Fernhill Estate
Future use options
December 2019

Consultation to inform a Plan of Management
Preamble

The NSW Government recently purchased the historic Fernhill Estate at Mulgoa to enhance quality green open space for the people of Western Sydney to enjoy for future generations.

**Fernhill Estate combines heritage, regional open space opportunities and a gateway to the Blue Mountains National Park.**

The 412 hectare estate will make the most significant contribution to open space to Western Sydney since the establishment of the Western Sydney Parklands in 2008.

The Fernhill Estate has a long and rich history with a diverse range of past uses having included a function centre, equestrian centre, race track, vineyard and hectares of grazing paddocks.

It’s time to reimagine the future of this important asset. The NSW Government is seeking input from all interested community members, groups and organisations to help to do this.

This Options paper provides a starting point for the discussion on deciding the new future for the Estate.
Background

Fernhill Estate is located in Mulgoa Valley, approximately 10 kilometers south west of Penrith in Western Sydney. Within the 412 hectares of Fernhill Estate is the historic homestead which is one of Australia’s finest examples of Georgian architecture. The existing historic gardens, paddocks and surrounding bushland provide an opportunity to create new public open space at the gateway of the Blue Mountains National Park and the Nepean River.

Fernhill Estate was purchased by the NSW Government in June 2018 to provide additional open space for Sydney. By March 2019, two separate adjoining properties had also been purchased.

Draft Conservation Management Plan

A draft Conservation Management Plan was prepared for the NSW Government after the purchase of Fernhill Estate by expert heritage architects. The draft Plan investigates the heritage and historical significance of Fernhill Estate and considers the range of works necessary to maintain and enhance the heritage value of Fernhill Estate. The full draft Conservation Management Plan is available here: www.planning.nsw.gov.au/fernhillestate.

Any use should support the conservation of Fernhill Estate as a whole as well as elements of heritage significance within it. Appropriate future uses should allow for public access while protecting and enhancing the Estate’s heritage values for the long-term future. The draft Conservation Management Plan anticipates that several different uses could be supported across Fernhill Estate to achieve this. Future uses will need to complement, be sensitive to and enhance Fernhill Estate’s heritage values for the long-term future.

Biobanking Agreements

Fernhill Estate incorporates two biobanking agreements. These Agreements stipulate that the biodiversity of these areas within Fernhill Estate are protected and managed in perpetuity and outlines a series of requirements for managing and enhancing the biodiversity. The draft Conservation Management Plan considers the requirements of these Agreements in its identification of preliminary future uses for Fernhill Estate. More information about Biobanking and Biobank Agreements is available on the Office of Environment and Heritage website here: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/biodiversity/biobanking

Future uses investigations

Informed by the draft Conservation Management Plan and the existing biobanking agreements, the NSW Government is now investigating options to secure Fernhill Estate’s long-term use as open space, along with the maintenance and curation as a site of State heritage.

The identification of future uses for Fernhill Estate will inform a management model that identifies the organisations best placed to lead long-term management.
Context

Fernhill Estate, although significantly altered during the 20th Century, is possibly the only substantially intact early Sydney colonial park-like Estate designed entirely on indigenous plants and the process of thinning rather than planting.

The Mulgoa Valley, where Fernhill Estate is located, was an important source of food and water for two major Indigenous clans from different language groups – the Dharug from the plains and Gundungurra from the mountains.

They lived in the area for thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans, who began to settle the area from the 1810s.
Following the arrival of Europeans, Fernhill Estate has passed through the ownership of several families, including:

- The Cox family – whose land grants make up what is now Fernhill Estate, and who built the main house and nearby Cox’s Cottage. They also commenced horse breeding activities with two Melbourne Cup winners being bred at Fernhill.
- Hilda Moyes – who advertised Fernhill Estate as a holiday destination.
- The Darling family – who began the restoration of Fernhill Estate, including main house repairs, new dams, main driveway realignment and landscaping works by landscape architect Paul Sorensen (highly respected in NSW in the 20th century).
- The Anderson family – who lived at Fernhill Estate, redecorated the house, built new buildings, and continued landscaping works which changed the relationship of the house to its landscape.
- The Tripp family – who undertook further maintenance and conservation works, including Biobanking Agreements over a considerable area of Fernhill Estate.

The NSW Government purchased Fernhill Estate in June 2018. The Office of Strategic Lands will manage Fernhill Estate until the future use of the Estate is identified, allowing it to be open to the public.

Since purchase:

- The use of the site for accommodation has ceased.
- Fernhill Estate has been closed and secured to enable the upgrade of the facilities and completion of the necessary site remediation and clean up.
- The equestrian facility has been licenced and the equestrian business continues to operate. The conservation areas on the Estate are being maintained and managed as required under the existing biobanking agreements.

The Office of Strategic Lands has undertaken the following:

- Regular security patrols.
- Electrical and plumbing works to make the building safe.
- The secure storage of moveable assets related to the building.
- Some fencing repairs and regular grounds maintenance.
- A draft Conservation Management Plan was prepared by an independent Heritage Architect for NSW Government to provide an understanding of the key elements of the Fernhill Estate and the measures necessary to ensure appropriate conservation and management.

Community consultation undertaken on potential future options between 18 December 2019 and 3 April 2020.

The consultation findings will inform the preparation and finalisation of a Plan of Management for Fernhill Estate by Mid 2020.
Possible options for future use

The draft Conservation Management Plan divides Fernhill Estate into precincts based on the existing elements.

This options paper groups similar built and landscape elements of Fernhill Estate together in to four areas:

- Existing Main House and Surrounds
- Existing Equestrian
- Existing Paddocks and Hayshed/Structures
- Existing Bio-banked Areas

Fernhill Estate was purchased to provide additional open space for Sydney. The draft Conservation Management Plan suggests possible future uses related to the built and landscape features, with a focus on balance between heritage, public use and long-term viability. There is a need for careful consideration of how natural and cultural values align to achieve the desired open rural character for most of the property with other areas protected for their natural values.
The possible future uses identified for consideration are:

**Cultural and activities**, considering possible:
- Museum or gallery
- Food and beverage outlet (such as a café or restaurant)
- Function venue
- Boutique accommodation or hotel
- Camping or glamping

**Equestrian**, considering possible:
- Equestrian general business (such as stabling and training)
- Race events

**Events**, considering possible:
- Medium scale (such as markets, car-shows, etc.)
- Large scale (such as concerts, etc.)

**Agricultural**, considering possible:
- Working farm (Grazing, Orchard, Vineyard etc.)
- Research and/or Education facility

**Passive Recreation**, considering possible:
- Open space and parklands
- Botanical Gardens

**Other uses**, including potential not for profit:
- Animal shelter / Wildlife sanctuary
- Research / Education facility
- Biobanking area – bushwalking

Each precinct is considered in more detail in the following sections.
Existing Main House and Surrounds

Legend

- Existing Main House and Surrounds
Features
Built features:
- Fernhill Estate main house
- Pergola
- Car parking and looped driveway
- Office/Old stables/Hall
- Paved terrace/courtyard
- Pool
- Ponds and island with summerhouse
- Lake with arch bridge
- Orchard and associated farm building
- Covered water reservoir
- Aviaries ruin
- Remains of former out/work buildings
- Former manager’s residence, with garage
- Road access

Landscape:
- Estate grounds, rose garden, lawns, and landscaping works by notable 20th Century landscape architect Paul Sorensen

Possible uses
- Museum/gallery
- Food/beverage (café/restaurant)
- Function venue
- Boutique accommodation/hotel
- Camping/glamping
- General venue hire
- Working farm (e.g. grazing, orchard, vineyard, etc.)
This area needs careful consideration of the interface between natural and cultural values to achieve the desired open rural character for most of the property, with other areas protected for their natural values.
Features
Built features:
• Horse racetrack and stables
• Winery ruin
• Stone wall part way of driveway
• Small dam

Landscape:
• Open pasture grounds and vegetation
• Pond
• Fenced paddocks, many with stoned walls and wire enclosures

Possible uses
• Equestrian business
• Race events
Legend

- Existing Paddock and Hayshed / Structures

Existing Paddocks and Hayshed/Structures

This area needs careful consideration of the interface between natural and cultural values to achieve the desired open rural character for most of the property, with other areas protected for their natural values.
Features

Built features:
- Large and small dams
- Direct vehicle entry to Mulgoa Road

Landscape:
- Open pasture grounds and vegetation (e.g. trees)
- Fenced paddocks and animal pens
- Multiple ponds

Possible uses
- Camping/glamping
- General venue hire
- Medium scale events
- Large scale events
- Not for profit opportunities
- Botanic gardens
- Function venue
- Open space and parklands
- Working farm
- Other uses, including potential not for profit (e.g. animal shelter/wildlife sanctuary, research/education facility)
**Legend**

- Existing Bio-banked Areas

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**Existing Bio-banked Areas**

This area is recognised as an area of natural woodland with environmental values, that is not suitable for uses apart from the protection of the woodland value.

This area needs careful consideration of the interface between natural and cultural values to achieve the desired open rural character for most of the property, with other areas protected for their natural values.
Features

Built features:
• Two stone bridges (reconstructed from original state)

Indigenous history:
• Open artefact scatter and isolated Aboriginal site finds (east of Mulgoa Road)

Landscape:
• Biobanking agreements in place
• Heavy vegetation cover
• Littlefields Creek
• Gorge

Possible uses
• Bush walking
• Walking trails

Any future use of the bio-banked areas must be in accordance with the relevant agreements.
How to make a submission

The closing date for submissions is 3 April 2020.

Interested organisations and individuals are invited to provide a submission on any matter relevant to the future options provided for Fernhill Estate.
Additional copies of this paper and the draft Conservation Management Plan can be downloaded from: planning.nsw.gov.au/fernhillestate

Please provide your feedback by:

• Visit: planning.nsw.gov.au/fernhillestate to provide your feedback and ideas by:
  » leaving your comments on the Fernhill Estate map
  » complete our online submission form

Feedback is open until midnight 3 April 2020.

• Mail to:
  Director, Office of Strategic Lands
  NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
  GPO Box 39, Sydney NSW 2001

What do you think of the potential options presented in this paper?

Do you have any other suggestions for uses that deliver community or commercial benefits?

Is the site important to you for any other reasons?

Do you have any other comments?

Tell us more in your submission.

What’s next?

When the consultation period closes all submissions will be analysed to inform the preparation of a Plan of Management.

Once the Plan of Management has been finalised it will be published on the Department’s website: www.dpie.nsw.gov.au.

The NSW Government will then enter into discussions with all relevant organisations to progress the implementation of the Plan of Management recommendations, ensuring the future viability of the Fernhill Estate.