Dear Dr Gangemi

I am the Conservation Officer of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club (CBOC). I am writing on behalf of the club to express our strong opposition to the development proposed in the Master Plan for Fred Caterson Reserve which has been adopted by The Hills Shire Council.

CBOC has over 400 members who, irrespective of whether they live in The Hills Shire or not, recognise the importance of retaining the existing vegetation in the reserve and in fact of adding to it. Fred Caterson Reserve is a favourite place for group members to go birding and outings there are organised regularly.

The Master Plan itself states that the reserve “supports a healthy community of endangered ecological habitats and local wildlife”. A Council document called *The Bushland of Fred Caterson Reserve*  lists 92 species of birds identified in the reserve in the preceding decade. However the document also identifies 2 species that had already disappeared. I understand that Council is consulting with BirdLife Australia but I fear that the number of bird species in Fred Caterson Reserve has declined since 2007. CBOC undertook an outing on 7 December 2022 and identified 41 different species including Glossy Black Cockatoos which have a conservation status of Vulnerable. It is vital that no more of their habitat is destroyed.

The Master Plan makes clear that the reserve has suffered degradation since 2010. *The Bushland of Fred Caterson Reserve* states that by 2006, only 59% of the reserve’s original bushland remained.

Despite what the Master Plan acknowledges, it proposes the destruction of 52,821 sq ms (5.28 hectares) of vegetation. This will significantly reduce the habitat available for birds to feed, roost and breed.

The Master Plan proposes the planting of 300 trees, native revegetation of approximately 8,710 sq ms, and bushland restoration of approximately 130,035 sq ms. However, the urban planting is mostly among the reserve’s facilities and therefore of little use to wildlife. The native revegetation represents only 16.5% of the proposed vegetation loss and is of limited benefit to birds which need mature trees and hollows, and while the bush restoration is good, it does not replace the lost vegetation.

Australia is facing an on-going extinction crisis of fauna and flora. One of the main causes of this crisis is the clearing of habitat. Every piece of habitat, especially where vulnerable and endangered species live, is important. Every individual and organisation has a responsibility to help protect and preserve habitat if we are to avoid further extinctions.

On behalf of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club, I therefore call on you and The Hills Shire Council to fulfil this responsibility by withdrawing the adopted Master Plan for Fred Caterson Reserve, and replacing it with a new plan which provides improved facilities where necessary but does not involve the destruction of vegetation.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the matters I have raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Martin Mansfield