

10.3. The Tree House and the Feasibility of Establishing a Significant Tree Register

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ATTACHMENTS: Nil

PURPOSE:

At its meeting of 14 November 2022, Council resolved:

THAT Council seeks a report on the Tree House including consideration of the feasibility of establishing a Significant Tree Register.

This reports responds to the resolution of Council.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The organisational structure of the Tree House changed in late 2022 and is now operating as the Urban Forest Team in the Parks and Reserves Department, within the Open Space and Environment Division. The Urban Forest Team ensures the continuous management, maintenance, and protection of North Sydney's Urban Forest (both public and private trees), as well as the management and implementation of Council's tree protection strategies and policies.

In December 1994, a Significant Tree Register was published, listing all significant public and private trees with heritage criteria in North Sydney Local Government Area. This document is deemed historical and does not provide any further protection for the enlisted trees; rather, as per North Sydney Development Control Plan (2013) Section 16 - Tree and Vegetation Management Policy, all trees in the LGA are protected equally, regardless of their heritage criteria.

The establishment of a new Significant Tree register would therefore add no value.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Nil

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT Council receives the information that North Sydney's Urban Forest are all protected equally under the Tree and Vegetation Management Policy and that no separate Significant Tree Register is required.

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
 - 1.2 Environmentally sustainable community

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of 14 November 2022, Council resolved to seek a report on the Tree House including consideration of the feasibility of establishing a Significant Tree Register.

Management of North Sydney's Urban Forest was historically conducted by multiple staff within different divisions of Council. The Tree Management Team was restructured so that staff could work out of the one location and report to the one supervisor, resulting in streamlined coordination and improved management.

The Urban Forest Team was subsequently created late 2022 and is located in the newly created Tree House offices, in the St Leonards Park Depot administration building. The team ensures the management, protection, and maintenance of North Sydney's public and private trees as per the North Sydney Development Control Plan - Tree and Vegetation Management Policy (2013), the Street Tree Strategy (2016) and the Urban Forest Strategy (2019).

North Sydney has previously used a Significant Tree Register (developed and published in 1994), which listed all significant public and private trees within the Local Government Area. However, the register is now deemed historical and no longer holds any statutory weight for tree protection.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement is not required.

DETAIL

The Tree House - Urban Forest Management

The Urban Forest team considers all trees in North Sydney LGA to be of significance and deserving of protection and preservation, as per Section 16 - Tree and Vegetation Management Policy under the North Sydney Development Control Plan (NSDCP) published in 2013.

NSDCP Section 16 was last amended in 2020. It now refers to the Biodiversity and Conservation SEPP (p. B16-1), as well as clearly specifying the vegetation that needs a permit to be removed (list of species, locations, sizes, presence in ecological endangered community).

Tree protection dimensions within NSDCP were also amended in 2020, reducing the threshold from ten meters to five meters for height and crown width, and to 500mm for trunk circumference for trees on any land. This amendment allowed for further protection of trees and to prevent random and unnecessary removal.

Trees on public land are protected regardless of their size. Cutting a public tree requires Council's approval. Once the Urban Forest Team receives a request from a resident for removing or pruning a tree on public land, the tree is assessed independently by one of Council's arborists.

For trees on private properties, the process of removal consists of:

- submitting a private tree pruning/removal application form. The tree(s) is then inspected by a member of Council's Urban Forest Team to determine the outcome. If the outcome is inconclusive, the resident is asked to obtain a consultant report assessing the tree (usually a AQF Level 5 Arborist's report). Based on the assessment of the consultant's report, the Tree Management Officer (Private) or Urban Forest Supervisor will decide if the tree is to be removed or retained. If it is decided to remove a tree which is prominent in the area, residents are notified and informed by a letter box drop, as well as in Council's newsletter; or
- Submitting a Development Application which impacts vegetation/trees. The application will be tasked to Council's Landscape Development Officer to provide recommendations and conditions on tree removal, retention, and tree protection.

The team abides by the main tree management policies listed below to protect and maintain all trees in the LGA.

1. **The Urban Forest Strategy 2019.** First developed and implemented in 2011, the strategy defines the importance of maintaining and preserving our urban forest by mapping North Sydney's canopy cover every 2 years. It is currently being reviewed and updated.
2. **The Street Tree Strategy 2016.** This strategy is also under review and is being updated with the most recent Council plans, numbers and photos. The Street Tree Strategy includes:
 - 5 yearly valuation of street trees since 2008;
 - street tree enhancement program/replacement of removed or dead trees;
 - choosing species and setting preferences;
 - continuous arboriculture cover;
 - maintenance and protection of existing trees;
 - continuous planting of new trees;
 - management of resident requests;
 - risk management;

- Powerline clearances; and
- native vs exotic tree plantings.

Feasibility of a Significant Tree Register

North Sydney LGA's historical and outdated Significant Tree Register (1994), prepared by LandArc Landscape Architects, consists of three volumes: the first volume covers public parks and reserves and street trees, and the second and third volumes list trees on private properties. Tree significance was based on four heritage criteria:

- historic planting or indigenous remnant;
- botanical and scientific values;
- cultural and commemorative values; and
- visual and aesthetic values.

However, all trees are now protected under the Tree and Vegetation Management policy, and the Significant Tree Register no longer holds any statutory weight.

CONCLUSION

North Sydney Council's historical Significant Tree Register (1994) was critical to the management of significant trees in the past, however Council's regulatory and strategic framework has evolved and strengthened over the years making the purpose of this register redundant.

Current controls and strategies now ensure the protection of every tree that is equal or above five meters in height or crown width, or measures at least 0.5m in trunk circumference at base level. Council aims to protect and maintain all healthy trees.

The establishment of a new Significant Tree register would therefore add no value.