

### **3.4. Gore Cove Reserve Walking Track Upgrade**

**AUTHOR:** Gareth Debney, Bushland Management Coordinator

**ENDORSED BY:** Peter Massey, Acting Director Open Space and Environmental Services

**ATTACHMENTS:** Nil

#### **PURPOSE:**

This report informs Councillors and the community about the development and coordination of upgrades to the Gore Cove Reserve bushland walking track in Wollstonecraft.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Gore Cove Reserve bushland walking track in Wollstonecraft is being upgraded with funding from North Sydney Council (Capital Works) and a grant awarded by the NSW Department of Lands.

This combined funding will enable new track features to be constructed as well as replacement of aging track elements such as sleeper box steps; raised boardwalks; track edging; water-bars and handrails.

The last time a major upgrade was carried out on the Gore Cove track was in 2008. Due to significant access constraints that are a characteristic of this linear foreshore reserve, track elements were constructed from treated pine building materials which have a limited lifespan particularly in sheltered, moisture-affected areas like Gore Cove and the Berry Creek riparian corridor. Despite being only fifteen years old, many of these timber track elements were approaching their safe useful life expectancy and required replacement. The additional funding afforded by the grant has enabled replacement of these timber elements with large-dimension sandstone blocks. Whilst moderately more expensive upfront, sandstone building materials in bushland provide far greater longevity, improved resistance to moisture and an aesthetic appeal that is highly compatible to a bushland setting.

Under normal circumstance, the use of dimension sandstone would not be possible in a difficult-to-access reserve like Gore Cove, however the grant funding has enabled the use of aerial materials delivery via a specialised helicopter lifting service, more commonly seen in National Parks or larger Council bushland areas like Manly Dam on the Northern Beaches.

The Gore Cove track upgrade will deliver a safer, more enjoyable and environmentally stable track surface, including:

- 174x dimension sandstone block steps (replacing mostly treated pine sleeper box steps)
- 4x new/replacement raised boardwalks covering over 40 lineal meters

- New galvanised steel handrails
- Water-bars, track edging and removal of in-track trip hazards
- New interpretive signage

Implementation of the project has begun and is expected to be completed by the end of May 2023. Periodic track closures will be required for public safety and aerial delivery operations.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Funding for this project is included in the adopted 2022/23 budget.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** the Gore Cove Reserve walking track upgrade report be noted.

## **LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

### **1. Our Living Environment**

#### **1.1 Protected, enhanced and biodiverse natural environment**

## **BACKGROUND**

Gore Cove Reserve in Wollstonecraft is one of North Sydney's most unique and ecologically diverse bushland remnants. The 4.3-hectare reserve, which incorporates Smoothery Park, conserves seven distinct vegetation communities – including two state-listed endangered ecological communities, as well as providing habitat for threatened species such as *Acacia terminalis* sub species *terminalis* and the Powerful Owl.

Berry Creek, which is the longest natural creekline in North Sydney, flows down the centre of Gore Cove Reserve, forming a boundary between North Sydney and Lane Cove Local Government Areas. On the Lane Cove side of the creek lies the bushland reserves of Holloway and Greendale Parks, further contributing to the overall size/ecological value of this urban bushland remnant and its importance as connecting habitat between the greater Waverton-to-Greenwich bushland corridor.

Skirting the foreshore of Gore Cove and the banks of Berry Creek is a ~1.2km walking track that connects Shirley Road (near Berry Island) with Smoothery Park (near Wollstonecraft Station). Around two-thirds of the track is in North Sydney LGA, whilst the remaining sections are across Berry Creek in the Lane Cove LGA.

Parts of the Gore Cove Reserve walking track have deteriorated over the past fifteen years due in-part to high usage levels, as well as weather and environmental conditions that expose large sections of the track to prolonged moisture, which in-turn accelerates timber decay. This project will improve the track surface and extend the lifespan of this popular bushland infrastructure.

## **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community engagement is not required.

## **DETAIL**

Apart from two aging footbridges that were reconstructed in 2016, the last major investment in track upgrades in Gore Cove occurred in 2008 with funding provided by the NSW Department of Planning's Sharing Sydney Harbour Access Program. That upgrade delivered works to both the Lane Cove and North Sydney parts of the track and featured (in the NSC sections):

- 85x treated pine sleeper box steps
- 46x lineal metres of galvanised steel handrails
- 9x lineal metres of treated pine sleeper track edging
- 18x lineal metres of raised timber boardwalks
- Refurbished dimension sandstone steps at the track entrance on Shirley Rd

Over the past 15 years, much of the timber-based infrastructure outlined above has deteriorated due to high usage levels (which intensified during COVID lockdowns) and the predominantly moist environmental conditions that characterise much of this reserve.



Above left: Raised timber boardwalk with decayed decking timbers

Above right: Damaged timber sleeper steps



Above left: Treated pine log steps with exposed steel pickets

Above right: Treated pine box steps, eroding and exposing service conduit



Above left: Raised boardwalk with decayed decking timbers

Above right: Eroding track surface exposing trip hazards

In the 2021/22 fiscal year, Council allocated \$90,000 for walking track upgrades in Gore Cove Reserve. Consequently, the Bushland Management Team prepared a project plan and prioritised the most degraded sections of track for repair and/or replacement of failing infrastructure.

In September 2021, these upgrades works commenced with construction of an 11x lineal metre raised boardwalk that curved around a heavily eroding bend in the track (see below), where the exposed roots of numerous trees made negotiating the track difficult.



*Above: track condition before upgrade*



*Above: 11m raised boardwalk*

In early 2022, Council was invited by the NSW Department of Lands to apply for grant funding for Gore Cove Reserve as part of formalising land ownership/management for a crown land parcel that forms a large part of the reserve. Consequently, the existing upgrade project was paused pending the outcome of the grant application.

In mid-2022, Council was advised by the Dept. of Lands that our application for funding had been successful, and Council would receive just under \$160,000 (ex-GST) to carry out the proposed track upgrades.

Combined with the residual \$70,000 Capital Works funding, the scope of this project was able to be revised allowing for further upgrades to be delivered using superior materials.

Importantly, the additional grant funding has enabled many timber track elements first installed in 2008 to be replaced with large dimension sandstone block materials. There are numerous advantages to using sandstone as a track construction medium in bushland settings. Apart from the aesthetic values of a natural and locally-occurring material characteristic of North Sydney's bushland, the main advantage of dimension sandstone is its longevity in service. For example, many of the 15-year-old treated pine sleeper box steps on the Gore Cove Track were nearing the end of their safe useful life expectancy – particularly in those parts of the track constantly exposed to moisture. In contrast, sandstone block steps are far less vulnerable to wet conditions and can safely remain in-service for decades longer than timber – reducing the number of times a track will require upgrading over time; which in-turn reduces the environmental impact associated with construction and achieving an improved return on investment.

Apart from a marginally higher upfront cost, the main reason dimension sandstone blocks are not used more frequently in bushland track construction is due to the difficulty moving and handling each 200-250kg block. This is particularly applicable in bushland reserves like Gore Cove that have very few points of access and a narrow, steeply undulated and irregular track surface. To overcome this constraint, the Gore Cove track upgrade project will use a specialist helicopter lifting service to move around 48x 1-tonne bags of sandstone blocks to various points along the track where they must be used.

Although a relatively common practice in National Parks and some larger Council areas (such as Hornsby and the Northern Beaches); aerial delivery of track materials will be a first for North Sydney and has only been made possible by the additional funding provided by the NSW Department of Lands.

It is expected that the aerial operation will take 5-6 hours to complete. During this period, a 75m public exclusion zone is required to ensure public safety is maintained. Due to the linear nature of Gore Cove Reserve, a small number of properties will be impacted by the exclusion zone and the Bushland Management Team will endeavor to contact affected residents and discuss options around the drop-point exclusion zones.

The Gore Cove track project resumed in December 2022 with construction of track elements not reliant on aerial delivery of materials. Around 50x treated pine log and sleeper steps from the track entrance off Shirley Road to the first creek crossing were replaced with dimension sandstone steps and integrated water-bars. This work included upgrades to the foreshore link track that accesses a dinghy storage area on Gore Cove’s foreshore and replacement of a small footbridge (see images below).

Stage two of the project, which involves the aerial delivery of sandstone block materials, is planned for completion between March and May 2023. In accordance with the grant agreement, Council will also incorporate new educational signage along the track and undertake “activation” activities later this year including guided walks through the reserve.



Above left: link track to foreshore with integrated drainage swale in foreground

Above right: Upgraded raised boardwalk with FRM mesh deck and reinforced hand-rail





Above left & right: Hand-faced dimension sandstone steps replacing sleeper box steps

