

3.3. Balls Head Reserve Vehicle Access Management

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ATTACHMENTS: Nil

Nil.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Balls Head Reserve is a popular, iconic bushland reserve on the foreshore of Sydney Harbour. Currently, the reserve is open to public access 24 hours a day, however vehicles are not permitted to park in the reserve between 10pm and 6am. Unfortunately, the reserve is affected by regular instances of vandalism and antisocial behaviours that result in financial cost to Council and lasting damage to the natural values of the reserve. Over the past 12 months alone, the reserve has suffered more than 18 documented instances of vandalism and antisocial behaviour ranging from dumping of rubbish and green-waste, graffiti, and facility damage, to the lighting of numerous fires. As many of these activities occur overnight, after Ranger patrols cease, it is proposed to install boom gates on the entrance/exit to Balls Head Reserve and manage their opening/closure in accordance with the signposted parking restrictions.

These actions are supported by a previous resolution of Council and adopted management plans for the reserve. Funding for the project, estimated at between \$26,000 to \$32,000 is available within the existing Bushland Management recurrent budget allocation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The associated costs will be covered by the 2021/22 Bushland Management recurrent budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT Council proceed with the installation of boom gates in Balls Head Reserve and the adoption of managed vehicle access in the reserve between 10pm and 6am.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

1. Our Living Environment

1.1 Protected and enhanced natural environment and biodiversity

4. Our Social Vitality

4.3 North Sydney supports lifelong learning

BACKGROUND

Balls Head Reserve is a highly valued community asset that is being negatively impacted by ongoing, regular bouts of vandalism and antisocial behaviour, particularly during night-time hours. The proposal to install boom-gates on the entry and exit lanes of the Balls Head loop road would provide additional options to Council for managing after-hours vehicle access to the reserve, helping to limit the damaging activities that presently occur during this time.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

DETAIL

Balls Head Reserve, which occupies the southernmost portion of the Waverton peninsula, is North Sydney Council's single largest bushland reserve. The 12.5Ha remnant is a popular destination for locals and visitors alike, offering unrivalled views of Sydney Harbour and the City skyline within a natural bushland setting.

Over the past 3 years, Council has made a significant investment in capital improvements to the reserve, including the completion of:

- Several new walking track/lookout handrails that improve visitor safety and protect sensitive foreshore vegetation, as well as sites of Aboriginal cultural significance.
- Walking track upgrades including new steps, track edging and a raised viewing platform.
- Picnic area upgrades including new table settings, sandstone paving and BBQ facilities
- Carpark line marking and signage improvements including new reserve entry signs; wayfinding; interpretive and carparking regulatory signage.
- Upgraded wastewater system, which will provide a substantial improvement to the treatment and disposal of wastewater from the Balls Head amenities block.

Unfortunately, the Reserve continues to be affected by regular bouts of vandalism, fires, and antisocial behaviours – particularly during non-daylight hours. To help counter this issue, the Bushland Management Team has worked closely with Council Rangers to institute evening patrols (where possible), as well as introduce parking regulations that restrict vehicles parking in the reserve between 10pm and 6am. Despite these initiatives, vandalism continues to occur with regularity, causing damage to property, loss of bushland vegetation and interference with ecosystem values/wildlife habitats (e.g. removal of logs and fallen timber for making fires).

The following table summarises these incidents over the past twelve-month period only:

Date	Incident detail	Indicative cost
08/04/21	Rubbish left, 60+ glass bottles broken, and fire lit in picnic area	\$390-*
22/02/21	Rubbish dumped in picnic area; broken glass; food waste; melted plastic on BBQs	\$540-
09/02/21	Establishing native plants pulled out/snapped off; rare Sphagnum moss beds that only grow on sandstone shelves destroyed	Est. ecological recovery 5+ yrs
06/12/20	Repair damage to new picnic area furniture, seat hardware snapped off and thrown down foreshore slope	\$1,100-
07/10/20	Dumped garden waste x3 truckloads to remove ^{1. Photo reference}	\$1,220-
07/09/20	Graffiti attack on all sides of the amenities block	\$1,500-
07/08/20	Hypodermic needles on road edge	\$150-*
07/08/20	Fire in picnic area, timber picnic setting seat smashed and burnt ^{2. Photo reference}	\$530-
27/07/20	Fire in picnic area, bushland vegetation damage	\$300-*
07/07/20	Hypodermic needles in picnic area	\$150-*
07/07/20	Fire in picnic area, bushland vegetation damage, burning logs rolled down bush slope (fortunately did not start a bushfire)	\$300-*
22/06/20	Picnic area fencing damaged and fence posts stolen	\$535-
22/06/20	Dumped household waste in picnic area	\$340-
14/06/20	Three separate fires lit in different locations in the reserve. NSW Fire and Rescue and Police attended ^{3. Photo reference}	\$450-*
09/06/20	Fire lit near harbour lookout. Rocks removed from bushland to create fire pit and deadwood gathered from adjacent bushland	\$225-
09/06/20	Broken crockery and glass dumped in picnic area	\$395-
20/04/20	Dumped soil and turf grass in bushland adjoining upper carpark	\$680-
12/02/20	Dumped mattress and household goods in upper carpark	\$320-
		\$9,125

**Cost estimate based on staff labour and material disposal costs only – damage to remnant bushland vegetation and the loss of habitat not quantified in monetary terms*



As outlined above, the estimated direct costs of these incidents, incorporating staff labour, waste disposal fees; graffiti removal contractor and facility repairs/replacements exceed \$9,125 for the past twelve-month period alone. Indirect costs, such as loss of staff time to other duties; damage to sensitive bushland vegetation and loss of habitat values are more difficult to quantify in monetary terms.

In addition to the above costs, there is also an increased risk of injury or harm that Bushland (and other Council) staff have to deal with when cleaning up dumped waste materials, including hypodermic needles, broken glass and fire ash etc. These work health and safety issues present a constant risk to staff as well as other users of the reserve.

To assist with managing these ongoing impacts on the reserve, it is proposed to install boom-gates on the entry and exit sides of the Balls Head loop road, incorporating minor modification of the road island to facilitate light vehicle U-turns when the gates are closed. These gates would subsequently be used to manage night-time vehicle access to the reserve in line with the existing parking restrictions (i.e. closed at 10pm and opened at 6am).

The installation of boom gates in Balls Head was previously approved and adopted by Council as part of the Bushfire Danger Period Public Access Management Plan resolution (15/12/2014). Under this approval, the boom gates would be closed under extreme and severe bushfire danger conditions, as declared by the NSW Rural Fire Service. Due to funding constraints and competing priorities, installation of the approved boom gates has been delayed to-date.

The need for greater security and improved access management for Balls Head Reserve have been identified as priority actions under the Council-adopted Bushland Plan of Management 2015 and Bushland Rehabilitation Plans 2019-2029. Both these strategic management documents recommend the installation of boom gates at the entrance of Balls Head and the implementation of night-time managed access to address the issues summarised above.



Above: draft schematic of proposed boom gate location and re-shaped road-island Council's Ranger Services have been consulted regarding the proposed installation of boom gates in Balls Head Reserve and are supportive of the initiative. Duty Rangers could perform the opening and closing of the boom gates, as the times correspond with shift rotation and existing duties such as opening/closing public amenities in the Coal Loader Parklands. In the event that vehicles are locked inside Balls Head Reserve, Council's security services provider could potentially provide out-of-hours boom gate opening on a user-pays basis, similar to the model used in other Local Council-operated bushland reserves such as Manly-Warringah War Memorial Park (Manly Dam Reserve).

Funding for the proposed boom gate installation and minor road augmentation works is available under the existing 2021/22 Bushland Management budget allocation. Installation of the boom gates has been costed at between \$12,000-16,000 whilst modification to the existing road island near the entrance to Balls Head Reserve, where the roadway divides and becomes a one-way loop through the reserve, would require approximately \$14,000-18,000 including new signage and replacement plantings.

It is recommended that the Environmental Services Reference Group endorse the recommendations of this report and that Council adopt the following resolutions:

That Council proceed with the installation of boom gates in Balls Head Reserve and the adoption of managed vehicle access in the reserve between 10pm and 6am.

