community and stakeholders to further protect and reveal the Estate to the public, supporting and continuing its sustainable future.

Four key moves for the Estate's five precincts support our vision for the Estate. We've also identified actions for the next five years that will protect and celebrate the Estate's natural and cultural values and create opportunities for more people to enjoy different activities – from picnicking with friends, visiting Fernhill House and exercising on a walking or family cycle path, or attending an event or celebration.

HOW WAS IT DEVELOPED?

The management priorities are guided by the conservation policies in the 2019 *Draft Conservation Management Plan*¹ for the Estate. This was an extensive study into the Estate's history, heritage significance, and the policies that will best help us to retain this significance in the future care, development and activation of the Estate.

We published a summary of the *Draft Conservation Management Plan's* recommendations along with potential public uses of the Estate for public comment in 2019, via the *Fernhill Estate Future Use Options*² paper. We also heard directly from people who visited the Estate during open weekends from mid-2020.

From this feedback, we released a draft of this plan of management for public comment from December 2020 to February 2021. From this, we know there is broad support for:

- opening up the Estate for public use and enjoyment
- creating a parkland with picnic grounds and cafes that everyone can access, along with new paths for bushwalking and family cycling
- conserving and communicating the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal cultural heritage of the Estate by completing additional plans and studies and completing a Conservation Management Plan
- protecting and enhancing the habitat for woodland birds, including the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot
- opening Fernhill House to the public, possibly as a museum, art gallery or visitor centre, for tourist accommodation or use by filmmakers

- holding different programs and activities to help more people understand the Estate's past
- using the Estate for events and functions and tours of the homestead and garden
- incorporating activities around the Estate's farm and equine uses including bridle trails, stables and boarding, racing or horse-riding lessons, including activities for the disabled
- supporting the opening of the Estate with appropriate low impact infrastructure (such as sewer and water provision), better road access off Mulgoa Road, and improved and new Estate roads and visitor parking

We will continue to refer to this feedback as we develop future planning studies for the Estate such as the Landscape Master Plan.

¹ JPA&D, *Fernhill Estate Conservation Management Plan* (draft), October 2019
² NSW Planning Industry and Environment, *Fernhill Estate Future use options*, December 2019





Fernhill Estate



About Fernhill Estate

Fernhill Estate is an exceptional landscape of natural and cultural heritage significance. It is on Darug Country, close to Gundungurra Country, at the edge of the Cumberland Plain at the base of the Blue Mountains.

Fernhill Estate is a place of many stories - from the ancient Aboriginal people who lived on the plains and foothills of the mountains in what we now know as Western Sydney, to the early British colonists in the Mulgoa Valley, their aspirations and the profound impact they had on Aboriginal traditional ways of life and the rural estate that endured as a meaningful place up to today.

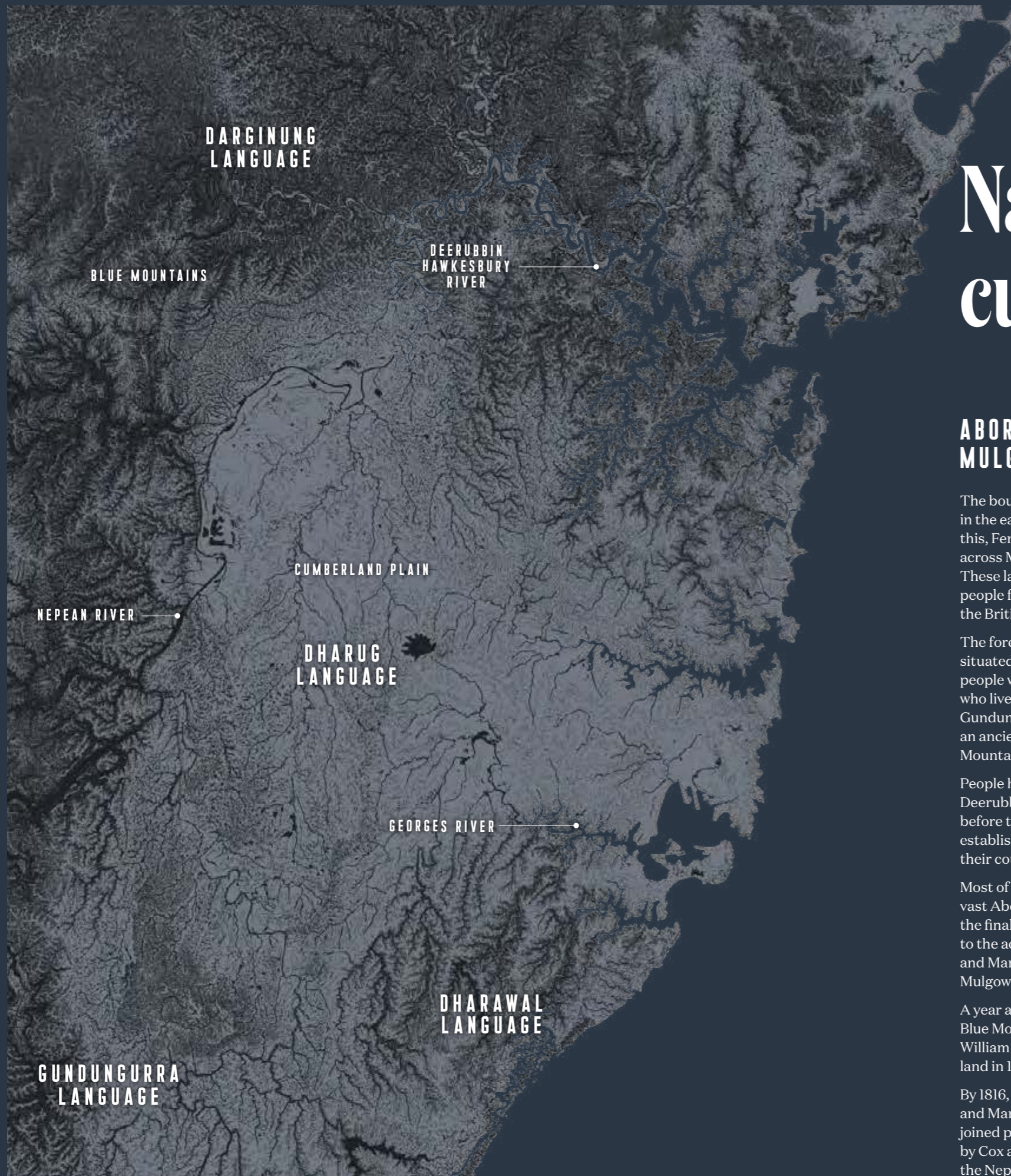
Much of the Estate still looks as it once did in the early days of the British colony, when it was established by the early pastoralist Cox family through a series of land grants to William Cox and his sons. Today it is part of the remaining rural countryside and woodland vegetation of the Cumberland Plain before you head west over the Blue Mountains.

The 423-hectare Estate includes Fernhill House, a grand sandstone historic house and one of Australia's finest examples of Colonial-era Greek Revival architecture.

Fernhill House is central to the Colonial-era cultural landscapes of the Estate. It includes significant open rural parklands, large reserves of natural bushland and creeks, as well as early-Colonial stables. It also features later-20th century farm estate outbuildings, equestrian buildings and a racing track.

The Estate has research potential for Aboriginal land management practices, culture and history before and after 1788.

The experience of Aboriginal people following colonisation of the Sydney region by the British has been recorded at Fernhill and in the Mulgoa area. Aboriginal people were affected by introduced diseases, expanding agricultural settlement and frontier violence at that time. Despite these impacts, Aboriginal people stayed on Country, some working at Fernhill Estate as labourers for the Cox family in the 1820s and others living further along the Nepean River, into the 1840s.



Natural and cultural heritage

ABORIGINAL HISTORY OF THE MULGOA VALLEY AND SURROUNDS

The boundaries of Fernhill Estate today have their origins in the early colonial land grants of the 1810s. Prior to this, Fernhill was part of a much larger Aboriginal estate across Mulgoa Valley and the broader Cumberland Plain. These landscapes were actively managed by Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of the British.

The forest lands on the Nepean River at Mulgoa were situated at the western edge of the ancestral Country of people who spoke the Dharug language. Their neighbours, who lived across the river and in the mountains, spoke Gundungurra. These people shared a river that followed an ancient watercourse pre-dating the uplift of the Blue Mountains some 15 to 22 million years ago.

People had been living along the river and the adjoining Deerubbin (Hawkesbury River) for at least 40,000 years before the British took possession of these waterways and established a series of strategically located towns along their course.

Most of what we know about the traditional owners of this vast Aboriginal estate come from historical records from the final years of the Sydney Wars (1814-1817). Many relate to the activities of Joe Molgowy or 'Joe from Mulgoa,'¹ and Mary-Mary, whom Macquarie titled 'Chief of the Mulgoa.'²

A year after the British identified a route through the Blue Mountains, Joe Molgowy helped guide and negotiate William Cox's road-building gangs through Gundungurra land in 1814.

By 1816, Mulgoa was contested ground. Both Molgowy and Mary-Mary were considered 'friendly Natives'³ and joined punitive parties of soldiers and settlers organised by Cox and ordered by Governor Macquarie to scour the Nepean-Hawkesbury Valley and kill or imprison any

'hostile'⁴ natives. None were found during these sweeps.

Macquarie promised these guides small farms between Mulgoa and South Creek as rewards. Despite this, a decade later, in 1826, the people of the Mulgoa tribe were working as seasonal agricultural labourers on Cox's Mulgoa estate for three meals a day and a moderate amount of weak rum punch in return.

Another connection of Aboriginal people to Mulgoa was made in the 1940s during World War II when Aboriginal children were moved by the Australian Government from the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia to various sites around Sydney.

The Church Mission Society Home for Half-Castes, or Mulgoa Mission, operated at the St Thomas' Anglican Church Rectory from 1942-1947. Some parents of children who were moved to Mulgoa Mission also moved to the area, often finding local work as domestic servants, in order to be close to the children.

When the Mission closed in 1947, some families returned home, while others stayed in Sydney. The Rectory building and the dormitory where the children slept have been demolished, but St Thomas' Church remains at the site.

If we're to learn and share the entirety of Aboriginal stories from Fernhill Estate and in the Mulgoa area, we need to acknowledge what happened in the past. This includes an honest understanding of the impacts colonisation had on Aboriginal people in the Sydney region, as well as an acknowledgement of contemporary Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice. Partnership with Aboriginal people is essential to bring knowledge and practice back to the site to care for Country.

¹ p63, *Memoirs of William Cox, J.P.*, Sydney and Brisbane, William Brooks & Co., 1901

² Lachlan Macquarie, *Journal*, 12 January 1814, Mitchell Library

³ Lachlan Macquarie, *Archival Estrays*, Add 85, Mitchell Library

⁴ Lachlan Macquarie, *Journal*, 12 January 1814, Mitchell Library



‘Fernhill Estate could provide walking tracks and bike riding trails, bridle trails for horse riding, playing fields... with public facilities to be discretely built’
Community Member

NATURAL SETTING

At the foot of the Blue Mountains, Fernhill Estate sits above two major geological faults that have created an incredible diversity in terms of topography, soils, water movement and vegetation.

The Estate is located within the Mulgoa Valley where 15 to 22 million years ago, the slow geological uplift of the Lapstone monocline created a diversity of soils and landforms. Here at the edge of the Cumberland Plain, the clay shale soils meet the sandstone of the Blue Mountains. This underlying geology gives rise to a variety of natural features.

West of the Valley offers up the steeply incised gorge of the Nepean River that was formed as the water cut through the slow uplift of the sandstone bedrock. In the Valley is a mix of rolling hills that fall sharply onto flat plains, creating pockets of meadows. Here, one of the most striking features is the shale cliffs at Mulgoa Nature Reserve formed by the erosive action of Mulgoa Creek.

The vegetation communities of the Valley vary with open woodlands, forests on sandstone soils, gullies of rainforest, grassy meadows and riparian corridors. This range of habitats provides for a diversity of wildlife, including woodland birds like the Regent Honeyeater. This is the last woodland setting as the birds migrate across the vast expanse of the Blue Mountains escarpment.

Fernhill Estate is a microcosm of Mulgoa Valley landscapes. On the Estate’s western edge, the permeable sandstone captures the flow of water down vertical faults in the bedrock. This area features forested hilltops and steep shaded gullies, creating cool moist areas and protection from fire, allowing ancient rainforest to survive.

The Estate’s landscape on the eastern edge changes dramatically. This area is dominated by woodland vegetation on clay soils with shallow, naturally forming watercourses collecting to Mulgoa Creek. These watercourses have been dammed by Europeans over time. The vegetation provides habitat for wildlife such as possums, bats and owls, and critical habitat for woodland birds.

Many of Australia’s iconic native animals are found in the Estate, including koalas, wallabies, kangaroos, goannas and echidnas.

Water flows through the Estate from the large lake in the south west corner. As water flows east it is fed from the permeable sandstone rise that today is covered in dry eucalypt forest. It enters the clay plains from deep gullies of dry rainforest and moist woodlands.

A second stream, Littlefields Creek, runs to the south. In between are the open woodlands of the Cumberland Plain. The diversity of plants, habitats and wildlife is created by the abrupt changes in soils and landforms caused by the uplift of the Blue Mountains escarpment.

MULGOA

Chart on large flat



'I would love to see Fernhill Estate host outdoor concerts and events and also be available for members of the public to picnic'
Community Member

EARLY COLONIAL HISTORY AND THE COX FAMILY

Fernhill Estate was one of several estates in the area owned and built by the Cox Family. It was among a series of land-holdings granted in the early 19th century to William Cox and his sons in Mulgoa Valley and beyond, by Governor George Patterson. The land grants were later confirmed by Governor Macquarie.

As the Cumberland Plain was divided into a series of grants and the land was gradually enclosed, the ancestral way of life for the Aboriginal peoples of Mulgoa Valley and the Cumberland Plain changed forever.

The Cox family at Fernhill started with a small cottage, now known as Cox's Cottage, built by William Cox on land granted to his young son Edward in the 1810s. The Cox family were significant in the British colonisation of Mulgoa Valley and beyond, and in the expansion of the early British colony over the Blue Mountains. William Cox oversaw the construction, at Governor Macquarie's request, of the first Colonial road over the Blue Mountains, opening up the vast plains to the west of the mountains to the British.

The Cox family were also integral in the establishment and development of the highly profitable wool industry in the early days of the British colony. After studying wool processing in England in the 1820s, Edward returned to Australia. As Fernhill Estate and the Cox family prospered, Edward built Fernhill House in the late 1830s, a time of great optimism and prosperity in the colony.

William and Edward Cox and their family represent the aspirations of the early British colonists, and the colony from Governor Macquarie's time, as it transitioned from 'a Penitentiary...on a grand scale'¹ to 'one of the greatest and most flourishing Colonies belonging to the British Empire.'² The grand design of Fernhill House and its prominent location on the knoll demonstrates how the Cox family and other early landed pastoralists saw themselves and wished to be seen – as a kind of new aristocracy in a new land.

¹ Historical Records of Australia, Series 1, Vol. 9, p.442

² Quoted in N.D. McLachlan, "Macquarie", Australian Dictionary Biography, Vol. 2, p.194



FERNHILL HOUSE AND ITS CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Fernhill House is one of the most significant Greek Revival houses built in the Early Colonial-era and has been attributed to several prominent architects of the Colony. It is a grand single-storey sandstone building with broad sweeping views of the rural parklands of the Estate, overlooking Mulgoa Valley and village below.

The historic approach to the house was consciously set out to reveal key views and vistas of the Estate and Fernhill House. Early pictorial representations show a natural landscape setting for Fernhill House that historical records imply was consciously created, and curated, from the native woodland of the Cumberland Plain. This natural landscape setting of the house was

significantly altered and lost in the late 20th century as a consequence of more formal garden installations by the landscape architect Paul Sorensen and later, his son.

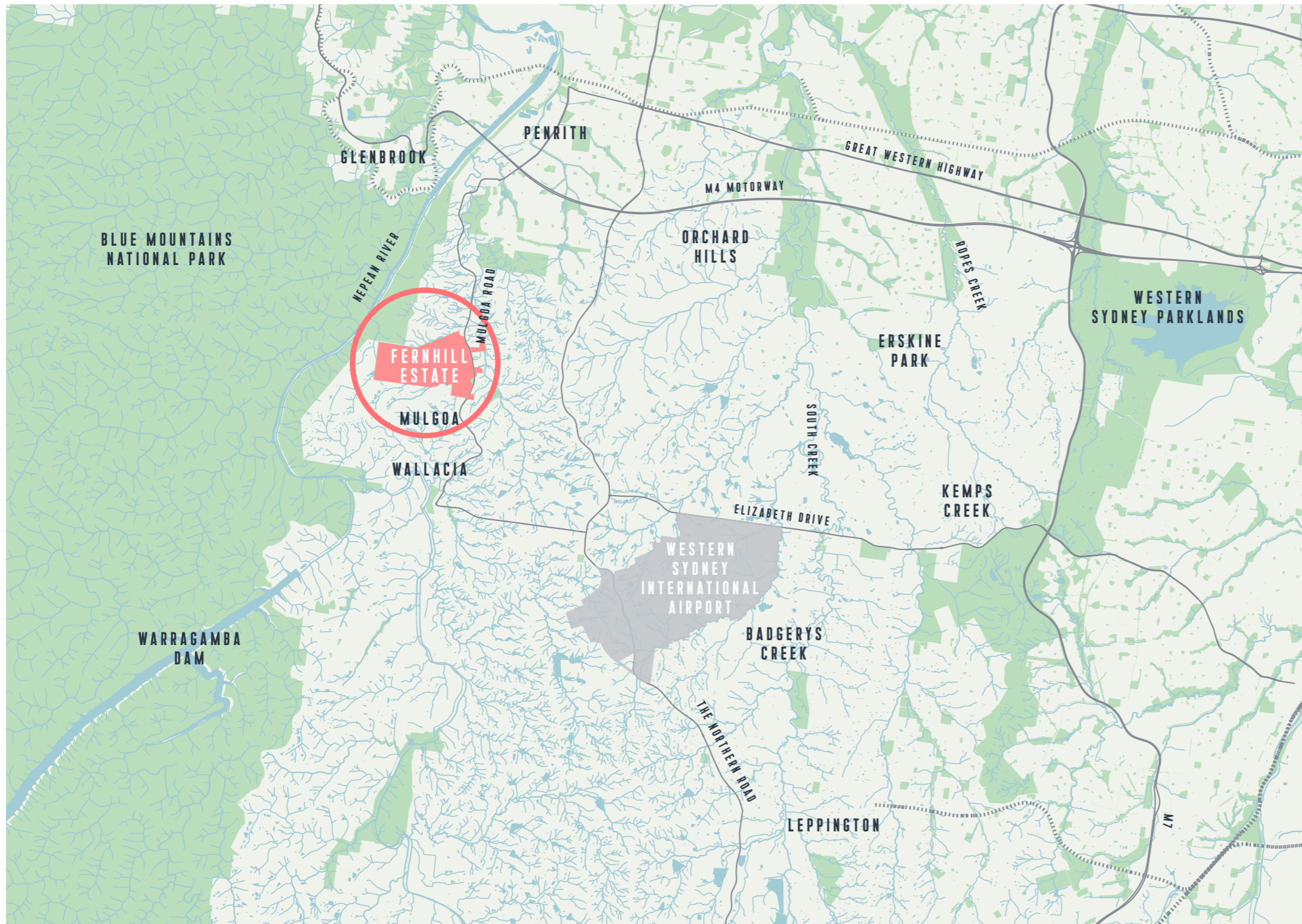
The open rural parkland of the Estate below the house and into the Valley is significant as a remnant Early Colonial rural estate landscape where it remains intact. This part of the Estate was also significantly altered in the late 20th century with the construction of the equestrian buildings and racetrack.

The Littlefield and Mulgoa Creek landscapes are significant as the historic boundaries of Edward Cox's land grant, now lost through road construction and land subdivisions and purchases. The bushland setting rising up the hill behind the house appears relatively unchanged from pre-1788 and is a dominant feature in the background setting of Fernhill House.



- 1 Fernhill House, c. 1865-1875
- 2 St Thomas' Church, c. 1830





Planning for the future

Greater Sydney is changing and Western Sydney will transform over the next 20 to 40 years as the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and Sydney Metro line from St Marys to the airport open.

Our focus now is to sustainably plan for this change to bring about more benefits to more people. This is about rebalancing how Sydney works – rather than a city where most activity, jobs or open spaces are focused in the east, the Greater Sydney of the future will embrace what’s called in strategic planning terms the ‘Western Parkland City’, focused around the new airport.

The emerging Western Parkland City will be the most connected place in Australia, underpinned by unique urban, rural and natural environments. It will offer a greater diversity of jobs and social opportunities for the thousands of people living in places like Penrith, Blacktown, Liverpool, Campbelltown-Macarthur and all the suburbs in between.

The way we think about the future of the Western Parkland City will make the landscape more than just a backdrop – it will be the underlying asset that will shape the design and location of future suburbs, employment hubs, transport connections and open spaces.

Fernhill Estate is nestled within the Mulgoa Valley, adjoining the Blue Mountains National Park. The Estate is part of a larger interconnected and sensitive ecosystem and corridor for native flora and fauna in Western and Greater Sydney and a unique piece of the Valley’s cultural history. It must remain part of the network of open spaces and well-loved landscapes around which the city will grow and depend on.

Our efforts to actively protect and activate the Estate will allow more people to enjoy this area’s mountains, escarpments, rural hinterland and rivers – now and into the future.

Fernhill Estate



PLANNING CONTEXT

Fernhill Estate is located within the Penrith Local Government Area. In 2016 this area was home to 200,000 people with a predicted increase to 260,000 by 2036. This comes within the context of vast regional population growth predicted with the emerging Western Parkland City - where the population will increase from around 1 million people in 2016 to more than 1.5 million by 2036.

Of those who lived in Penrith in 2016, 21.6 per cent were born overseas, compared to 36.7 per cent in Greater Sydney as a whole. In the local population of Mulgoa, 15.6 per cent were born overseas. It is a slightly younger population with a median age of 34 in the Penrith LGA, compared to 36 for Greater Sydney.

Overall planning for the Western Parkland City is based on forecasts of increasingly higher numbers at each end of the age spectrum. This means we need to plan for more families with young children and more older people in the area, as well as more diverse backgrounds.

Understanding what the community is like today, how it might be in the future, and what their recreation aspirations might be has informed the key moves and priorities.

Penrith City Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement recognises the importance of significant places like Fernhill Estate. Council is continuing to build a new strategic framework based on its Local Strategic Planning Statement, including the creation of the 'economic

triangle' anchored by Penrith, St Marys and the new airport. Further, Council identifies the corridor between the airport and Penrith as a scenic corridor that offers significant tourism opportunities, thanks to its scenic, ecological and rural landscapes. Over time, Fernhill Estate will become a key recreation and tourism destination within this corridor.

Council is also developing a green grid strategy that places Fernhill Estate as an integral element of the LGA's green network for recreational, ecological and hydrological importance.

The Estate also sits within the Western City District. The *Western City District Plan* sets a vision for Greater Sydney to evolve and grow as 'A city in its landscape', where green spaces and landscapes are valued as an integral part of the city. Many of the *Western City District Plan's* priorities will shape the way we plan for and protect the future of Fernhill Estate. The Estate - as a natural landscape and a respite from the busy city - can form part of a network of green spaces and waterways that will be the backbone of the Western Parkland City.

Fernhill Estate is already a beautiful place - under the guardianship of Greater Sydney Parklands and strong partnerships with the community, stakeholders, Penrith City Council and the NSW Government, it will be one of many special places for the community in Greater Sydney that will flourish over time.

STATUTORY MANAGEMENT

In managing and activating the Estate, our work must align with State and local statutory frameworks, statutory heritage listings, biodiversity agreements and our own operational requirements.

Fernhill Estate was vested in Greater Sydney Parklands under the *Western Sydney Parklands Act 2006*. This Act and its regulations define the operational requirements for the sustainable activation and management of Fernhill Estate.

Heritage listings

Most of Fernhill Estate is on the State Heritage Register including Fernhill House and its immediate setting, the bushland to the west of the house and most of the open land and bushland to the east, including land adjacent to St Thomas' Church.

The remainder of the Estate is listed as a place of local heritage significance by Penrith City Council. Council has also listed the entire Estate and its broader curtilage, as well as the historic alignment of Mulgoa Road associated with the Colonial Estate, as items of local heritage significance.

Greater Sydney Parklands is obliged under the *Heritage Act 1977* to maintain a register of heritage items it owns and manages. Fernhill Estate will be included in this register.

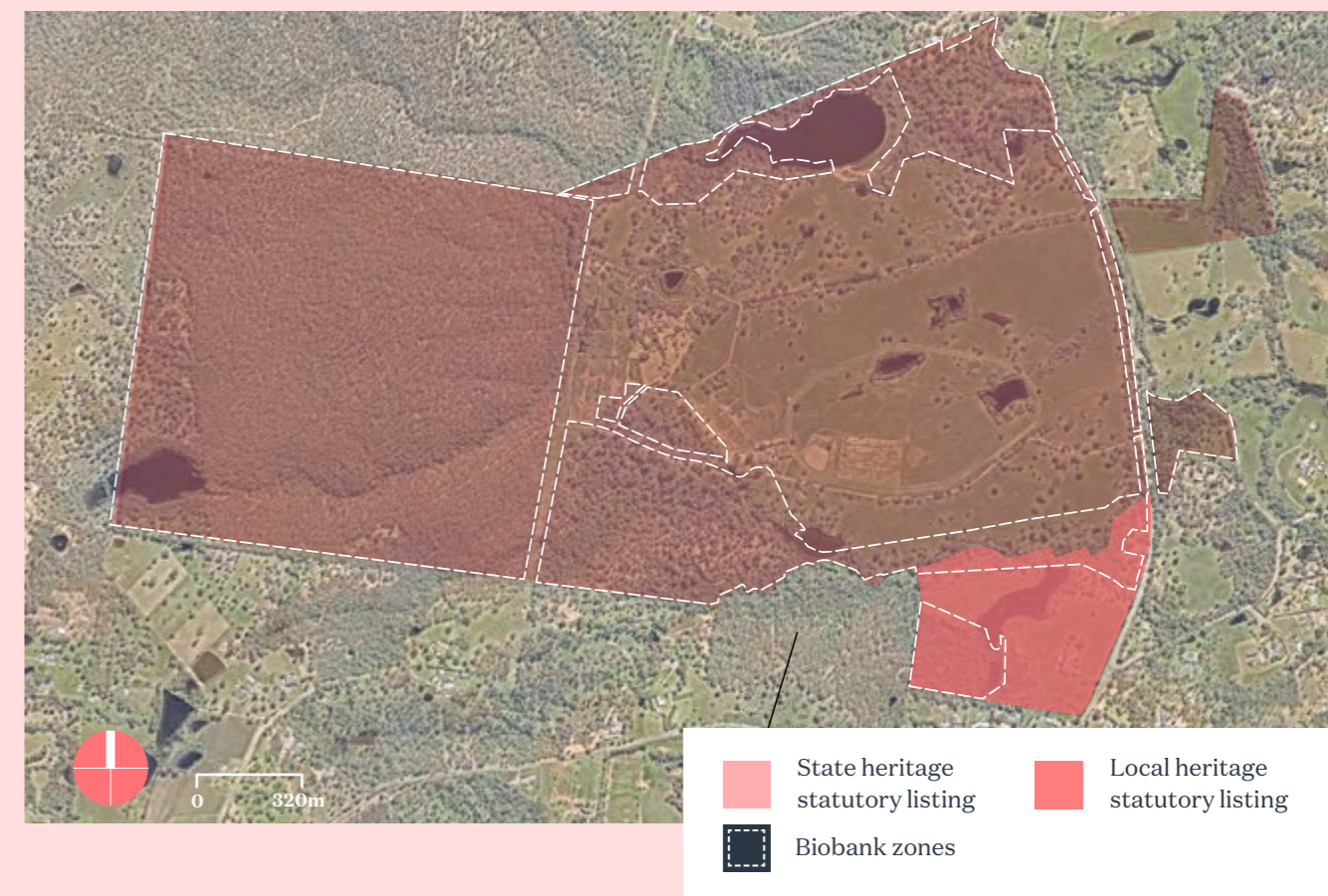
These listings mean all activities to improve and activate Fernhill Estate must also conserve its heritage significance including associated fabric, settings, views, archaeological sites and places of Aboriginal significance.

Biodiversity stewardship agreements

More than 60 per cent of the Estate is under biodiversity stewardship agreements. These ensure the permanent protection and management of biodiversity and allow for annual Biodiversity Stewardship Payments Fund contributions.

These areas are primarily set aside for conservation purposes and restricted to activities that will not have a negative effect on the Estate's biodiversity. The land can still be used, but for more passive activities. We will investigate how and whether the public can use these lands.

A 10-hectare area of the Estate on the eastern side of Mulgoa Road is identified as a strategic conservation area under the draft *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan*. The land may be used as part of a broader biodiversity connection from the Cumberland Plain to the Blue Mountains, which may mean the land will be subject to further planning controls.



50 YEAR OPEN SPACE AND PARKLANDS VISION

Greater Sydney Parklands was formed to promote, champion and realise the NSW Government's *50-Year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands* for a sustainable, liveable, green and cool Sydney. In this role, we are the custodian of the iconic and regionally significant state government-owned parklands and open space of Greater Sydney, including Fernhill Estate.

The 50-Year Vision establishes the principles within which Greater Sydney Parklands will secure the future of Fernhill Estate. The Vision also sets out four strategic directions that have informed this Plan:

- Strategic direction 1: Growing parks for people
- Strategic direction 2: Connecting people to parks
- Strategic direction 3: Keeping Sydney green and vibrant
- Strategic direction 4: Caring for the environment.

To achieve this vision, we'll plan for Fernhill Estate to be a place:

- with a protected natural environment, where planning considers the bigger-picture impacts of a changing climate such as heat management and shade, water security and sustainable management
- that is managed in a way that involves Aboriginal people and communities in shared decision-making and co-design practices to realise caring for Country principles
- accessible to everyone, offering flexible and multipurpose green spaces for a range of people and experiences
- to benefit people and their quality of life, with connections to surrounding neighbourhoods, transport links and local and regional walking and cycling networks including along the Nepean River and to Penrith CBD
- with real significance for local, regional and international visitors, offering a remarkable, memorable and distinctive experience in an exceptional cultural landscape
- that is a key part of the Greater Sydney Green Grid.

Partnerships with local Aboriginal people and organisations will bring cultural knowledge and practice to Fernhill Estate, creating opportunities for Aboriginal people to perform custodial roles in caring for Country and to strengthen culture, and create opportunities for people to learn about ecology, sustainability and spirituality in Aboriginal culture.

The NSW Government also released a draft *Public Spaces Charter* in 2020 – a commitment to protect the diverse range of public spaces that resonate with history and memory and shape how people enjoy and experience where they live, work or visit. The draft Charter has also informed this Plan of Management.

'I would love to see Fernhill Estate opened up, a beautiful place for us Western Sydney people and visitors to enjoy.'
Community Member





Key moves and opportunities

Key moves and opportunities

Four Estate-wide key moves will directly inform and guide the next five years of our custodianship of Fernhill Estate. These are underpinned by the strategic directions in the 50-Year Vision. We also want people to learn more about Fernhill Estate – make it easy for them to visit, and to access the Estate grounds. We want to offer them many ways to enjoy the Estate.

Importantly, we want to be responsible custodians and protect these significant landscapes and buildings that tell stories of the ancient and recent past, and support the plants, birds and animals that bring life to this area.

KEY MOVES

Estate stewardship

As responsible custodians of the Estate, we will work with the community and professionals to identify, conserve, restore, enhance and communicate the Estate’s natural and cultural heritage values. We will prepare background studies to inform our custodianship and establish a future that respects the past. From this research, we will prepare a refreshed plan of management.

Opening the estate

With the Estate now in public ownership we will start to make more of the land available for the community. This Plan sets the foundation and a thoughtful approach for a progressive opening of the Estate over the next five years. Over time, the Estate will be a place for activities such as bushwalking, bike riding and specialised sports, or events, cultural and artistic programs. It could even be a new tourism destination. It will attract local, regional and national visitors for different reasons and in different ways.

Engaging community

As an emerging major recreational destination for the Western Parkland City, Fernhill Estate will be a place that local communities of Mulgoa Valley and Penrith – and communities from across Greater Sydney – can feel part of.

The immediate neighbours in Mulgoa Village and Mulgoa Valley will enjoy a remarkable area on their doorstep, and communities in the Penrith area and Greater Sydney will discover programs and events to feel part of this special place.

Sustainable and resilient

We must be smart about the Estate’s social, financial and environmental sustainability. We will consider the causes and predicted impacts of climate change, local urban development, and the new airport and associated infrastructure when planning how we will care for the Estate’s future.

We will seek out opportunities for social benefit programs and services, such as the youth employment services that currently assist with asset maintenance across the site.

We will investigate opportunities for adaptive re-use of existing buildings and facilities that is commensurate with the heritage and environmental values of the Estate. We can be responsible in finding new ways for people to engage with the Estate while also ensuring sound stewardship and fiscal management.

Each key move will be supported by detailed analysis and planning.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

We have identified the following land uses to support the key moves:

- **Cultural heritage conservation**

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage

- **Arts and culture**

Events, programs, tours, public art, markets, weddings

- **Natural conservation**

Bushland, habitat, waterways and lakes, biodiversity stewardship sites



- **Recreation**

Picnic, play, kickabout, walking, cycling, open space, specialist sports, horse riding, bushwalking, birdwatching, canoeing and orienteering

- **Tourism**

Camping, glamping, cabins, boutique accommodation, supporting sensitive and site-responsive retail, food and beverage, health spa and wellness

- **Rural**

Equestrian facilities, agistment, bridle trails, agriculture

- **Community and education**

Community facilities, education and social programs

- **Existing residential**

Existing residential cottages

PROTECTING AND ACTIVATING THE ESTATE

A Landscape Master Plan, focusing on the Fernhill House and Rural Parkland Precincts, will:

- protect the heritage significant landscape settings and features, views, routes and buildings
- plan a network of scenic walks, tracks and trails within the Estate and possible routes to Mulgoa Park and Gow Park, the broader Mulgoa Valley, the Nepean River and Penrith CBD
- plan for visitor facilities to accompany water-based activities, picnicking and other recreational uses - including signage, toilets and parking areas

- plan for safe and easy car access off Mulgoa Road or investigate other vehicular access options, including adjacent sites such as the school

- plan for new utilities, including water and waste water facilities.

The Landscape Master Plan will be co-designed by an Aboriginal consultant and we will consult further with the community and stakeholders during its preparation.

In the first five years, we will also:

- expand and finalise the draft Conservation Management Plan to include the site’s Aboriginal history and cultural landscape values and to inform the mapping of Aboriginal cultural heritage of the Estate

- prepare a views, setting and routes analysis and management strategy to bring new learnings about how best we can protect, manage and activate Fernhill House and the cultural landscapes of the Estate

- prepare a biodiversity strategy

- prepare an interpretation strategy that responds to natural and cultural heritage values

- establish a framework for events that are appropriate to the location

- facilitate Caring for Country programs led by the Aboriginal communities of Mulgoa Valley and Western Sydney.

These activities will further develop and support the implementation of the key moves and priorities and, as already noted, inform the development of a longer term plan of management.



Precincts

Precincts



We think about Fernhill Estate in terms of five precincts, each identified for their unique features and how they can contribute to our vision for the entire Estate.

Each has different natural and cultural features and values, a distinct landscape character and context, and existing and future functional and operational requirements.

1 Fernhill House

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Fernhill House Precinct sits in the centre of Fernhill Estate. It comprises Fernhill House, its adjacent gardens, estate outbuildings and immediate landscape setting. It looks over the much of the Estate and sits on edge of the fertile clay farming soils of the Cumberland Plain.

Fernhill House is central to the Colonial-era cultural landscape settings, views and routes of the Estate. It is a grand single-storey house made from stone quarried on site with a semi-circular bay surrounded by a stone flagged verandah and Doric columns. It has an extensive cellar with an elegant stone cantilevered stairway.

The height of the first floor, plan form and façade composition of Fernhill House suggest the house was originally intended to be a two-storey building. That it was never built is most likely due to the impact of the 1840s depression on the fortunes of the Cox family. The grand scale and proportion of the façade features such as the windows and doors, and the lack of architectural detail in these features contribute to the visual command the house has over the landscape when seen from afar.

The design has been attributed to prominent architects such as Mortimer Lewis and John Verge. The grand design and prominent location on the knoll provide sweeping views across the open woodland to the valley and village.

Fernhill House's immediate setting was once open, steeply rising agricultural land, partly fenced for grazing. This landscape was altered in the latter half of the 20th century with extensive cut and fill works, new formal garden terracing, retaining walls, stairs, roadways, other landscape structures and new exotic plantings. The original drive up to the house was buried under fill, a new approach constructed and the panoramic views to and from the house obscured by plantings. This is the landscape we see today.

Additional outbuildings and structures were also built in the latter half of the 20th century. These include a new residence, pool, pool house, large hall building, garden and other estate sheds; a series of paddocks, stone and timber fences and shelters; the rebuilding of the stone arch bridges; and a new roof and additional verandah on the late 1830s stables building.

This Precinct also includes a dam and 1840s ruins ascribed to an early winery. Old and substantial trees in the gardens around the house include Bunya Pines, Stone Pines and a grove of Chinese Elms.

SIGNIFICANCE

Fernhill House is significant as a fine example of a grand sandstone Greek Revival style house built in the final years of the Colonial-era. It is significant as a place that demonstrates and communicates the social and economic history of the expanding British colony at the time and what that meant for the lives of Aboriginal people then and what it means to Aboriginal people today.

The significant gum trees that surround the house provide a connection to past woodland landscapes and important habitat for birds, bats, reptiles, possums and insects.

The early, albeit altered, stable building and ruin are significant as remnants of an early working agricultural land-holding in the valley.

Fernhill House is also significant for its association with the Cox family and their occupation and connection with Mulgoa Valley across several generations and homesteads, dating from the earliest colonial land grants in this region in the 1810s.

Later, as the colony expanded across the mountains, Fernhill Estate became part of a series of Cox family land-holdings that stretched west toward Bathurst.

The whole precinct is within the State heritage-listed curtilage of the property.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural conservation
- Cultural heritage conservation
- Recreation
- Arts and culture
- Tourism
- Rural



“Fernhill”
 ‘Charming and picturesque “Fernhill”
 is being appreciated by crowds of
 visitors. Music, dancing, and table
 tennis are amongst the enjoyments of
 this historic old home.’



MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Investigate uses for the heritage significant Fernhill House that activate this significant building in a way that supports and communicates its heritage values and opens the house up for the community
- Research and communicate the Precinct's Aboriginal history from before and after 1788 in cooperation with local Aboriginal communities and include the findings in site interpretation and education programs
- Protect, communicate and interpret the heritage significance of Fernhill House, its landscape settings, the former stables, ruins and remnant Early Colonial landscape setting

- Investigate opportunities to reinstate the original open rural setting and approach to the house
- Research further and maintain where identified significant late 20th century formal gardens and landscape structures
- Locate facilities for visitors and site management in non-heritage significant structures or locations sympathetic to the immediate setting of Fernhill House

Opening the Estate

- Provide scenic walks around Fernhill House and its garden setting
- Improve walking connections to and from the rest of the Estate
- Prioritise walking and cycling over car traffic on roadways with a network of safe and easy to navigate paths
- Create opportunities for people to relax – for example, picnicking, walking and exploring
- Prepare an accessibility strategy for Fernhill House
- Investigate and provide service infrastructure to the Fernhill House and estate buildings to support anticipated visitation in a way that preserves the significant heritage fabric of Fernhill House and its setting

Engaging community

- Investigate partnerships with Penrith City Council, State agencies or other heritage, environment, arts and culture organisations for tours or events at Fernhill House and gardens
- Develop self-guided history programs and tours of Fernhill House and gardens

Sustainable and resilient

- Create opportunities for social benefit and procurement programs in landscape and facilities management
- Investigate appropriate uses for Fernhill House that embrace and support its heritage significance while facilitating public access
- Investigate adaptive re-use leasing opportunities for ancillary estate buildings and surrounds that are sympathetic to the significance of Fernhill House and its setting
- Investigate greywater and blackwater harvesting for garden and lawn maintenance



2 Rural Parkland

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

The Rural Parkland Precinct includes most of the open agricultural woodland and the consciously curated rural landscape setting for Fernhill House.

The historic estate complex of the early modest Cox's Cottage and St Thomas' Anglican Church (now under separate ownership and outside the boundaries of the Estate) were accessed through the Rural Parkland Precinct by tree-lined drives. These grand approaches were consciously laid out to reveal and frame long views and vistas of Fernhill House and St Thomas' Church as well as the stone arch bridges and broad views of the open woodland and bushland setting.

A handsome stone house overlooks by far the most lovely and extensive landscape – as a home view – I ever met with in Australia: and its beauty is much enhanced by the taste and success of the proprietor in weeding out the thinly leafed and unsightly kinds of the gum-tree and preserving only that species of eucalyptus called the apple-tree, which, with its stout gnarled branches and crisp tufted foliage, is, when standing alone or in clumps on parkish looking ground, by no means a bad representative of the English oak a stranger might imagine himself at the country-house of some substantial English squire there is a unity of homelike landscape unlike anything else of its kind I have met with out of England (Mundy 1852)

Historical accounts indicate that specific natives were culled and some preserved. This is evident today in the avenues of remnant natives and scattered paddock trees.

The realignment of Mulgoa Road in the mid-20th century isolated St Thomas' Church from the main estate and further isolated Cox's Cottage from Fernhill House.

Natural bushland regeneration has obscured key views and sightlines through the Estate from and to Fernhill House, including that of St Thomas' Church's spire.

Landscaping and built works in the latter half of the 20th century included the stone-walling along the drives, a substantial stables and equestrian complex including fencing and paddock shelters, a racecourse, several dams, a large hayshed and new plantings, including a pecan orchard.

The hayshed building at the north of the Precinct is modest in scale and siting. The racetrack and equestrian building complex to the south are prominent features in this landscape.

At the western edge of the Cumberland Plain, this Precinct is comprised of impermeable clay shale soils. Vegetation is typical of the broader Cumberland Plain including the threatened ecological communities of Cumberland Plain Woodland and River-flat Eucalypt Forest. Where there are more sandstone-influenced soils on the south western edge, Sandstone Shale Transition Forest prevails.

The Precinct includes biodiversity stewardship agreement sites to the north, east and south. The remainder is scattered with old, significant remnant paddock trees and fragmented patches of bushland. Of several dams and creeks, the largest waterbody is the dam in the north east. The drainage lines flowing through the centre of the Precinct, although partly modified, provide opportunity for swampy meadow or wetland type habitats to be restored.

Paddock trees and other open woodland areas provide breeding sites for migratory woodland birds, including the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, and other animals that rely on tree hollows for habitat. Migratory birds visit all year but are mostly prevalent in the breeding season between late August and early February, particularly in the south east corner. Koalas have also been seen feeding in this area.



SIGNIFICANCE

This Precinct is significant for its historic cultural landscape value as a remnant Early Colonial agricultural land-holding, as it is for the consciously curated broad rural setting of Fernhill House with its sweeping vistas across the valley, native tree-lined drives and remnant paddock trees. It is also significant for the former visual relationship demonstrated between the historic Cox estate buildings at Cox's Cottage and St Thomas' Church.

This Precinct is also significant for its research potential into pre-Colonial history, including the land management and cultural practices of the Aboriginal people of this Country and post-Colonial history of the frontier conflict.

It is significant for its remnant Cumberland Plain Woodland, River-flat Eucalypt Forest and Sandstone Shale Transition Forest and for the habitat these provide to the significant Regent Honeyeater, other woodland migratory birds and other fauna. The Precinct's remnant paddock trees are also highly significant for biodiversity and habitat opportunities for birds, bats, reptiles, possums and koalas.

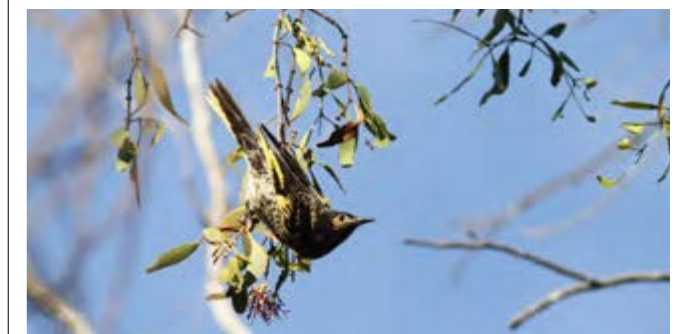
Most of this Precinct is within the State heritage-listed curtilage of the property, with the remainder listed as local heritage significant.

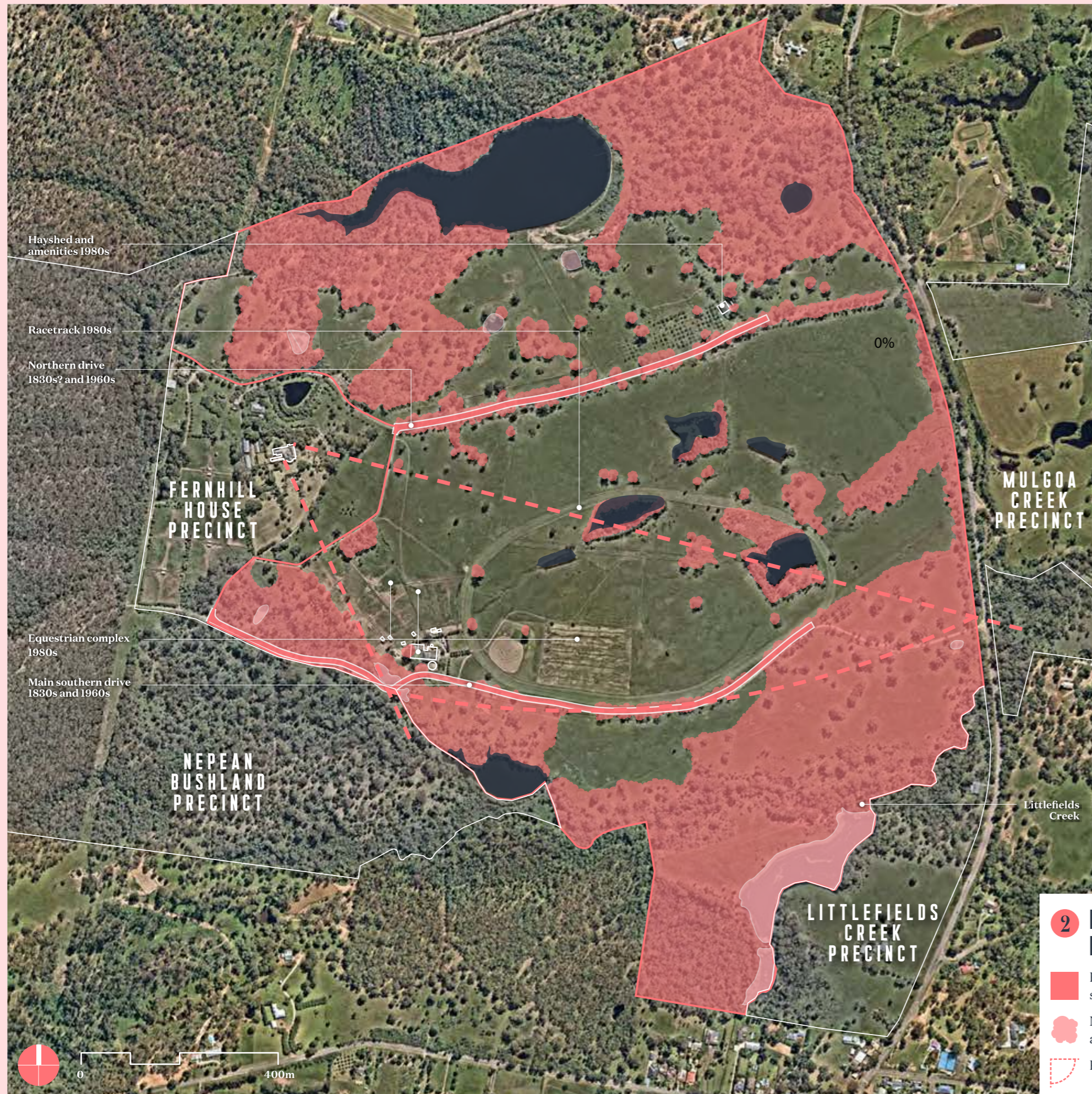
LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural conservation
- Cultural heritage conservation
- Recreation
- Arts and culture
- Tourism
- Rural

“Fernhill Estate is in the east of the Regent Honeyeater's breeding range. It is therefore an important drought refuge for the core remaining population in the greater Blue Mountains. Regent Honeyeaters nest at Fernhill Estate when conditions are dry and nectar is sparse further inland. Preserving and restoring habitats on the Estate will undoubtedly play a crucial role in securing the long-term future of the wild Regent Honeyeater population.”

Dr Ross Crates





MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Research and communicate the Precinct's Aboriginal history from before and after 1788 in consultation with local Aboriginal communities and develop cultural programs about Aboriginal environmental management
- Protect and manage Early Colonial remnant cultural landscapes
- Investigate opportunities to realign the southern and northern entrance drives to their historic locations and interpret their former relationships to St Thomas' Church and Cox's Cottage
- Investigate opportunities to reverse the late 20th century modifications to the Early Colonial landscape setting
- Manage the bushland within the areas of the biodiversity stewardship agreements, other bushland habitat and remnant paddock trees
- Investigate how water flows through the Estate, manage the erosion and protect the soil landscapes that serve important water management across the Precinct
- Ensure protection for identified Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot nesting sites and surrounding habitat

Opening the Estate

- Create amenities and opportunities for picnicking, water-based activity, walking and exploring
- Provide a series of tracks and trails that showcase natural and cultural features, and the Precinct's landscape settings
- Provide walking connections to and from the rest of the Estate
- Provide park amenities at key locations that are appropriate in scale, siting and detail to the Precinct's landscape settings

Engaging community

- Investigate partnerships with Penrith City Council, State agencies or heritage, environment, arts and culture organisations for tours and events
- Investigate opportunities for public programs and events
- Develop self-guided programs for community enjoyment

Sustainable and resilient

- Create opportunities for social benefit and procurement programs in landscape and facilities management
- Investigate opportunities for public programs and events
- Review equestrian leases for business opportunities that could increase public access
- Investigate adaptive re-use opportunities that could open the hayshed to the public
- Investigate opportunities for other adaptive re-use and leasing for existing structures and fixtures
- Look to celebrate water in the landscape for recreation, cooling and irrigation

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Mulgoa Creek Precinct sits over two lots separated by private land-holdings, with Mulgoa Creek and Littlefields Creek dominant features of both. Edwards Cox's early land grant was defined by Mulgoa Creek to the east and Littlefields Creek to the south.

The northern lot was mostly once part of the early Edward Cox land grant, which also included Cox's Cottage. This lot has remnant early vineyard terracing associated with wine making by the Cox family and evidence of an early track linking the estate to Glenmore.

The open rural landscapes of this lot are significant as remnant rural pastureland settings of the larger estate and Fernhill House and as the immediate setting of the more modest Cox's Cottage.

The original alignment of Mulgoa Road isolated this lot from the Estate's main land-holding and cut through the historic drive that connected Fernhill House to Cox's Cottage. The road's realignment in the mid-20th century further isolated this lot from the main estate land-holding.

This northern lot is typical of early land grant plots in Western Sydney that were cleared, then impacted by exotic pasture grasses and other invasive weeds. Sections of natural and assisted regenerating vegetation along drainage lines is evidence of the strong natural resilience of the site. It is identified in the draft *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan* as a strategic conservation area for its potential to connect and provide a link between adjacent nature reserves and corridors.

The southern lot was also once part of the early Edward Cox land grant that was isolated by the realignment of Mulgoa Road. The land east of Mulgoa Creek, including St Thomas Church, was once part of the early land grant to William Cox Snr, Edward's father. This lot was part of a 40-acre parcel of land gifted to the Anglican Church by the Cox family. It is now heavily vegetated, obscuring historic views between the spire of St Thomas' Church and Fernhill House.

The St Thomas' Church site was home to Aboriginal children living in what was known as the Mulgoa Mission from 1942 – 1947. The rectory building, where the children slept, was a brick two-storey building with a cellar; it has been demolished.

The children were given English names and forbidden from speaking Aboriginal languages, although the families who followed the children to the Mission taught the children their language and culture in secret.¹

¹ De Vries, N. DATE, *One Life, Two Stories: Nancy De Vries Journey Home*, p.63

The southern lot is a sloping vegetated block dissected by Littlefields Creek and tributaries that flow to Mulgoa Creek and is predominately regenerating River-flat Eucalypt Forest. The woodland on the drier section closer to the church is mostly grassland dominated by Kangaroo Grass with mature and regenerating trees and impacted on the boundaries by exotic pasture grasses. It is a small example of the threatened ecological community of Cumberland Plain Woodland.

It is entirely under a biodiversity conservation agreement that identifies biodiversity improvements and provides funding for environmental management.

SIGNIFICANCE

The lots of this Precinct are significant as remnant portions of the Early Colonial Fernhill Estate, and for their ability to demonstrate the Estate's original boundary and the historic relationship of Cox's Cottage and St Thomas' Church to Edward Cox's early land grant.

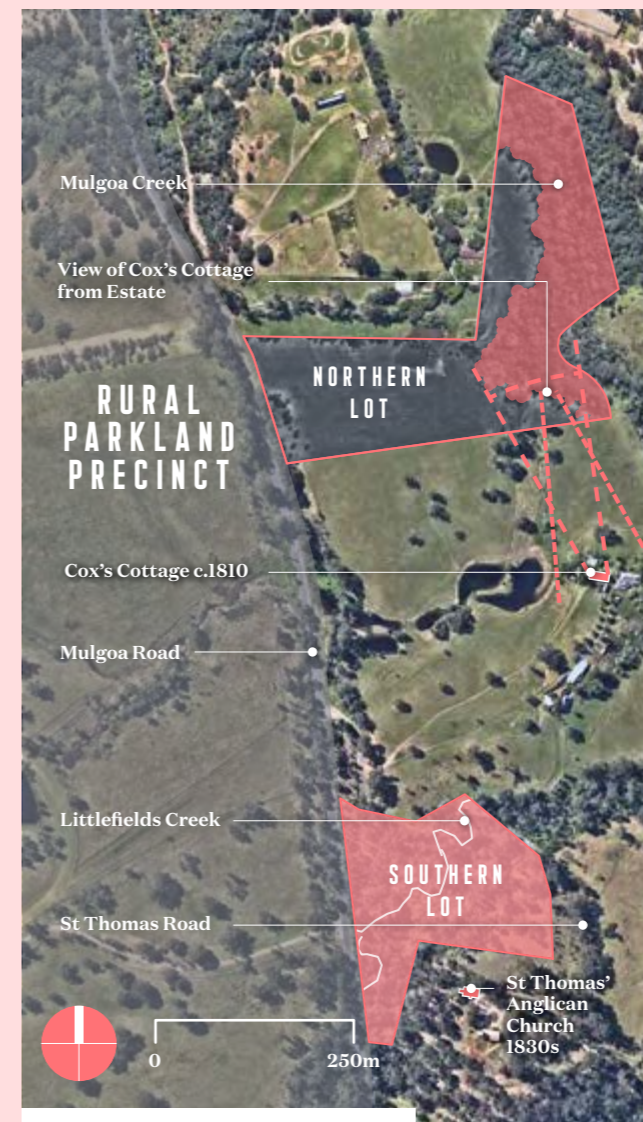
The open rural landscape of the northern lot is significant for its views to and from Cox's Cottage and as a remnant historical setting for Cox's Cottage. It is an item of State heritage significance.

The southern lot is significant as a remnant of the main historical estate prior to the construction of Mulgoa Road, as part of the parcel of land gifted to the Anglican Church by the Cox family, and for its ability to demonstrate the original alignment of Mulgoa Road, now known as St Thomas Road. It is an item of State heritage significance as part of the immediate setting of the adjacent St Thomas' Church.

The Precinct's riparian corridors are significant for their biodiversity and connectivity values between the Blue Mountains and the Cumberland Plain. The remnant trees on the floodplain provide important habitat for birds, bats, reptiles, gliders and insects and many species can be observed moving through the corridor. The field of Kangaroo Grass adjacent to St Thomas' Church is important remnant grassland and a connection to Aboriginal land management practices.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural conservation
- Cultural heritage conservation
- Recreation
- Rural



MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Research and communicate the Precinct's Aboriginal history from before and after 1788, in particular the history of the Mulgoa Mission, in cooperation with local Aboriginal communities and share the findings in site interpretation and programs
- Share the history of the impacts of colonisation and displacement of Aboriginal people in the Mulgoa Valley, creating opportunities for truth-telling on past actions associated with the site
- Investigate, interpret and communicate the relationship of Mulgoa Creek, Littlefields Creek and St Thomas Road with the original Fernhill Estate curtilage, boundaries, Cox family land grants and neighbouring Cox's Cottage and St Thomas Church
- Preserve and protect the open rural estate character of the northern lot where it supports and contributes to the historic setting of Cox's Cottage
- Manage the biodiversity assets of the biodiversity stewardship agreements and Mulgoa Creek riparian corridor
- Investigate potential for opening sightlines from the St Thomas' Church spire to the estate, within the provisions of the biodiversity stewardship agreements

Opening the Estate

- Investigate and facilitate connections and links with main estate and improve access to the northern lot from Mulgoa Road
- Investigate passive recreation opportunities and appropriate uses for the northern lot
- Provide park amenities at key locations

Engaging community

- Recognise Aboriginal people's connection to the area and establish a collaborative process with Aboriginal organisations to bring Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practice to the site
- Work with the Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group for continued improvement of the Mulgoa Creek riparian corridor and seek other opportunities for community involvement in the Precinct.
- Investigate opportunities for small-scale events and activation on open land in the northern lot

Sustainable and resilient

Create other opportunities for social benefit programs for bushland management, and other site management in conjunction with the Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group

4 Nepean Bushland

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Nepean Bushland Precinct sits on an elevated part of the Estate, largely sandstone bedrock with free-draining infertile sandy soils. The Precinct is entirely under a biodiversity stewardship agreement.

It forms a distinct spine in the landscape protruding south into the Mulgoa Valley with incised gullies to the east and a series of natural watercourses running through the south-eastern portion, including Littlefields Creek bounding the south-eastern edge.

The vegetation on the high country is well forested with little understorey or grasses typical of the sandstone slopes that surround Sydney. A series of well-defined management trails traverses the site.

The infertile nature of this soil would not have made it attractive, nor viable, as agricultural grasslands. Historically, it is unlikely this part of the Estate provided any open pastureland and has probably remained as it was following the cessation of Aboriginal land management practices. Recent large fires are evident, with the site responding to the impact – as is typical of Australian bushland.

SIGNIFICANCE

This Nepean Bushland Precinct is a biodiversity precinct on the eastern edge of the Blue Mountains and represents a formation of the slow geological uplift of the Blue Mountains combined with the sudden faulting of large sections. This has created an interesting mix of underlying geology and distinct changes in vegetation species and habitat.

It is entirely under a biodiversity conservation agreement that identifies biodiversity improvements and provides funding for environmental management of the site.

Being an uplift of sandstone bedrock, it is largely covered in Sydney Hinterland Transition Forest with variations in vegetation communities, such as Shale Sandstone Transition Forest, River-flat Eucalypt Forest and Cumberland Plain Woodland on the south-western to south-eastern area where it grades to gravels and clay soils.

There are distinct sandstone gullies to the eastern edge where the sandstone bedrock meets the Cumberland Plain that support Moist Shale Woodland and Dry Rainforest communities. These are home to the Gully Shadeskink (*Saproscincus spectabilis*), of which there are a few in Sydney, and Brush Myrtle (*Rhodamnia sp.*), a critically endangered plant.

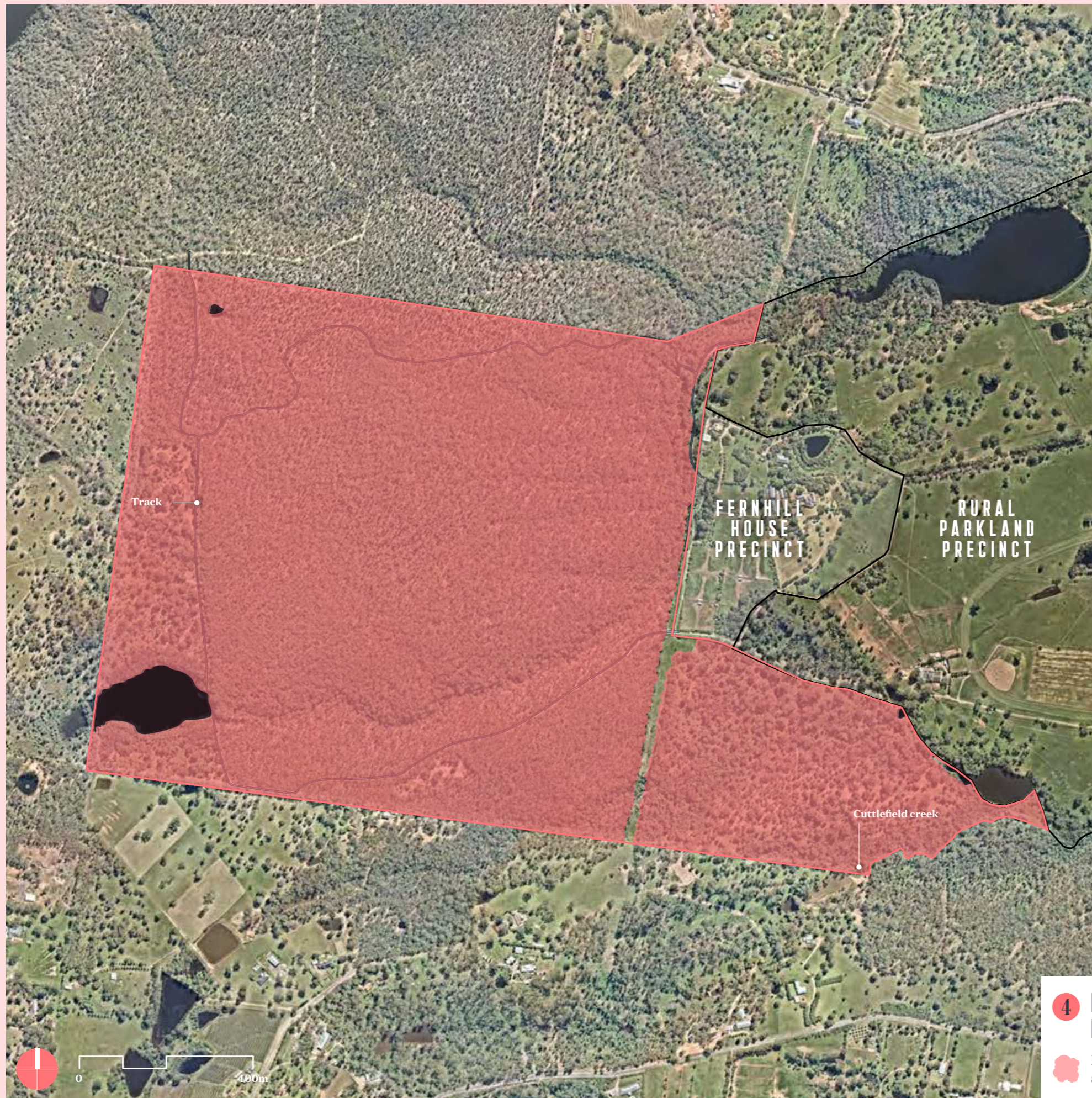
A significant feature is the excavated mountain lake in the south western edge, formed by the blocking effect of the Kurrajong Fault. The size and depth of this lake has been created by excavation in the late 1960s and the fire trail at the Lake's exit.

This Precinct is within the State heritage listed curtilage of the property.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural conservation
- Cultural heritage conservation
- Recreation





MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Research and communicate the Precinct's Aboriginal history from before and after 1788 in consultation with local Aboriginal communities
- Manage the biodiversity assets of the biodiversity stewardship agreements

Engaging community

- Provide opportunities for walking trails, self-guided tours and artistic pursuits such as nature photography

Opening the Estate

- Investigate and facilitate connections and links with the main estate as identified in existing biobanking agreements

Sustainable and resilient

- Identify opportunities for social benefit programs in bushland management, trail maintenance, tour guiding and other appropriate programs
- Identify opportunities to leverage biodiversity stewardship agreement funding to enhance site stewardship and to provide for recreation
- Identify opportunities to deliver programs such as bird watching, photography or art
- Work with NSW Rural Fire Service on bushfire management and other risks from climate change

'The presence of the Regent Honeyeater (at Fernhill Estate) is an international draw card for Fernhill and the significance of this opportunity should be embraced' *Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group*

4 NEPEAN BUSHLAND

Natural bushland and significant trees

5

Littlefields Creek

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Littlefields Creek Precinct is in the south east of the Estate, outside the boundaries of the early Edward Cox grant on land that was originally granted to William Cox Snr. The Mulgoa Village of today is within the boundaries of this early land grant. This Precinct includes the site of the last slab cottage in Mulgoa Valley, used as a post office from 1883 to 1893.

The Precinct is bounded by a large dam to the west and includes the drainage catchment and riparian corridor of Littlefields Creek. The northern and western boundaries transition to woodland communities that connect to the open rural landscapes of the Rural Parkland Precinct.

The Precinct has a large frontage to Mulgoa Road and includes two modern residential dwellings and their associated gardens, as well as vacant land adjacent to Mulgoa Village and Mulgoa Public School.

SIGNIFICANCE

This Precinct is significant as part of the series of early land grants in the area to the Cox Family, in this instance to William Cox Snr, and the subsequent occupation of Mulgoa Valley by the early British colonists and enclosure of the land. Some parts of the site are also significant for their research potential regarding Aboriginal land management practices and history and for the archaeological potential related to the early slab hut used as a Post Office.

This Precinct is partly under a biodiversity stewardship agreement to the north and west. The vegetation in areas subject to the agreement and the open woodland to the northern boundary of the Precinct also provide breeding and foraging habitat for endangered migratory woodland birds including the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot. There are some significant very old remnant native trees in this Precinct.

The lots in this Precinct are listed as items of either local heritage or archaeological significance.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural conservation
- Cultural heritage conservation
- Recreation
- Existing residential



Former slab hut

‘Fernhill Estate Parkland could be a drawcard for tourism, maximised by integrating visitor experience of its setting with the cultural and natural landscape of Mulgoa Valley’ *Friends of Fernhill and Mulgoa Valley*



5 LITTLEFIELDS CREEK

Natural bushland and significant trees

MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Investigate archaeology of the early slab hut and historic relationship to Mulgoa Village
- Research and communicate the Precinct’s Aboriginal history from before and after 1788 in consultation with local Aboriginal communities
- Manage the biodiversity assets of the biodiversity stewardship agreements, other bushland habitat and Littlefields Creek riparian corridor
- Prepare and implement a tree management plan for habitat and cultural values
- Provide buffers for Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot nesting sites and surrounding habitat

Opening the Estate

- Investigate low key nature-based links to the main estate and opportunities such as bird hides
- Provide low impact recreation and community facilities, such as kickabout areas, adjacent to the school

Sustainable and resilient

- Investigate leasing opportunities for existing residential buildings and their curtilage
- Investigate opportunities for small-scale health, community or education uses that meet the emerging needs of the adjacent Mulgoa Village
- Identify opportunities for renewable energy, recycled materials and other sustainability initiatives when developing community uses



Making it happen

In developing this Foundation Plan of Management, we recognise that population and economic growth in the Western Parkland City will change this broader region and its context beyond these first five years.

We have considered short-term and mid-term actions that are set out in terms of:

Activating Fernhill Estate – how we intend to bring about activity, visitors and community interest in the Estate, immediately and for the next five years

Making it happen – the important planning, investigations, building and servicing work that will enable activation and will underpin the longer term plan of management



ACTIVATING FERNHILL ESTATE: THE FIRST 12 MONTHS

By the end of the first 12 months, we will complete the Landscape Master Plan and Fernhill Estate will be open for low-impact and passive recreation uses, including managed tours of Fernhill House and events guided by a new event framework. We will trial short-term adaptive re-use leasing opportunities for non-heritage buildings, renew key assets and commence bushland management and restoration.

The focus for the first year is:

- opening the Estate for walking, picnics, programs and events and other activities, and opening Fernhill House as appropriate for tours or special events
- considering short-term adaptive re-use leasing opportunities for non-heritage buildings
- hosting an annual event such as a music or equestrian event or outdoor gallery
- creating a Fernhill Estate website and community and stakeholder engagement strategy
- re-leasing the equestrian facility, including for public uses such as recreational riding, community uses and eventing
- implementing the first stages of the Fernhill Estate landscape master plan
- making good the Estate, being responsible caretakers of the heritage buildings and interpreting heritage stories
- identifying a catalyst project with the Aboriginal community through collaborative design to initiate a custodial presence on the Estate.

Making it happen

- Undertake site investigations and prepare a Fernhill Estate landscape master plan including access and service provision, costings and an implementation plan
- Prepare a views, setting and routes analysis and management strategy for the Estate
- Establish a framework for events that are appropriate to the location
- Commence service infrastructure provision including sewer, water and better access from Mulgoa Road along with internal road upgrades
- Commence financial planning for the long-term management of the Estate

ACTIVATING FERNHILL ESTATE: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

The next five years will see a focus on restoring Fernhill House and setting the foundation for the Estate to become a major attraction for Mulgoa Valley and Greater Sydney. This will involve:

- restoring and refurbishing Fernhill House and establishing a major tourism destination or arts and culture precinct
- adaptively re-using existing buildings for additional activations
- continuing to implement the Fernhill Estate landscape master plan
- working with Penrith City Council on the potential provision of specialist sports
- creating broader walking and cycling connections with Penrith City Council to create long distance walking and hiking trails from the Blue Mountains to Fernhill and south to Camden
- continuing to make good the Estate, acting as caretaker of heritage buildings and interpreting the heritage stories.

Making it happen

- Expand and finalise the draft Conservation Management Plan to include the site's Aboriginal history and cultural landscape values and facilitate Aboriginal cultural heritage mapping of the Estate
- Prepare a biodiversity strategy
- Facilitate Caring for Country programs led by the Aboriginal communities of Mulgoa Valley and Western Sydney
- Manage infrastructure and service upgrades with Sydney Water and Penrith City Council
- Encourage Destination NSW to refresh its visitor economy strategy for Western Sydney
- Prepare and implement an interpretation strategy for the Estate
- Continue the adaptive re-use of existing non-heritage buildings for uses that are sympathetic to the site and that reflect local and regional community demand
- Develop a dam safety plan, and a strategy for bushfire risk and management

Definitions

Aboriginal cultural heritage

- The living, traditional and historical practices, representations, expressions, beliefs, knowledge and skills, and the associated environment, landscapes, places, objects, ancestral remains and materials, that Aboriginal people recognise as part of their cultural heritage and identity

Biodiversity

- The variety of all life forms on Earth — the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, and the ecosystems of which they are a part

Biodiversity stewardship agreement

- An agreement that will provide for the permanent protection and management of biodiversity and allows for the creation of biodiversity credits

Colonial-era

- From 7 February 1788 when the new British Colony was proclaimed by Governor Phillip until 1 January 1901 when the six British colonies of New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, South and West Australia united to form the Commonwealth of Australia

Cultural landscape

- Defined by UNESCO as the combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between people and their natural environment

Cumberland Plain

- For the purposes of the draft *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan*, approximately 200,000 hectares primarily within the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA) Cumberland subregion as well as some minor areas of the Sydney Cataract and Wollemi IBRA subregions. The area includes parts of eight local government areas— Wollondilly, Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Penrith, Blacktown and Hawkesbury

Greek Revival

- The conscious revival of Greek Classical architectural forms and orders popular in the early 19th century

Mission House

- From 1942-1947 the rectory at St Thomas' church site at Mulgoa was used as a home for Aboriginal children and mothers moved by the government during WW2 from the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. The site was called the Church Mission Society Home for Half-Castes, or Mulgoa Mission

Plan of management

- Developed to define the vision, objectives and strategies for land or a place, and the heritage policies and management priorities to achieve these

Riparian

- Relating to, or situated on, the bed and banks of a river or watercourse.

Setting

- The immediate and extended environment of a place that is part of or contributes to its cultural significance and character

Stolen Generations

- Since colonisation, numerous government laws, policies and practices resulted in the removal of generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities across Australia. Thousands of children were removed by governments, churches and welfare bodies to be raised in institutions, fostered out or adopted by non-Indigenous families, nationally and internationally. They are known as the Stolen Generations.¹

Western Parkland City

- Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly LGAs with the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and the Aerotropolis at its heart

¹ AIATSIS, Stolen Generations. Accessed: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/stolen-generations>

A discoverable, diverse place of connection –
“The land is our mother, our teacher and
our library, the landscape will inspire
the next generation of environmental
custodians both Indigenous and non-
Indigenous, the future of our mother earth.”

Christian Hampson (2021)

– Maneroo, Woiwurring, CEO Yerrabingin.



For you