

THE CRAG

NEWSLETTER OF THE CASTLECRAG PROGRESS ASSOCIATION INC

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Seventy four years of community development



November / December 1998

Our FBLs: Council's Final Decision

With a full Council fronting a packed public gallery for its most important meeting of the year, Council's final recommendation for the Foreshore Building Lines was debated on 9 November. There was apprehension all round as the gallery filled with residents keen to witness the outcome of the long, hard haul from the time when Willoughby City Council began its FBL review process four years ago.

Having swiftly dealt with other matters of the agenda, Council then focussed on the main event and the 22 listed speakers waiting to address their viewpoints. It was decided to allow 2 minutes for each, with no extensions. The speakers included 1 representative from the Nature Conservation Council and 14 Castlecrag, Middle Cove and Northbridge residents who spoke against the revised and lowered FBLs of 25 May '98, as recently exhibited. There were 6 speakers from Castlecrag in favour of the FBLs as exhibited.

Many speakers were very articulate, well informed, and covered a range of issues from the financial to the environmental, with references to planning issues raised by the proposed changes to the FBL lines. A few speakers referred to equity and disadvantage and their individual situations. Most managed to edit their addresses to the difficult 2 minutes instead of 3, though a few were cut off mid-sentence.

If the public gallery showed strong reaction to some points speakers raised, it was more an indication of the importance of the issue at hand than that the normally civil Willoughby Council meeting process was turning into something resembling a Leichhardt meeting. Some Councillors also seemed to use their privilege of putting questions to the speakers in a manner that appeared in some cases to be inappropriate and uncivil.

One speaker in particular was asked questions by several Councillors apparently directed at funding over a period of 12 years for a major bush regeneration project in Castlecrag by a Willoughby environmental group. There appeared to be an implication that the funding was over-generous and could have been misappropriated.

A Compromise and the Masterplan

Most residents at the meeting had not seen Council's post-FBL exhibition report dated 26 October 1998, in which Council Planning Officers had recommended a new FBL line for Sugarloaf Crescent which they named the 'compromise line'; positioned between that proposed by Cr Rutherford at the Council meeting of 25 May '98, and their own recommendations of November '97.

They also recommended a Masterplan for Sugarloaf Crescent, as part of the DCP (Development Control Plan), to include landscaping and bushland protection, bushfire hazard reduction, stormwater drainage and land stability assessment. The Masterplan would be required for approval prior to formulation of any DA for 70, 72, 80 and 84 Sugarloaf Crescent.

Also included in the report were recommendations from the Council's Open Space Manager, letters from the Department of Urban Affairs & Planning, the Waterways & Foreshores Planning & Advisory Committee and a summary of submissions to the recent FBL exhibition. Added to this was a recommendation for Sugarloaf Crescent from the National Trust of a 'fall-back' position a little below the Council Officers compromise line.

The inclusion of the compromise line meant there were now six FBL lines to consider: The existing lines gazetted in 1986; the independent FBL review consultants, Mitchell McCotter's line of 1996; the WCC Council Planning Officers recommendations of November 1997, (which made minor amendments to the Mitchell McCotter lines and was known as *WCC LEP95 Amendment No. 3, Officers' Recommendations*); the lines proposed by Cr Rutherford on 25 May 1998 and exhibited by Council, known as *WCC LEP95 Amendment No.3, further amendments of 25 May 1998*; WCC Planning Officers' compromise line and the the National Trust ('fall-back') line for Sugarloaf Crescent.

It was therefore understandable that once Council swung into debate, much of the audience in the gallery was confused as to which line under discussion was which, having not seen the recent report — but they were not alone. It seemed throughout the debate that some Councillors were also confused as to which was which, though they had had the opportunity to brief themselves with the report.

Following the speakers, the Director of Environmental Services, Mr. Greg Woodhams, spoke on behalf of the Compromise Position, saying that it would not represent 'a weakening or an accommodation of others' view' and that the lines were 'still consistent with FBL and State policies'. He considered that the Masterplan would "enable principles to be agreed as to how development could proceed on those (Sugarloaf Crescent) properties".

The main motion and amendment

Cr Rutherford's motion

Cr Judith Rutherford proposed a motion that Council adopt the FBLs as exhibited, (*WCC LEP95 Amendment No.3, of 25 May 1998*), with some further amendments being to raise the line proposed for 203 Edinburgh Road on 25 May to the 'second escarpment' and to reject Council Officers' proposed Masterplan for Sugarloaf Crescent, in favour of a site-specific DCP only.

Cr Lamb's amendment

Cr Kate Lamb proposed an amendment to the Council officers' Compromise recommendations from the report. Her changes sought to revert to the Council Officers' recommendations of Nov. 97 for Sugarloaf Crescent and for 173 and 203 Edinburgh Road; otherwise, as per the Officers' report of 26/10/98.

this feature continued on pages 3 & 4

COMMUNITY BYTES

The Millenium Project

The Progress Association would like to assist in the winning of funding for a millenium project, for something special and of a major nature in Castlecrag. It would need to be something of ongoing value that many could enjoy/use/be part of/ appreciate....whatever. We would like to hear from members of the community on this. What ideas do you have? Is there something you feel Castlecrag could do with, that would enrich the community amenity or scenic beauty? We will be having a brainstorming on this at the first CPA General Meeting on 23 February next year. It's not so far away, but enough time to let ideas drift, sift and filter.

Dad's Navy

We have heard there is a marine version of Neighbourhood Watch operating, which currently advises boat owners to lock up and bolt down equipment. They say professionals particularly look for stormy weather to mask their activities; stealing anything moveable from moored boats. High tech. equipment, or ropes, blocks and shackles are saleable items. During school holidays, watch out for kids in 'tinnies' who run around local waters looking for unsecured dinghies. This Neighbourhood Watch is a kind of 'Dad's Navy' of boat owners who take turns to patrol the mooring areas, check moored boats and report anything they notice to police. However, *Water Rats* it is not, just good local boaties doing what they can to help minimise marine theft.

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Our FBLs: Council's Final Decision

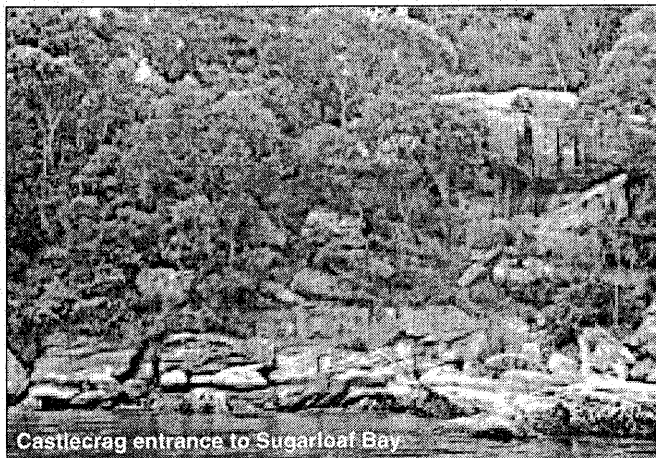
(continued from page 1)

In speaking to her motion, Cr Rutherford said that "no new substantial information has come forth". She thought that (for Sugarloaf Crescent) Amendment 3 would "provide more stability...mean less disruption" as it would avoid the possibility of 5 houses in a row. She stated that the "lower houses are on land, the more unobtrusive they become". She queried the supporting information for bushfire hazard. "Where is the supporting information for bushfire hazard? The owner states that there is no bushfire hazard". Referring to the recent landslide below Sunnyside Crescent, Cr Rutherford said it had "occurred adjacent to bush regeneration" and that the land at Sugarloaf Crescent was perfectly stable. (*Editors' note: the landslide occurred in an area of virgin bushland, which has not been regenerated*).

Cr Rutherford mentioned a submission from the National Trust as being from "one of Council's contractors"; the amount of money being spent on "some of the bushland in Castlecrag" and letters from DUAP which had expressed views that she said were "rather a change of pace for them".

Speaking to her amendment, Cr Lamb replied that "it's instructive to me that (Cr Rutherford) felt no significant issues were arising out of this (recent) exhibition. It is a very hollow comment". She said that if lowering the houses would make them less visible, ask people to look at Northbridge and its houses on the waterfront, compared with Sugarloaf Crescent. Cr Lamb said she had read correspondence re the Bushfire Officers' report and that although bushfire threat may be low now, asked Council to take into consideration what the threat might be if development creeps downslope. "In fact there are serious liability issues to be considered. We are intending to increase our risk of bushfire". She also spoke of her concerns about houses below the FBL, the 'anomalies', that if a line was to run around them, Council may be open to further representation from residents.

Cr Lamb referred to relevant extracts of the Local Government Act, SEPP19, SREP23, SEPP56 and WCC LEP as it currently



Castlecrag entrance to Sugarloaf Bay

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stands, and to comments from DUAP. She said that this decision was the most important in her seven years on Council and urged Councillors not to do anything to bring into disrepute the arena of Local Government, to consider Council's legislative responsibility and the community expectations. "This is not simply a local issue...it is an issue that concerns very many people".

Councillors' comments

Cr Mary Johnston agreed that this was an area of significance for Sydney, but that "when people are affected they have an inalienable right to have the law overturned". She indicated support for Cr Rutherford's motion.

Cr Sue Randle said Councillors should take into consideration future generations. "Will they see the beautiful bushland...will they see flora and fauna, or will there be nothing left? If we proceed to lower FBLs, we are being negligent. It is our duty not to change this line. We are ignoring our own LEP and State legislation". She asked council to "show the leadership and vision and protect our natural foreshores".

Cr Joe Ciantar said he felt the individual property owners had been forgotten, and that Council was "voting to protect the individual".

Cr Mandy Stevens cited the large amount of correspondence she had received in support of a stronger FBL. "Over 2 weeks I have had so many faxes and letters saying 'don't support Amendment 3'. I don't want to support one group or the other, but I will support Cr. Lamb's amendment".

Cr Tony Mustaca said there was no fire danger as people have lived there a long time and have not had a fire. Cr Mustaca stated he was for protection of the individual. "It's really the way we treat individual rights that makes us what we are as people" he said. In mentioning narrow frontages in Sugarloaf Crescent, Cr Mustaca said "what we are looking for is a situation where each of those allotments can have a house of a reasonable size". Concerning environmental issues, Cr. Mustaca said "I like to listen to frogs and things — but that is exactly what we are trying to propose."

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Our FBLs: Council's Final Decision

(continued from page 3)

Cr McCurrich said he was in favour of the FBL in Sugarloaf Crescent remaining *above* the tennis court (instead of below as per Cr Rutherford's motion) because it would still allow space for development.

Cr Fogarty said he would give qualified support to the National Trust line — "but that came late in the day and there was no supporting material. We don't know exactly where it is. Cr Fogarty said he would support the motion, but with the exclusion of 203 Edinburgh Road". Cr Fogarty said that this particular siting was "a planning issue, not an FBL issue".

Cr Bartels said he and Cr Cianar were the only Councillors who were on Council when the FBL began. He thought Council could allow "some minimal development in these places" and said he supported Cr Rutherford's motion.

Cr Morgan said "it was interesting to me that out of 9 speakers affected by FBLs, 5 said 'I have an FBL and I endorse it'. I'm concerned about individual rights also; of individuals who are happy to have an FBL, own the property with an FBL and sell it." "What I am looking for is the importance of ecological sustainability." She said that Council did not have to do what the few active lobbyists have pushed over the years: "It is an asset that is irreplaceable. We need to show leadership and vision by returning to the line of Officers' recommendations of 25 May".

Vote on Cr Lamb's Amendment

Voting for: Cr Randle, Cr Lamb, Cr Morgan, Cr Brasch, Cr Stevens.

Voting against: Cr Rutherford, Cr Mustaca, Cr Oreb, Cr Bartels, Cr Fogarty, Cr Cianar, Cr McCurrich, Cr Raymond and the Mayor, Cr Reilly.

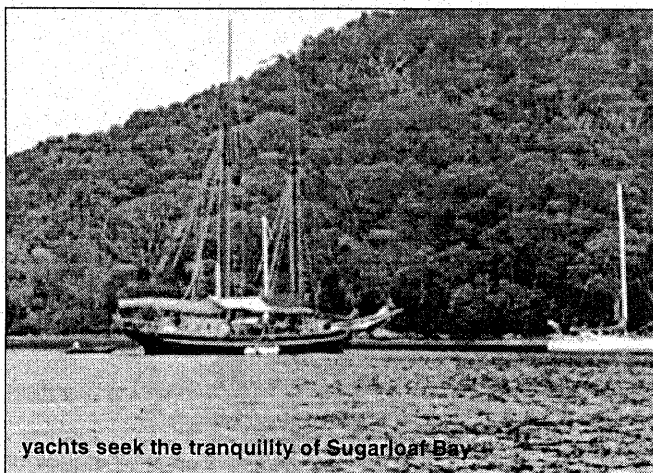
The Amendment was lost. Cr Randle called for a division.

Cr Raymond's Amendment

Cr Raymond moved that the FBL be amended to reflect the National Trust line shown in the report of 26/10/98, with some other minor amendments. She said she thought the owners of 5 blocks would still be able to build a reasonable house on each block. This amendment was roundly discussed, but in the vote the amendment was lost.

Cr Brasch's Amendment

This was for the Officers recommendations of 9/11 *ie.* the Compromise Line for Sugarloaf Crescent. He said the owners of 5 blocks would be able to build on each of their properties and that the line could be justified. This Amendment was also lost because Council was split 7/7 and the Mayor, Cr Pat Reilly, gave his casting vote against.



yachts seek the tranquility of Sugarloaf Bay

Cr Rutherford's motion adopted

The Mayor then determined that the recommendation as put by Cr Judith Rutherford had been passed.

By now it was 12.45pm and few were left in the public gallery — because after Cr Kate Lamb's amendment was lost, it was thought to be all over bar the shouting. Well, not quite. Even though congratulations or commiserations were the order of the new day (depending which side of the fence you were on), what still remains to be done is the gazettal.

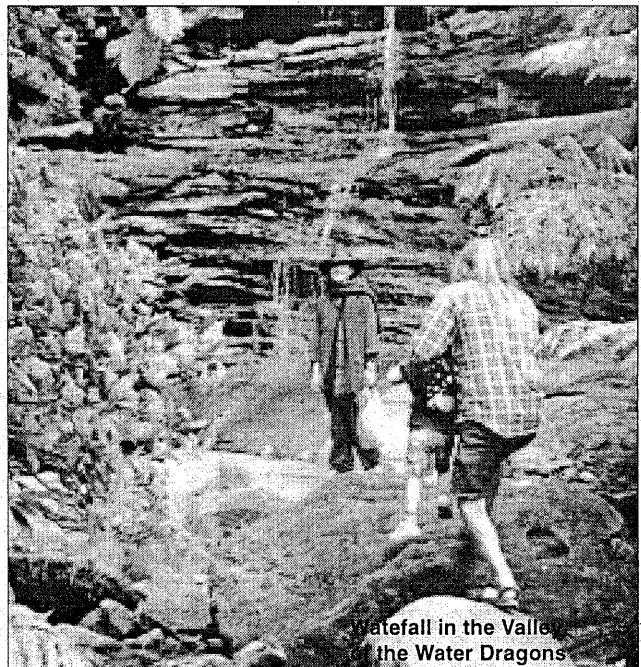
The final process

The gazettal is what enshrines the Council-adopted FBL in Willoughby's Local Environmental Plan, and thereby in law. Council Planning Officers are now preparing their report for the Department of Urban Affairs & Planning (DUAP), for the Minister's consideration. He must approve it before it can be gazetted.

What was illuminating for people who have never attended a major meeting of Willoughby City Council was to see first-hand the process of debate over the most important issue affecting Willoughby's most important asset.

Not only were the issues of the FBL on display; so were the Councillors, who will be either standing down next year or asking for your support for re-election. Would you have them back? You may well use this issue as a yardstick to measure them by, because you will never have a better one.

Editor



Waterfall in the Valley of the Water Dragons

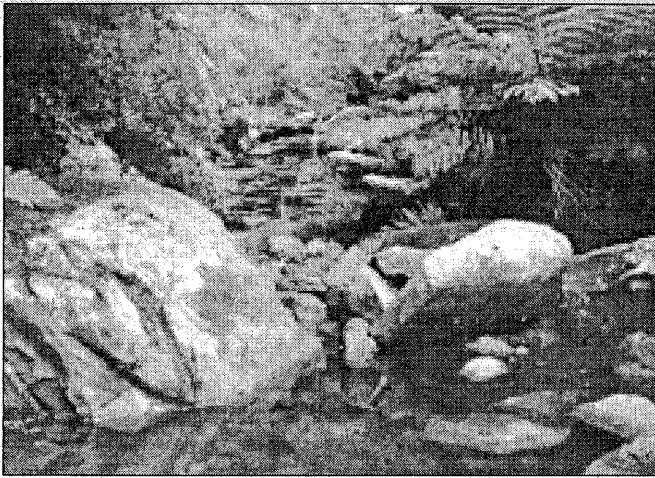
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The Sugarloaf Bush Regeneration Project

a great commitment

Not many people would be prepared to spend their time, energy and long-term expertise for basic rates of pay over 13 years to bring a valley back from a weed-ravaged mess to a state which can gather a reputation as a 'model regeneration project'.

Gay Spies, President of Willoughby Environmental Protection Association, her husband Harold Spies, and a small team of WEPA members have done just that. Yet instead of being publicly commended for their commitment to public bushland, they have recently been subject to some inappropriate comments that are wide off the mark. So perhaps it is only reasonable to present the real picture of Castlecrag's fabulous Sugarloaf Project, in the Valley of the Water Dragons.

Back in 1983 when Willoughby City Council's Plan of Management for bushland was being prepared, the WEPA committee guided the consultants who were preparing the PoM down into the lower reaches of Harold Reid Reserve among the mangroves and along Sugarloaf Creek to the waterfalls. They were enchanted, but the whole of the valley at that stage was almost totally inaccessible, due to weed infestation.

The Consultants, Alan Fox & Roger Good, who were aware a number of WEPA members were trained bush regenerators, suggested WEPA should apply for grants such as the National Estate Grants Programme and for Federal Bicentennial Funding, which they did and received a small grant of \$10,000 from the National Estate Programme. Work commenced in November 1985. WEPA was not yet incorporated and the project was then administered by the Total Environment Centre.

At the end of 1986 WEPA heard the Bicentennial authorities had money 'left over' and they were on a 'short list'. They then received \$80,000 which had to be spent in 2 years.

It was suggested Council should fund ongoing maintenance work on the Project. (Council grants that Council itself applies for are almost always dollar for dollar). For it to be funding maintenance when WEPA was winning the grant money for primary work was only a fair thing — it is WCC land ('our land'), after all. This was the beginning of Council's long association with WEPA on the Sugarloaf Project and it has been a 'good deal' for Council: WEPA does the work as a practical demonstration of its conservation ideals. It provides all administration, documentation, tools, equipment and materials, and also contributes to insurance.

a journey into Valley of the Water Dragons

The exquisite carving of a basking water dragon on a rock lets you know you are on the right track. The track winds in a zig-zag fashion all the way down to Sugarloaf Creek, and once well downslope from the residential area, it is native bushland all the way.

Suddenly you are in a fabulous gully with tumbled rocks, sunny pools and waterfalls, and you struggle to remember that this is Castlecrag, not the Blue Mountains. This is lush Australian bushland environment such as you might see in a photographic landscape book, not somewhere fifteen minutes' drive from the city.

The curiosity is aroused — what is downstream? One can access the creek with minimal fitness, but from then on careful navigation is needed cross-creek and down the narrow passage beside the next waterfall (there are three). Then the valley bed opens out a little. The creek divides into rivulet channels with grassy patches on either side. There is a long sandstone shelf which probably gave shelter to the Gamaraigals.

But natural beauty close to human habitation is fragile. Reminders of human habitation are scattered around; remnants of material festooning low branches, plastic bottles and bags.

People who know this place say that before the Sugarloaf Project was begun, this area was inaccessible. It was covered in weeds and lantana thickets. Now, due to expert regeneration, the vegetation grows again, sprouted from seed left dormant for many years, waiting for the right conditions in which to grow. That is a comforting thought — that we can experience something of the fantastic nature of this place as it was for generations before us.

The Valley of the Water Dragon is a beautiful valley. Let us hope it continues to be cared for so that it will be there for those who come after us.

Marie Bassett

WEPA charges for skilled labour at National Trust rates — less than that charged by some contractors, and there are no supervisory rates, usual with a commercial contractor. It would be hard to find comparable situations where contractors give so much for so little. And no commercial contractor brings with them significant grant money (\$206,000) for work on public land, i.e. for public benefit.

Because of the high standard of reporting and high calibre of their work, together with the regional significance of the bushland in the area, WEPA has been successful in the very competitive arena of seeking grants for work in bushland.

The scope of the project was for the bushland surrounding the two creeks — Sugarloaf and Camp Creeks which form the subcatchment of the South Arm of Sugarloaf Bay. The project has just completed 13 years of work, gradually moving down the catchment. Bushland higher up in the catchment is being maintained while primary work is being carried out down the bottom. It is now accessible to the public. Regeneration has been very good.

The difficult areas which require greatest work are always those downslope at the backs of houses. Ideally, residents could do most of the maintenance of those areas, with a little bit of training, but when properties change hands, the education process has to begin again.

The Sugarloaf Project

(continued from page 5)

Bush Regeneration is *not* big business

The work is hard, the site is very difficult to access and in some places, work in. Weeds must often be carried out of the valley: up a waterfall and then a long climb to the street at the end of the day. There is no holiday, sick or wet weather pay, but the Sugarloaf Project is lucky to have a core of committed people who love what they do and still get a great kick at seeing weedy, almost impossible areas turn around and become home to germinating native plants used by native fauna.

NB: This is a natural process where natives regenerate from a seed bank stored in the soil or spread by wind, birds or water — not a gardening exercise of planting tube stock. Regenerators need to be able to recognise both weeds and native species in their juvenile stages, know how and when to remove the weed species and to retain habitat for fauna.

This area *is* special. There are no creeks left on the eastern side of Willoughby with a series of waterfalls like we have along Sugarloaf. There is a drop on Scotts Creek at Eastern Valley Way, but the falls in Flat Rock are sadly long since buried. Anyone who has been to Sugarloaf can see it's very special. Another aspect which contributes to significance is the large amount of bushland which adjoins the creeks, some private, most public, e.g. Harold Reid Reserve and the northern escarpment, and it is therefore important that areas of weed invasion be treated so that they do not spread further into core pristine bushland.

next CPA General Meeting
Tuesday 23 February, 1999 8pm
at the Community Centre

the Agenda will include:

- RTA and DUAP land on lower Edinburgh Rd. and The Tor Walk,
- Traffic issues
- Nominations: Castlecrag's Millenium Project

RENEWALS OF CPA MEMBERSHIPS ARE NOW DUE. FEES FOR 1999 ONWARDS ARE \$10 PER PERSON AND \$5 CONCESSION. SEND TO THE TREASURER, BOX 6/77 EDINBURGH RD (NEWSAGENCY)

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP

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Our Constitution stipulates that a member of the Association must be a natural person who is a resident or ratepayer of the area (designated in Rule 1.3) being over the age of 18 years and has been approved for membership of the Association by the Committee. Two months membership is obligatory for a member to be eligible to vote. The names of the people applying for membership should be supplied with the membership fee. A person who was a member in 1997 will automatically be eligible to vote in 1999 as soon as the 1999 membership is paid (as long as the qualifying period has elapsed). A 'family' cannot be a member because a 'family' is not a real person. If a company owns a property in Castlecrag, then the directors of the company do not qualify for membership of the Association if they live outside Castlecrag.

Visitors never fail to be impressed at the scope of the project, WEPA's commitment and the results. Gay Spies is often asked to give talks on the Sugarloaf Project to groups in other parts of Sydney and even in the Blue Mountains.

WEPA also takes individuals or groups on guided walks through the project, and some of these have written to Council to express their favourable comments — including congratulating WCC on money well spent.

That a major restoration project can be relatively economical is due to the economy of its work and administration. Willoughby City Council's overall contribution from 1989 to May 1998 has been \$113,512; over ten years averaging out at around \$11,300 per annum. WEPA has won the bulk of the finance for the project from the National Estate Grant fund, the Australian Bicentennial Grant fund and the Environmental Trust Grant fund totalling \$206,000 since 1986. All grants are used for labour and for insurance. WEPA has also contributed in excess of \$50,000 in voluntary labour, in rubbish disposal, documentation and administration.

The Sugarloaf Project is successful and grant authorities show their confidence by renewing its funding. Willoughby benefits from a brilliantly restored amenity which it will celebrate in years to come. Why not start celebrating now?

Adele Barnett

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