

Fernhill Estate.



DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT 2030



Greater
Sydney
Parklands



Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and sky of the Mulgoa Valley, Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains and pay our respects to all Elders past, present and emerging.

We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains today.



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This document also draws on research and data provided in reports about Fernhill Estate prepared by Elton Consulting, Urbis and JPA&D

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Caring for

Country relates to the nation or cultural group and land that Aboriginal people belong to, yearn for, find healing from and will return to. **Country means much more than land; it is a place of origin in cultural, spiritual and literal terms.**

Country includes not only land but also skies and waters. It incorporates both the tangible and the intangible, for instance, all the knowledge and cultural practices associated with land.

People are part of Country, and their identity is derived in a large way in relation to Country

Daniele Hromek (2019) -
Budawang/Yuin, Researcher and spatial designer

Country



Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges that Fernhill Estate is on Darug Country, close to Gundungurra Country, and within the boundaries of the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Aboriginal people have lived in Mulgoa Valley for tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of the British in the late 18th century. Before the valley was occupied, fenced and enclosed by the early colonists, Aboriginal people actively managed and cared for this land, their Country.

Greater Sydney Parklands acknowledges the rights of Aboriginal people to be involved in the ongoing management of their traditional lands and will work in a respectful manner with the traditional custodians of the lands of this Estate, the Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Aboriginal communities of Western Sydney.



Fernhill Estate is an idyllic rural retreat and **a celebration of natural and cultural heritage.**

On the edge of the Cumberland Plain with the Blue Mountains as its backdrop the Estate offers an escape from the city in **a beautiful natural landscape.**

It is a destination for diverse community events and recreation, for quiet contemplation, **for health and wellbeing and for people to feel part of nature.**

It will be cared for to create, protect and share the legacy and stories of the past, with the enjoyment and **opportunities of the future.**

Vision

About

Fernhill Estate Plan of Management 2030 establishes the direction for the Estate to 2030.

The Estate was acquired by the NSW Government in 2018 to bring this significant site into public ownership and vested to Greater Sydney Parklands in 2020 to secure its future for the recreation and amenity of the people of NSW.

It is a place that deserves protection, especially as many more people will be living in, working in and visiting this broader area of Greater Sydney in the future. That's why we have developed this plan to shape and guide our work to protect, activate and celebrate this special place.

Plans of management are statutory documents that establish the vision, objectives, key strategies and actions for a place. This plan establishes management actions to open the site for the public to enjoy and use, while protecting its natural and cultural heritage, and its idyllic rural and bushland setting. This plan will create a sustainable future for the Estate.

Greater Sydney Parklands takes a cultural landscape approach to protecting and enhancing the Estate's natural and cultural values. In this way we think of a cultural landscape as the complex interaction between landscapes and natural systems and how these elements are intertwined with the cultural uses and values from the past and from today.

To achieve our vision for the Estate four key moves have been established for the Estate's five precincts with actions identified to implement these moves. These actions will protect and celebrate the Estate's natural and cultural values while creating opportunities for more people to enjoy the place through different activities such as picnicking with friends, visiting Fernhill House, exercising along a walking or cycling path or attending an event or celebration.

The future planning and activation for Fernhill Estate supports and aligns with the vision and strategic directions established in the NSW Government's *50-year Vision for Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands*.

A Draft Conservation Management Plan was released, and a Fernhill Estate Options Paper was put out for public exhibition in 2019. We also had an opportunity to hear from people about how the Estate could be used in the future when it was opened to the public from mid-2020 for limited weekend access, via a scenic walking trail.

Some of what we heard included:

- creating an open parkland with picnic grounds and cafes that everyone can access
- opening Fernhill House to the public, possibly as a museum or art gallery, or for tourist accommodation or even for use by filmmakers
- holding different programs and activities to help more people understand the Estate's Aboriginal past
- developing new paths for bushwalking and cycling
- using the area for events and functions including weddings, concerts like those at wineries, outdoor movies, or tours of the homestead and garden
- incorporating activities around the Estate's farm and equine uses including bridle trails, stables and boarding, racing or horse-riding lessons.

This plan is now on exhibition. Your feedback is important and will inform the final Plan of Management to be adopted by the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces in early 2021.

To get involved visit
www.westernsydneyparklands.com.au

the plan





Fernhill Estate



About the Estate

Fernhill Estate is an exceptional landscape of natural and cultural heritage significance. It is on Darug Country, close to Gundungurra Country, at the edge of the Cumberland Plain and at the foot of the Blue Mountains.

Much of the Estate still looks as it once did in the early days of the British colony, when it was established by the early pastoralist Cox family through a series of land grants to William Cox and his sons. Today it is part of the last of the rural countryside and woodland vegetation of the Cumberland Plain before you head west over the Blue Mountains.

The 423-hectare Estate includes Fernhill House, a grand sandstone historic house and one of Australia's finest examples of Colonial-era Greek Revival architecture. It also includes significant open rural parklands, large reserves of natural bushland and creeks, as well as an early Colonial stables building, later 20th century farm estate outbuildings, equestrian buildings and racing track. The Estate also has research potential for Aboriginal land management practices, culture and history before and after 1788.

Fernhill Estate is a place of many stories - from the ancient Aboriginal people who lived on the plains and foothills of the mountains in what we now know of as Western Sydney, to the early British colonists in the Mulgoa Valley, their aspirations and the profound impact they had on Aboriginal traditional ways of life and the rural estate that endured as a meaningful place up to today.



ABORIGINAL HISTORY OF THE MULGOA VALLEY AND SURROUNDS

The boundaries of Fernhill Estate today have their origins in the early colonial land grants of the 1810s. Prior to this, Fernhill was part of a much larger Aboriginal estate across Mulgoa Valley and the broader Cumberland Plain. These landscapes were actively managed by Aboriginal people for tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of the British.

The forest lands on the Nepean River at Mulgoa were situated at the western edge of the ancestral Country of people who spoke the Darug language. Their neighbours, who lived across the river and in the mountains, spoke Gundungurra. These people shared a river that followed an ancient watercourse over a million years old, pre-dating the uplift of the Blue Mountains.

People had been living along the river and the adjoining Deerubbin (Hawkesbury River) for at least 40,000 years before the British took possession of these waterways and established a series of strategically located towns along their course.

Most of what we know about the traditional owners of this vast Aboriginal estate come from historical records from the final years of the Sydney Wars (1814-1817). Many relate to the activities of Joe Molgowy or 'Joe from Mulgoa', and Mary-Mary, whom Macquarie titled 'Chief of the Mulgoa'.

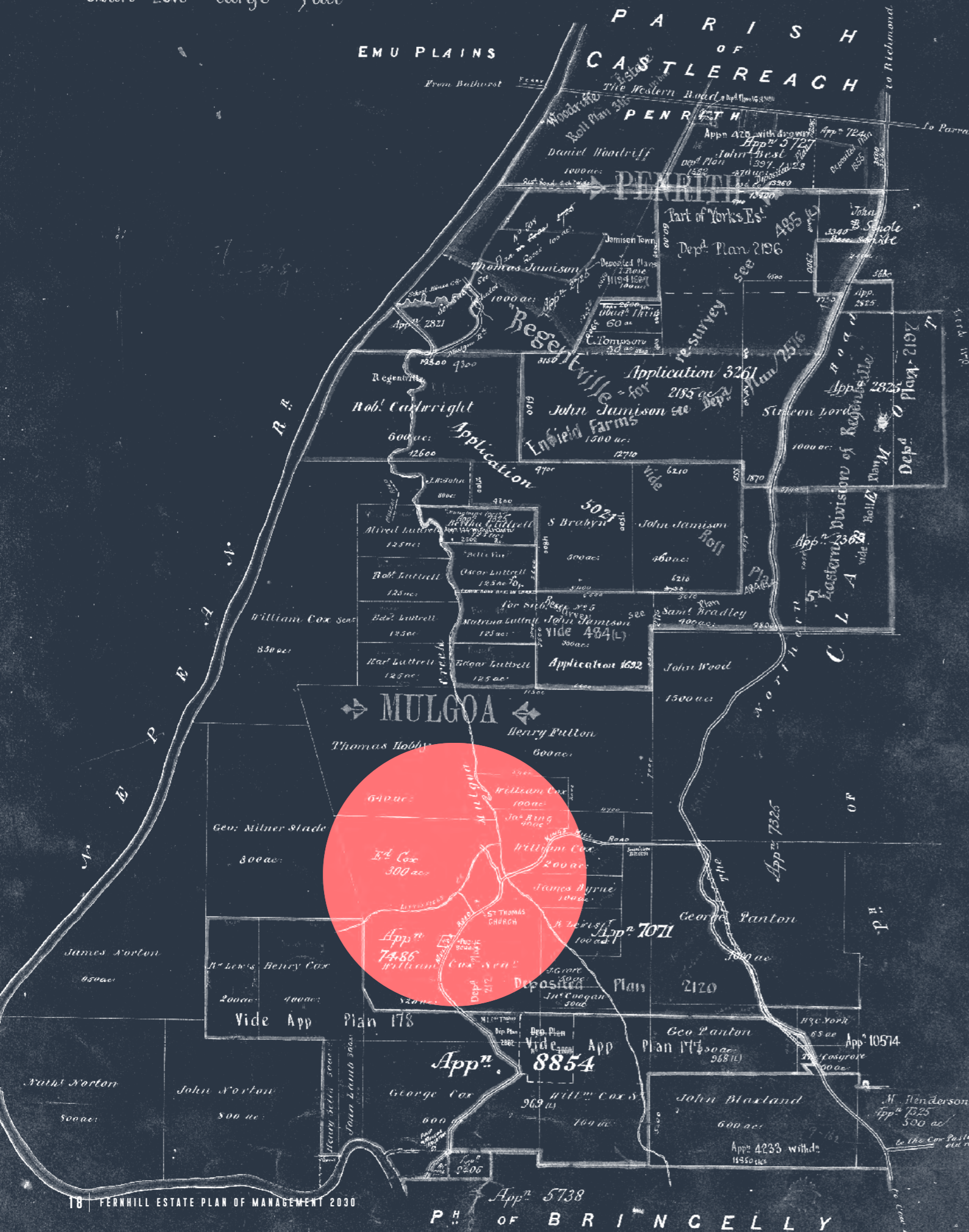
A year after a route through the Blue Mountains was identified by the British, Joe Molgowy helped guide and negotiate William Cox's road-building gangs through Gundungurra land in 1814.

By 1816, Mulgoa was contested ground. Both men were considered 'friendly Natives' and joined punitive parties of soldiers and settlers organised by Cox and ordered by Governor Macquarie to scour the Nepean-Hawkesbury Valley and kill or imprison any 'hostile' natives. None were found during these sweeps.

Macquarie promised his guides small farms between Mulgoa and South Creek as rewards. However, a decade later, in 1826, the people of the Mulgoa tribe were working as seasonal agricultural labourers on Cox's Mulgoa estate for three meals a day and a moderate amount of weak rum punch in return.

MULGOA

Chart on large flat



Natural and cultural heritage

NATURAL SETTING

At the foot of the Blue Mountains Fernhill Estate sits above two major geological faults that have created an incredible diversity in terms of topography, soils, water movement and vegetation.

On the Estate's western edge, the permeable sandstone captures the flow of water down vertical faults in the bedrock. This area features forested hilltops and steep shaded gullies, creating cool moist areas and protection from fire for ancient rainforest to survive.

The Estate's landscape on the eastern edge changes dramatically. This area is dominated by woodland vegetation growing on clay soils with shallow naturally forming water courses collecting to Mulgoa Creek. These water courses have been dammed by Europeans over time. This vegetation provides a comfortable habitat for wildlife such possums, bats and owls and critical habitat for woodland birds.

Many of Australia's iconic native animals are found in the Estate, including koalas, wallabies, kangaroos, goannas and echidnas.

Water flows through the Estate from the large lake in the south west corner. As water flows east it is fed from the permeable sandstone rise that today is covered in dry eucalypt forest. It enters the clay plains from deep gullies of dry rainforest and moist woodlands.

A second stream, Littlefields Creek, runs to the south. In between are the open woodlands of the Cumberland Plain. The diversity of plants, habitats and wildlife is created by the abrupt changes in soils and landforms caused by the uplift of the Blue Mountains escarpment.

Fernhill House, c. 1865-1875



EARLY COLONIAL HISTORY OF THE COX FAMILY

Fernhill Estate was one of several estates in the area owned and built by the Cox Family. It was one of a series of land holdings granted to William Cox and his sons in Mulgoa Valley, and beyond, in the early 19th century by Governor George Patterson, later confirmed by Governor Macquarie.

As the Cumberland Plain was divided up in these series of grants and the land enclosed over time the ancestral way of life for the Aboriginal Peoples of Mulgoa Valley and the Cumberland Plain changed forever.

The Cox family at Fernhill started with a small slab hut, now known as Cox's Cottage, built by William Cox on land granted to his young son Edward in the 1810s. The Cox family were significant in the British colonisation of Mulgoa Valley and beyond, and the expansion of the early British colony over the Blue Mountains. William Cox oversaw the construction of the first British Colonial road over the Blue Mountains at Governor Macquarie's request, opening up the vast plains to the west of the mountains to the British.

The Cox family were also integral in the establishment and development of the highly profitable wool industry in the early days of the British colony. After studying wool processing in England in the 1820s, Edward returned. As Fernhill Estate, and the Cox family prospered, Edward built Fernhill House in the late 1830s, a time of great optimism and prosperity in the colony.

William and Edward Cox and their family represent the aspirations of the early British colonists, and the colony from Governor Macquarie's time, as it transitioned from 'a Penitentiary...on a grand scale' to 'one of the greatest and most flourishing Colonies belonging to the British Empire.' The grand design of Fernhill House and its prominent location on the knoll demonstrates how the Cox family and other early landed pastoralists saw themselves and wished to be seen – as a kind of new aristocracy in a new land.

FERNHILL HOUSE AND ITS CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Fernhill House is one of the most significant Greek Revival houses built in the Early Colonial era and has been attributed to a number of prominent architects of the Colony. It is a grand single-storey sandstone building with broad sweeping views of the rural parklands of the Estate overlooking Mulgoa Valley and village below.

The historic approach to the house was consciously set out to reveal key views and vistas of the Estate and Fernhill House. Early pictorial representations of the house and Estate show a natural landscape setting for Fernhill House that historical records imply were consciously created, and curated, from the native woodland of the Cumberland Plain. This natural landscape setting of the house was significantly altered and lost in the late 20th century as a consequence of more formal garden installations by the landscape architect Paul Sorensen, and later his son.

The open rural parkland of the Estate below the house and into the valley is significant as a remnant Early Colonial rural estate landscape where it remains intact. This part of the Estate was also significantly altered in the late 20th century with the construction of the equestrian buildings and racetrack.

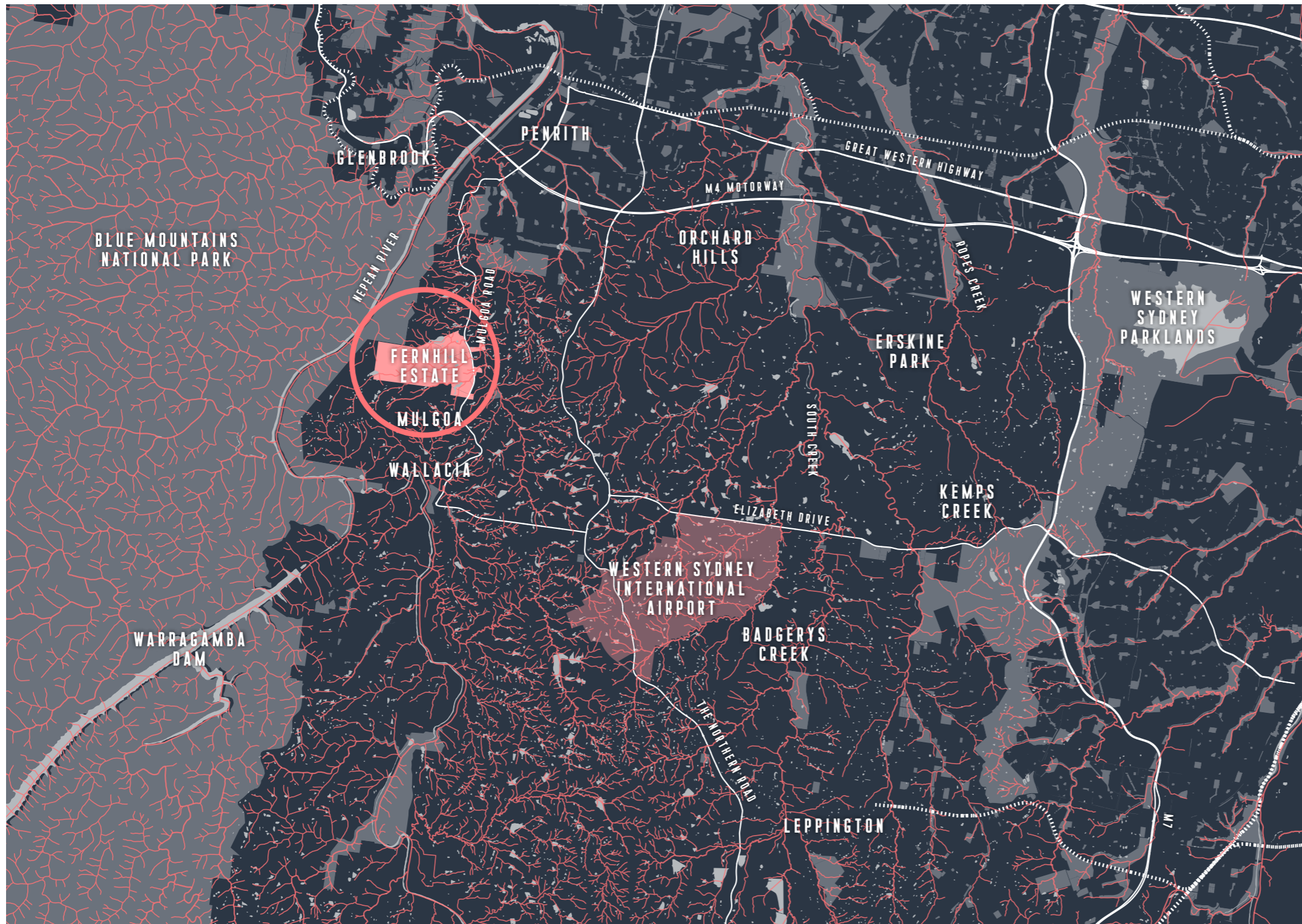
The Littlefield and Mulgoa Creek landscapes are significant as the historic boundaries of Edward Cox's land grant now lost through road construction and land subdivisions and purchases. The bushland setting rising up the hill behind the house appears relatively unchanged from pre-1788 and is a dominate feature in the background setting of Fernhill House.

St Thomas Church, c. 1830



1 Historical Records of Australia, Series 1, Vol. 9, p.442

2 Quoted in N.D. McLachlan, "Macquarie", Australian Dictionary Biography, Vol. 2, p.194



Planning for the future

Greater Sydney is changing and Western Sydney in particular will transform over the next 20 to 40 years as the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and the Sydney Metro line from St Marys to this airport open.

We are in a position to sustainably plan for this change to bring about more benefits to more people. This is about rebalancing how Sydney works – rather than a city where most activity, jobs or open spaces are focused in the east, the Greater Sydney of the future will embrace what’s called in strategic planning terms the ‘Western Parkland City’, focused around the Airport.

The emerging Western Parkland City will be the most connected place in Australia, underpinned by the unique urban, rural and natural environments. Home to more than a million people by 2036, it will offer a greater diversity of jobs and social opportunities for the thousands of people living in places like Penrith, Blacktown, Liverpool, Campbelltown-Macarthur and all the suburbs in-between.

The way we think about the future of the Western Parkland City will make the landscape more than just a backdrop – it will be the underlying asset that will shape the design and location of future suburbs, employment hubs, transport connections and open spaces.

Fernhill Estate is, therefore, a place that will continue to be part of a network of open spaces and well-loved landscapes around which the city will grow and depend on even more.

By actively protecting and activating the Estate, more people will get to enjoy this area’s mountains, escarpments, rural hinterland and rivers now and into the future.

Fernhill Estate



REGIONAL PLANNING CONTEXT

Fernhill Estate is located within the Penrith Local Government Area. In 2016 this area was home to 200,000 people with a predicted increase to 260,000 people by 2036. This comes within the context of vast regional population growth predicted with the emerging Western Parkland City where the population will increase from around 1 million people in 2016 to more than 1.5 million people by 2036.

The people who live in Penrith today come from a mix of backgrounds. In 2016, 21.6 per cent were born overseas, compared to 36.7 per cent in Greater Sydney as a whole. In the local population of Mulgoa, 15.6 per cent of people were born overseas. It is a slightly younger population with a median age of 34 in the Penrith LGA compared to 36 for Greater Sydney.

Overall planning for the Western Parkland City is based on forecasts of increasingly higher numbers of people at each end of the age spectrum. This means we need to plan for more families with young children and more older people in the area, along with people with more diverse backgrounds. Understanding what the community is like today, how it might be in the future, and what their recreation aspirations might be in the future has informed the key moves and priorities in this plan. Penrith City Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement recognises the importance of significant places like Fernhill Estate in greater Penrith area.

European heritage-listed buildings and places provide cultural value, identity, and a connection to the past. Their preservation assists in telling the story of the people, places and events which have shaped Penrith into the City it is today.

The Estate also sits within the Western City District of the Greater Sydney Commission's *Greater Sydney Region Plan*. The strategic planning documents for this district set a vision for Greater Sydney to evolve and grow as 'A city in its landscape', where green spaces and landscapes are valued as an integral part of the city.

Places like Fernhill Estate – as a natural landscape and a respite from the busy city - will form part of a network of green spaces and waterways that will be the backbone of the Western Parkland City.

Many of the *Western City District Plan's* priorities will shape the way we plan for and protect the future of Fernhill Estate so that its key values support the vision for a sustainable, liveable and productive Western Parkland City.

Fernhill Estate is already a beautiful place – under the guardianship of the Greater Sydney Parklands and with strong partnerships with the community, stakeholders, Penrith City Council and the NSW Government it will be one of many special places for the community in Greater Sydney that will flourish over time.

STATUTORY MANAGEMENT LISTINGS AND AGREEMENTS

In managing and activating the Estate, Greater Sydney Parklands must align with State and local statutory frameworks, statutory heritage listings, biodiversity agreements and its our own operational requirements.

Fernhill Estate will be vested in Greater Sydney Parklands under the *Western Sydney Parklands Act 2006*. This Act and its regulations define the operational requirements of the Trust in its activation and management of Fernhill Estate. The sustainable business model for Western Sydney Parklands will underpin the way forward to create long term sustainability at Fernhill Estate.

STATUTORY HERITAGE LISTINGS

Most of Fernhill Estate is on the State Heritage Register including Fernhill House and its immediate setting, the bushland to the west of the house and the majority of the open land and bushland to the east, including adjacent to St Thomas Church.

The remainder of the Estate is listed as a place of local heritage significance by Penrith City Council. Penrith City Council has also listed the entire Estate and its broader curtilage, as well as the historic alignment of Mulgoa Road associated with the Colonial estate, as items of local heritage significance.

Greater Sydney Parklands is also obliged under the *Heritage Act 1977* to maintain a register of heritage items

owned and managed by the Agency. Fernhill Estate will be included in this register.

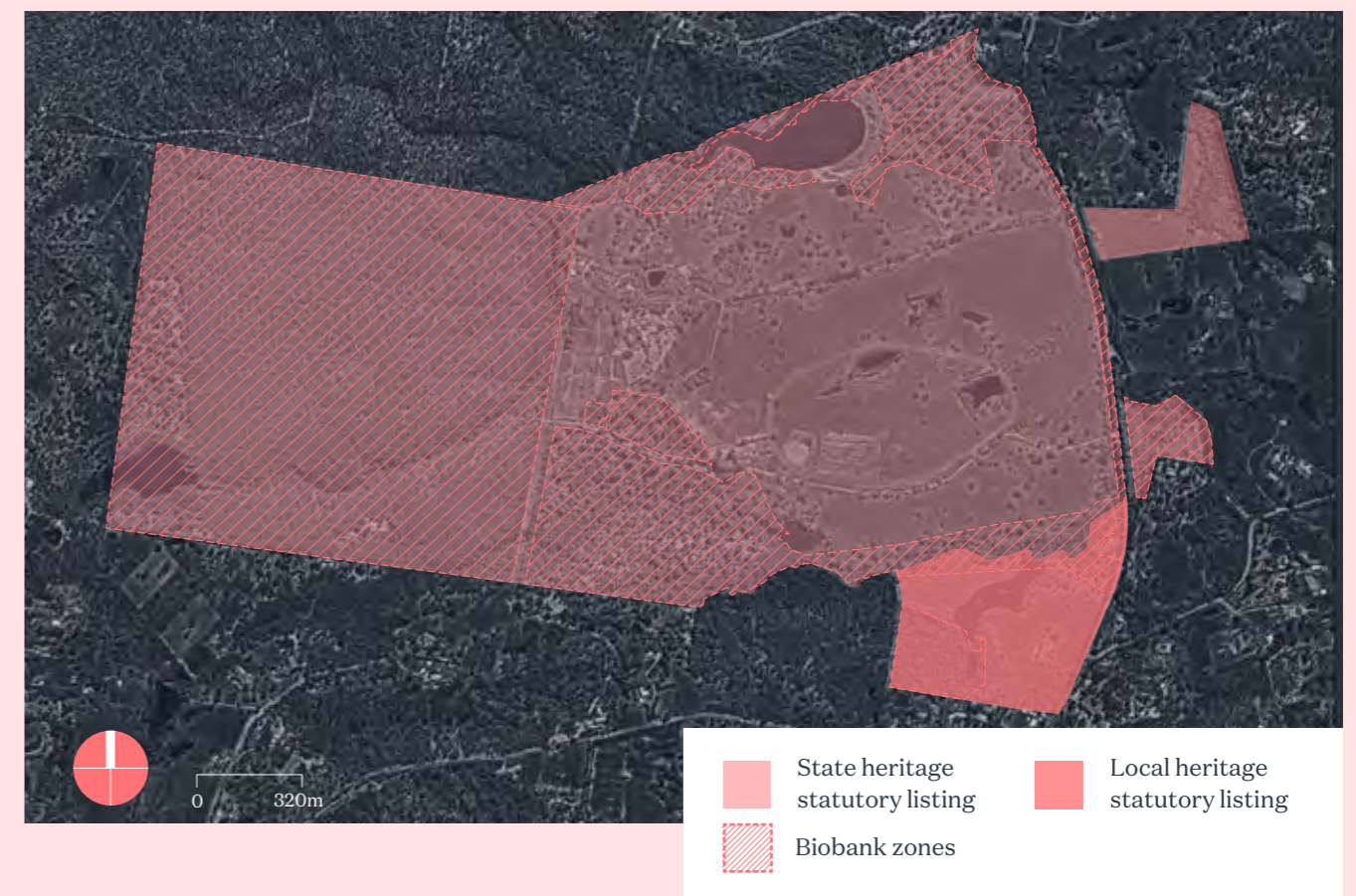
These listings means all activities to improve and activate Fernhill Estate must also conserve the heritage significance of the place including associated fabric, settings, views, archaeological sites and places of Aboriginal significance.

BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENTS

More than 60 per cent of the Estate is under biodiversity stewardship agreements. These ensure the permanent protection and management of biodiversity and also allows for annual Biodiversity Stewardship Payments Fund contributions.

This means some areas are restricted only to activities that will not have a negative effect on the Estate's biodiversity – meaning these areas can still be used, but for more passive activities. The public's use of these lands will be investigated.

A 10-hectare area of the Estate on the eastern side of Mulgoa Road is identified as a strategic conservation area under the draft *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan*. The land may be used as part of a broader biodiversity connection from the Cumberland Plain to the Blue Mountains, which may mean the land will be subject to further planning controls.



50 YEAR OPEN SPACE AND PARKLANDS VISION

The planning and activation of Fernhill Estate is underpinned by the strategic directions established as part of the NSW Government's 50-Year Vision for *Greater Sydney's Open Space and Parklands*. These are:

- Strategic direction 1: Growing parks for people
- Strategic direction 2: Connecting people to parks
- Strategic direction 3: Keeping Sydney green and vibrant
- Strategic direction 4: Caring for the environment.

This means planning for Fernhill Estate to be a place that:

- is a new iconic park for Greater Sydney that is accessible to everyone, and offers flexible and multipurpose green spaces for a range of people and experiences
- can benefit people and their quality of life, while being well connected to surrounding neighbours, transport links and local and regional walking and cycling networks including along the Nepean River and to Penrith CBD
- has real significance for local, regional and international visitors, offering a remarkable, memorable and distinctive experience in an exceptional cultural landscape for everyone who visits
- helps us improve the Estate's natural environment, including extensive native vegetation across the Estate and helps us to consider the bigger-picture impacts of a changing climate such as heat management and shade, water security and sustainable management.

The NSW Government also released a draft *Public Spaces Charter* in 2020 – a commitment to protect the diverse range of public spaces that resonate with history and memory and shape how people enjoy and experience where they live, work or visit. The draft Charter has also informed this Plan of Management.





Key moves and opportunities

Key moves and opportunities



We have established four Estate-wide key moves that will directly inform and guide the next 10 years of our custodianship of Fernhill Estate. These are underpinned by the four strategic directions established in the 50-year vision.

These key moves will shape the decisions we make about the site's future over the next 10 years to create a sustainable business model for the site over the long term.

We also want people to learn more about Fernhill Estate – make it easy for them to visit and to move about. We want to offer them many ways to enjoy the Estate.

Importantly, we want to be responsible custodians and protect these significant landscapes and buildings that tell stories of the ancient and recent past, and bring back the plants, birds and animals that always brought life to this area.

KEY MOVES

Estate stewardship

As the community's custodians of the Estate we will work with the local community and professionals to identify, conserve, restore, enhance and communicate the Estate's natural and cultural heritage values. This is about a future that respects the past.

Opening the Estate

With the Estate now in public ownership we will start to make more of the land available for the community. Over time the Estate will be a place for recreational activities such as bushwalking, bike riding and specialised sports, events, cultural and artistic programs or as a new tourism destination. It will attract local, regional and national visitors for different reasons and in different ways.

Engaging community

As an emerging major recreational destination for the Western Parkland City, Fernhill Estate will be a place that local communities – and communities from across Greater Sydney – can feel a part of.

The immediate neighbours in the Mulgoa Valley will discover a remarkable area on their doorstep, and communities in the Penrith area and Greater Sydney will enjoy programs and events to feel part of this special place.

Sustainable and resilient

We must be responsible and smart about the Estate's future. The way we operate and the way we sustainably fund the ongoing restoration, enhancement and management of the Estate is paramount to long-term sustainability. Creating leasing opportunities in the Littlefields Creek Precinct adjacent to Mulgoa Village for uses that complement the Village and provide benefits for residents or Estate visitors will create a long-term sustainable business model to activate and manage the whole Estate.

Any revenues coming from these lease opportunities will only be used to maintain Fernhill Estate and support its future, providing management revenues in perpetuity. Specific land use opportunities will be investigated and will be determined as demand for new land uses emerges and where they are compatible with the characteristics of the Village and the Estate.

The Key Moves will be supported by detailed analysis and planning for the Estate in terms of protecting its many heritage and environment values.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

We have identified the following land uses to support the key moves:

- **Cultural heritage conservation**
(Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage)
- **Arts and culture**
(events, programs, tours, public art, markets, weddings)
- **Natural conservation**
(bushland, habitat, waterways and lakes, biodiversity stewardship sites)
- **Recreation**
(picnic, play, kickabout, walking, cycling, open space, specialist sports, horse riding, bushwalking, birdwatching, canoeing and orienteering)
- **Tourism**
(camping, glamping, cabins, boutique accommodation, supporting retail, food and beverage, health spa and wellness)
- **Rural**
(equestrian facilities, agistment, bridle trails, agriculture)
- **Community, lifestyle and Education**
(including community facilities, education and opportunities that link to Mulgoa Village)
- **Existing residential**
(existing residential cottages)

PROTECTING AND ACTIVATING THE ESTATE

We will prepare a Landscape Master Plan for the Estate that will:

- protect its natural and cultural heritage significant landscape settings and features, views routes and buildings
- facilitate Caring for Country programs by the Aboriginal communities of Mulgoa Valley and Western Sydney
- plan a network of scenic walks, tracks and trails within the Estate and connecting to Mulgoa Valley, the Nepean River and Penrith CBD
- plan for new recreation facilities that people can use while picnicking or to be active on the water, and other facilities like public toilets and car parking
- plan for safe and easy car access into the Estate off Mulgoa Road
- plan for services such as sewer and water

To further our understanding of the Estate, we will expand the draft Conservation Management Plan to include the site's Aboriginal history and cultural landscape values and facilitate Aboriginal cultural heritage mapping of the Estate. This work will bring new learnings about how best we can protect, manage and activate the Estate.

We will also prepare a biodiversity strategy for the Estate and an interpretation strategy that responds to the natural and cultural heritage values of the place.



Precincts

Precincts



Fernhill Estate Plan of Management 2030 identifies five precincts that will each be planned for in terms of our vision for the entire Estate, but also in recognition of their unique features.

Each precinct has different natural and cultural features and values, a distinct landscape character and context, and existing and future functional and operational requirements.

We introduce each of these precincts in detail and summarise their significance. The land use opportunities for each precinct are identified and the management priorities set out how we will implement the key moves for the Estate in each precinct.

1 Fernhill House

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Fernhill House Precinct sits in the centre of Fernhill Estate. It comprises Fernhill House, its adjacent gardens, estate outbuildings and immediate landscape setting. It looks over the much of the Estate and sits on very edge of the fertile clay farming soils of the Cumberland Plain.

The design of Fernhill House has been attributed to prominent architects such as Mortimer Lewis and John Verge. Its grand design and prominent location on the knoll provides sweeping views across the open woodland to the valley and village – elements that speak to how the early landed pastoral classes saw themselves and wished to be seen, as a kind of new aristocracy in a new land.

It is a single-storey house made from stone quarried on site with a grand semi-circular bay with a stone flagged verandah of stone Doric columns. It has an extensive cellar with a stone cantilevered stairway.

The height of the first floor, plan form and façade composition suggest the house was originally intended to be a two-storey building. That it was never built is most likely due to the impact of the 1840s depression on the fortunes of the Cox family.

Fernhill House’s immediate setting was once open steeply rising agricultural land, partly fenced for grazing. This landscape was altered in the latter half of the 20th century with extensive cut and fill works, new formal garden terracing, retaining walls, stairs, roadways and other landscape structures and new exotic plantings.

The original drive up to the house was buried under fill, a new approach constructed and the panoramic views to and from the house were obscured by plantings. This is the landscape we see today.

Additional outbuildings and structures also built in the latter half of the 20th century include a new residence, pool, pool house, large hall building, garden and other estate sheds and a series of paddocks, stone and timber fences and shelters and the rebuilding of the stone arch bridges.

The late 1830s stables building was altered with a new roof and additional verandah.

This precinct also includes a dam and 1840s ruins ascribed to an early winery. Old and substantial trees in the gardens around the house include Bunya pines, Stone pines and a grove of Chinese Elms.

SIGNIFICANCE

Fernhill House is significant as a fine example of a grand sandstone Greek Revival style house built in the final years of the Colonial era. It is significant as a place that demonstrates and communicates the social and economic history of the British colony at time.

The early, albeit altered, stable building and ruin are significant as remnants of an early working agricultural land holding in the valley.

Fernhill House is also significant for its association with the Cox family and their occupation and association with Mulgoa Valley across several generations and homesteads, dating from the earliest colonial land grants in this region in the 1810s.

Later, as the colony expanded across the mountains, Fernhill Estate became part of series of Cox family land holdings that stretched west toward Bathurst.

All of this precinct is within the State heritage-listed curtilage of the property.

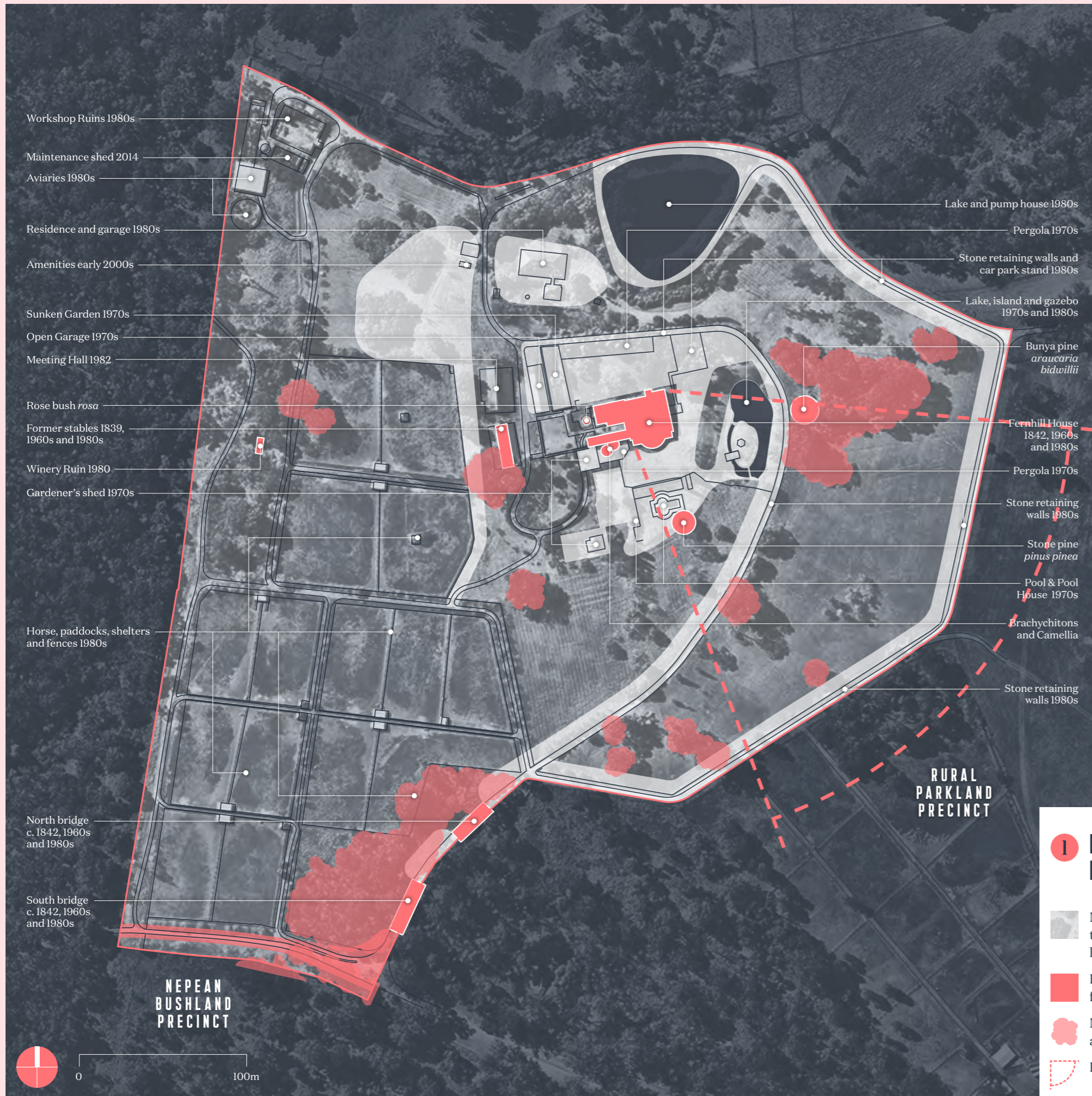
LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural Conservation
- Cultural Heritage Conservation
- Recreation
- Arts and Culture
- Tourism
- Rural







“Fernhill”
 “Charming and picturesque “Fornà’i”
 is being appreciated by crowds of
 visitors. Music, dancing, and table
 tennis are amongst the enjoyments of
 this historic old home.*





1 FERNHILL HOUSE

-  Modifications to early colonial landforms
-  Heritage significant features
-  Natural bushland and significant trees
-  Key views and vistas

MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Research and communicate the Precinct's Aboriginal history from before and after 1788 in cooperation with local Aboriginal communities
- Protect and conserve the heritage significant Fernhill House, former stables, ruins and remnant setting
- Investigate opportunities to reinstate the original open rural setting and approach to the house

Opening the Estate

- Provide scenic walks around Fernhill House and garden setting
- Improve walking connections to and from the rest of the Estate
- Prioritise walking and cycling over car traffic on roadways with a network of safe and easy to navigate paths
- Create opportunities for people to relax – for example, picnicking, walking and exploring
- Prepare an accessibility strategy for Fernhill House

Engaging Community

- Investigate partnerships with Penrith City Council, State agencies or other heritage, environment, arts and culture organisations for tours and events of Fernhill House and gardens
- Develop self-guided history programs and tours of Fernhill House and gardens

Sustainable and Resilient

- Maintain, where retained, late 20th century formal gardens and landscape structures
- Locate facilities for visitors and site management in non-heritage significant structures or locations sympathetic to the immediate setting of Fernhill House
- Investigate appropriate uses for Fernhill House that embrace its heritage significance and facilitate public access
- Investigate leasing opportunities for ancillary estate buildings and surrounds that are sympathetic to the significance of Fernhill House and its setting
- Create opportunities for social benefit programs for landscape and facilities management
- Investigate and provide service infrastructure to the Fernhill House and estate buildings to support anticipated visitation
- Investigate greywater harvesting for garden and lawn maintenance

2 Rural Parkland

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

The Rural Parkland Precinct includes most of the open agricultural woodland and the consciously curated rural landscape setting for Fernhill House.

The historic estate complex of the early modest Cox's Cottage and St Thomas Anglican Church (now under separate ownership and outside the boundaries of the Estate) were accessed through the Rural Parkland Precinct by tree-lined drives. These grand approaches were consciously laid out to reveal and frame long views and vistas of Fernhill House and St Thomas Church as well as the stone arch bridges and broad views of the open woodland and bushland setting of the estate.

A handsome stone house overlooks by far the most lovely and extensive landscape – as a home view – I ever met with in Australia: and its beauty is much enhanced by the taste and success of the proprietor in weeding out the thinly leafed and unsightly kinds of the gum-tree and preserving only that species of eucalyptus called the apple-tree, which, with its stout gnarled branches and crisp tufted foliage, is, when standing alone or in clumps on parkish looking ground, by no means a bad representative of the English oak a stranger might imagine himself at the country-house of some substantial English squire there is a unity of homelike landscape unlike anything else of its kind I have met with out of England' (Mundy 1852)

Historical accounts indicate a landscape treatment of culling and preserving specific natives – this is evident today in the avenues of remnant natives and scattered remnant native paddock trees.

The realignment of Mulgoa Road in the mid-20th century isolated St Thomas church from the main estate and further isolated Cox's Cottage from Fernhill House.

Natural bushland regeneration has obscured key views and sightlines through the Estate from and to Fernhill House, including that of St Thomas spire.

Landscaping and built works in the latter half of the 20th century included the stone walling along the drives, a substantial stables and equestrian complex including

fencing and paddock shelters, a racecourse, several dams, a large hayshed, and new plantings, including a pecan tree orchard.

The hayshed building at the north of the Precinct is modest in scale and siting. The racetrack and equestrian building complex to the south are prominent features in this landscape.

At the western edge of the Cumberland Plain, this Precinct is comprised of impermeable clay shale soils. Vegetation is typical of the broader Cumberland Plain including the threatened ecological communities of Cumberland Plain Woodland and River-flat Eucalypt Forest and, where there is more sandstone influenced soils on the south western edge, Sandstone Shale Transition Forest.

The Precinct includes biodiversity stewardship agreements sites to the north, east and south. The remainder is scattered with old, significant remnant paddock trees and fragmented patches of bushland. Of several dams and creeks, the largest waterbody is the dam in the north east.

Paddock trees and other open woodland areas provide breeding sites for migratory woodland birds, including the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, and other animals that rely on tree hollows for habitat. Migratory birds visit all year but are mostly prevalent in the breeding season between late August to early February, particularly in the south east corner. Koalas have also been seen feeding in this area.



SIGNIFICANCE

This Precinct is highly significant for its historic cultural landscape value as a remnant Early Colonial agricultural land holding, as the consciously curated broad rural setting of Fernhill House with its sweeping vistas across the valley, native tree-lined drives and remnant paddock trees. It is also significant for the former relationship demonstrated in this precinct between the historic Cox estate buildings at Cox's Cottage and St Thomas Church.

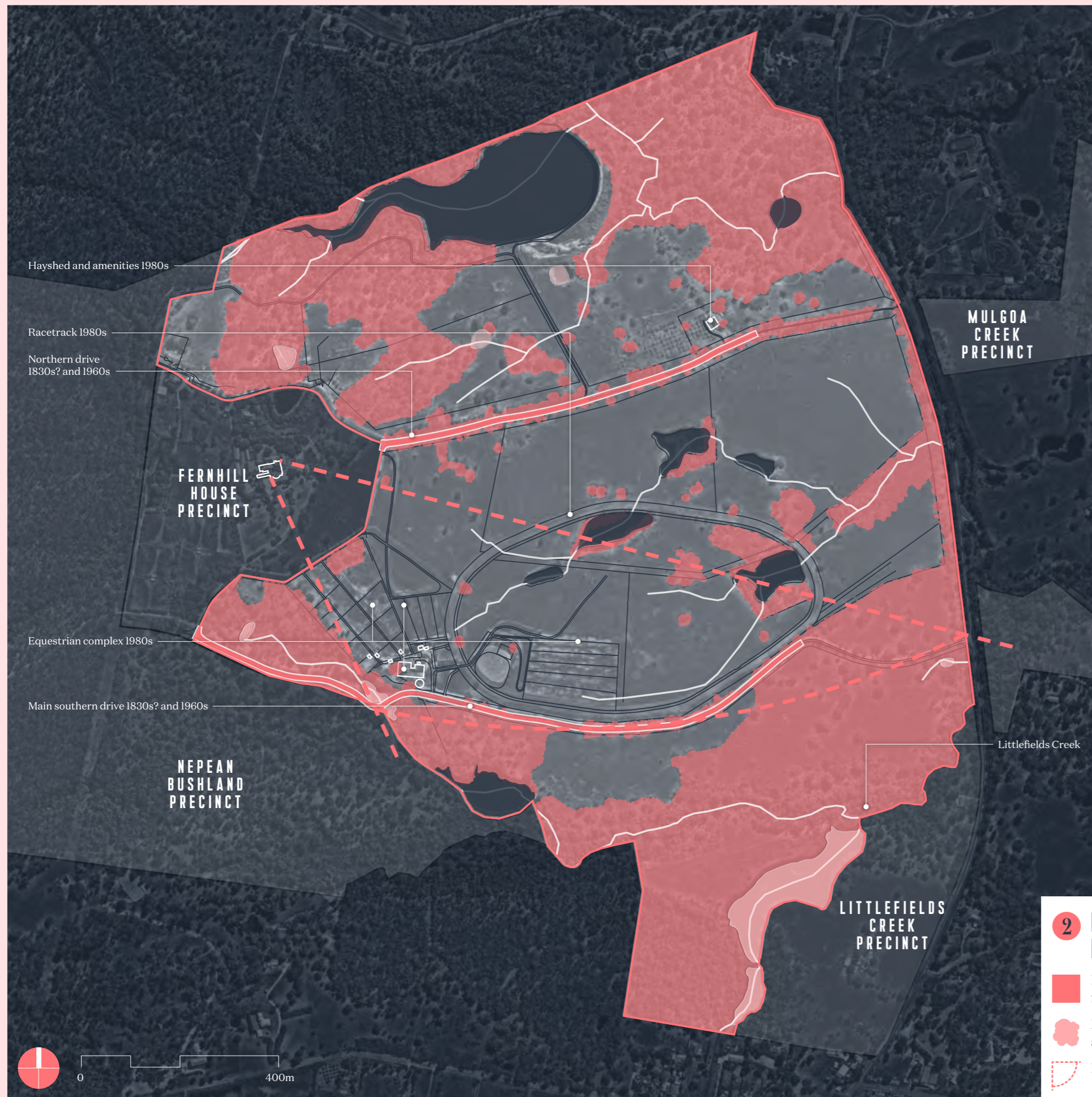
This Precinct is also significant for its research potential into pre-Colonial history, including the land management and cultural practices of the Aboriginal people of this Country and post-Colonial history of the frontier conflict.

It is highly significant for its remnant Cumberland Plain Woodland, River-flat Eucalypt Forest and Sandstone Shale Transition Forest and for the habitat these provide to woodland migratory birds and other fauna.

Most of this Precinct is within the State heritage-listed curtilage of the property, with the remainder listed as local heritage significant.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural Conservation
- Cultural Heritage Conservation
- Recreation
- Arts and Culture
- Tourism
- Rural



MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Facilitate Caring for Country programs led by Aboriginal communities
- Protect and manage Early Colonial remnant cultural landscapes
- Investigate opportunities to realign the southern and northern entrance drives to their historic locations and interpret their former relationships to St Thomas Church and Cox's Cottage
- Investigate opportunities to reverse the late 20th century modifications to the Early Colonial landscape setting
- Manage the biodiversity assets of the biodiversity stewardship agreements and other fragments of Cumberland Plain Woodland

Opening the Estate

- Create amenities and opportunities for picnicking, water-based activity, walking and exploring
- Provide a series of tracks and trails that showcase natural and cultural features, and the Precinct's landscape settings
- Provide walking connections to and from the rest of the Estate
- Provide park amenities at key locations that are appropriate in scale, siting and detail to the Precinct's landscape settings

Engaging community

- Investigate partnerships with Penrith City Council, State agencies or heritage, environment, arts and culture organisations for tours and events
- Consider opportunities for events and programs that celebrate the rural and equestrian activities of the site and the Mulgoa Valley
- Develop self-guided programs for community enjoyment

Sustainable and resilient

- Maintain, where retained, late 20th century buildings and landscape structures
- Review equestrian leases for business opportunities to increase public access
- Investigate commercial opportunities that could open the hayshed to the public
- Investigate opportunities for other commercial recreational leasing arrangements
- Identify other opportunities to deliver public programs
- Create opportunities for social benefit programs for landscape and facilities management

3 Mulgoa Creek

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Mulgoa Creek Precinct sits over two lots separated by private land holdings, with Mulgoa Creek running through both. Edwards Cox's early land grant was bound by Mulgoa Creek to the east and Littlefields Creek to the south.

The northern lot was mostly once part of the early Edward Cox land grant, which also included Cox's Cottage. The original alignment of Mulgoa Road isolated this lot from the estate's main land holding and cut through the historic drive that connected Fernhill House to Cox's Cottage. The road's realignment in the mid-20th century further isolated this lot from the main estate land holding.

This northern part of the Precinct is typical of early land grant plots in Western Sydney that were cleared, impacted by exotic pasture grasses and other invasive weeds, with sections of natural regenerating vegetation usually along drainage lines. It is identified in the draft *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan* as a strategic conservation area for its potential to connect and provide a link between adjacent nature reserves and corridors.

The southern lot was also once part of the early Edward Cox land grant. It was isolated from the main estate land holding by the realignment of Mulgoa Road in the mid-20th century. The land east of Mulgoa Creek, including St Thomas Church, was once part of the early land grant to William Cox Snr, Edward's father. This southern area of the Precinct is heavily vegetated, obscuring historic views between the spire of St Thomas Church and Fernhill House.

This lot is a sloping vegetated block dissected by Littlefields Creek and tributaries that flow to Mulgoa Creek and is predominately regenerating River-flat Eucalypt Forest. The woodland on the drier section closer to the church is mostly cleared and impacted by exotic pasture grasses.

It is entirely under a biodiversity conservation agreement that identifies biodiversity improvements and provides funding for environmental management.

SIGNIFICANCE

The lots of this Precinct are significant as remnant portions of the Early Colonial Fernhill Estate and for their ability to demonstrate the Estate's original boundary, and the historic relationship of Cox's Cottage and St Thomas Church to Edward Cox's early land grant.

The northern lot is significant as a visual setting for Cox's Cottage and is an item of local heritage significance. It is an item of State heritage significance as part of the rural landscape setting of Cox's Cottage. The southern lot is significant for its ability to demonstrate the original alignment of Mulgoa Road. It is an item of State heritage significance as part of the immediate setting of the adjacent St Thomas Church.

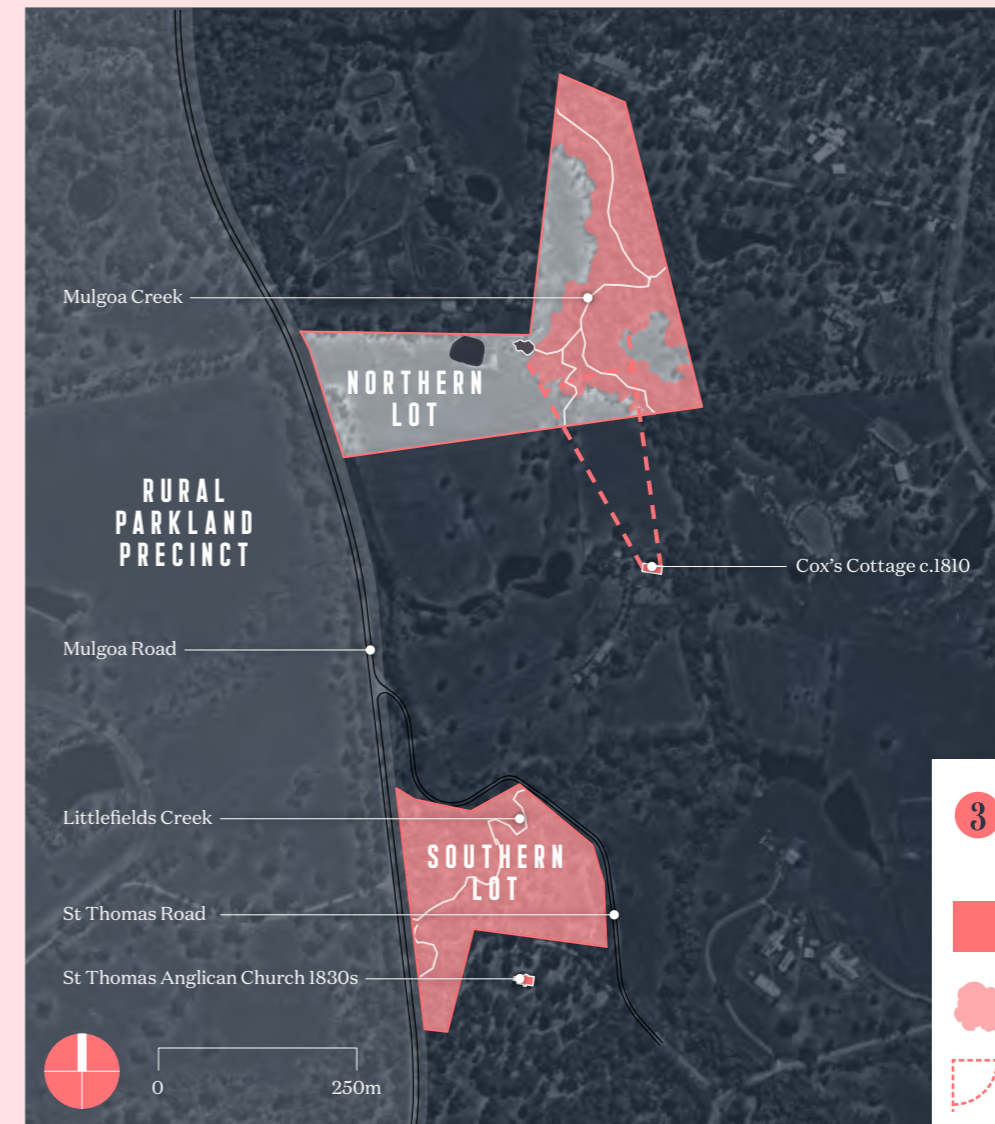
The Precinct's riparian corridors are significant for their biodiversity values and connectivity values and potential between the Blue Mountains and the Cumberland Plain.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural Conservation
- Cultural Heritage Conservation
- Recreation
- Rural



Cox's Cottage, 1835



3 MULGOA CREEK

- Heritage significant features
- Natural bushland and significant trees
- Key views and vistas

MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Investigate, interpret and communicate the relationship of Mulgoa Creek, Littlefields Creek and St Thomas Road with the original Fernhill Estate curtilage, boundaries, Cox family land grants and neighbouring Cox's Cottage and St Thomas Church
- Preserve and protect the open rural estate character of the northern lot where it supports and contributes to the historic setting of Cox's Cottage
- Manage the biodiversity assets of the biodiversity stewardship agreements and Mulgoa Creek riparian corridor
- Investigate potential for opening sightlines to St Thomas Church spire from Mulgoa Road within the provisions of the biodiversity stewardship agreements

Opening the Estate

- Investigate and facilitate connections and links with main estate
- Improve access to the northern lot from Mulgoa Road
- Investigate passive recreation opportunities and appropriate uses for the northern lot
- Provide park amenities at key locations

Engaging community

- Look to establish a landcare group for Mulgoa riparian corridor
- Investigate opportunities for small-scale events and activation on open land in the northern lot

Sustainable and resilient

- Investigate uses that support the Precinct's heritage significance and creates ways for the public to enjoy the area
- Create opportunities for social benefit programs for landscape and facilities management

4 Nepean Bushland

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Nepean Bushland Precinct sits on an elevated part of the Estate, largely sandstone bedrock with free-draining infertile sandy soils.

It forms a distinct spine in the landscape protruding south into the Mulgoa Valley with incised gullies to the east and a series of natural watercourses running through the south-eastern portion including Littlefields Creek bounding the south-eastern edge.

The vegetation on the high country is well forested with little understorey or grasses typical of the sandstone slopes that surround Sydney. A series of well-defined management trails traverse the site.

The infertile nature of this soil would not have made it attractive, nor viable, as agricultural grasslands. Historically it is unlikely this part of the Estate provided any open pastureland and has probably remained as it was following the cessation of Aboriginal land management practices.

SIGNIFICANCE

This Nepean Bushland Precinct is a biodiversity precinct on the eastern edge of the Blue Mountains and represents a formation of the slow geological uplift of the Blue Mountains combined with the sudden faulting of large sections. This has created an interesting mix of underlying geology and distinct changes in vegetation species and habitat.

It is entirely under a biodiversity conservation agreement that identifies biodiversity improvements and provides funding for environmental management of the site.

Being an uplift of sandstone bedrock, it is largely covered in Sydney Hinterland Transition Forest with variations in vegetation communities, such as Shale Sandstone Transition Forest, River-flat Eucalypt Forest and Cumberland Plain Woodland on the south-western to south-eastern area where it grades to gravels and clay soils.

There are distinct sandstone gullies to the eastern edge where the sandstone bedrock meets the Cumberland Plain that support Moist Shale Woodland and Dry Rainforest communities. These are home to the Gully Shadeskink (*Saproscincus spectabilis*), of which there is little in Sydney, and Brush Myrtle (*Rhodamnia sp.*), a critically endangered plant.

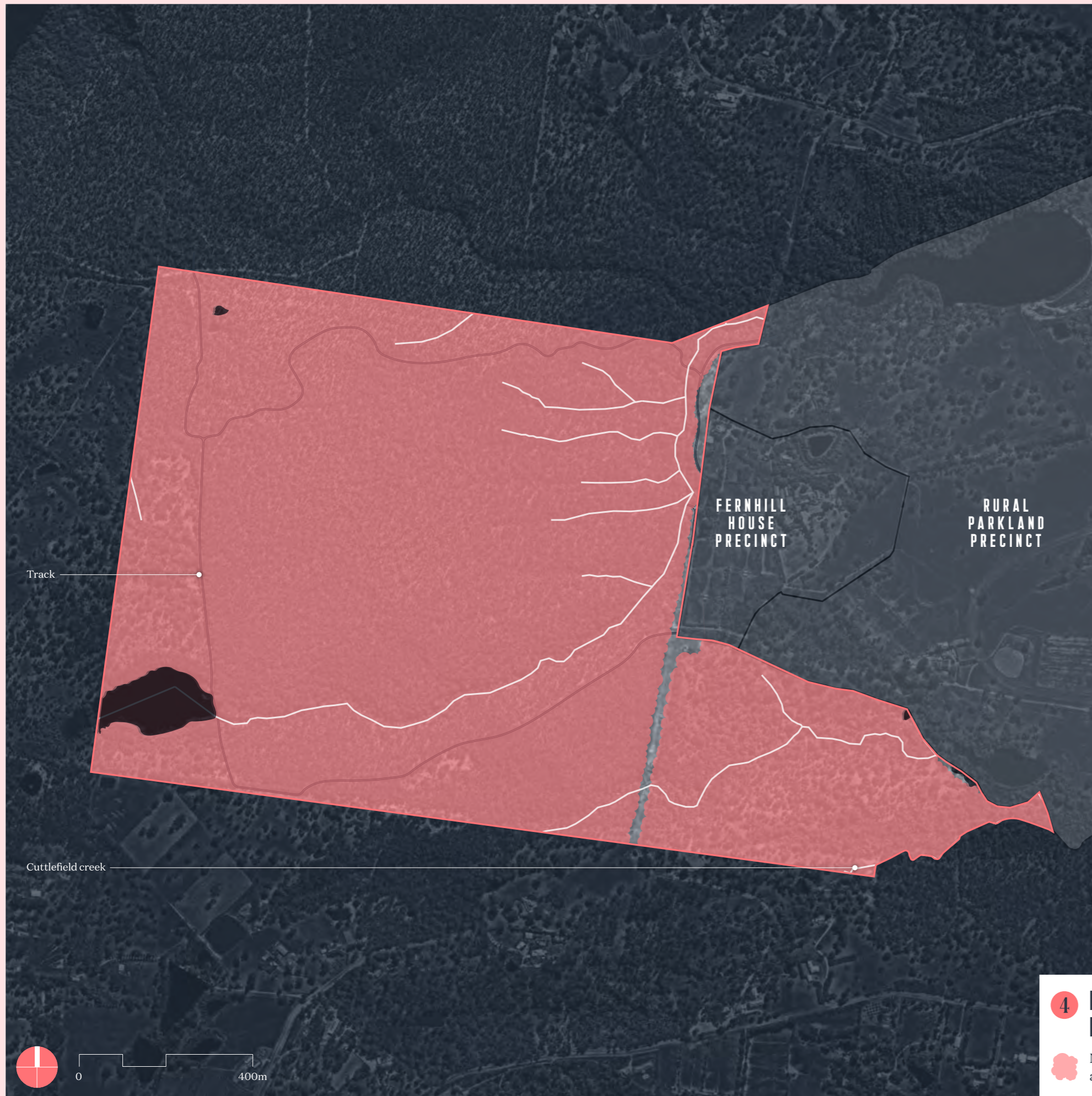
A significant feature is the mountain lake in the south western edge, formed by the blocking effect of the Kurrajong Fault. The size and depth has been slightly enhanced by the fire trail at the Lake's exit.

This Precinct is within the State heritage listed curtilage of the property.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural Conservation
- Cultural Heritage Conservation
- Recreation





MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Manage the biodiversity assets of the biodiversity stewardship agreements


Engaging community

- Provide opportunities for walking trails, self-guided tours and artistic pursuits such as nature photography

Sustainable and resilient

- Identify opportunities to leverage biodiversity stewardship agreement funding to enhance site stewardship and to provide for recreation
- Identify opportunities and business interest to deliver programs such as bird watching, photography or art

4 NEPEAN BUSHLAND

 Natural bushland and significant trees

5

Littlefields Creek

ABOUT THE PRECINCT

Littlefields Creek Precinct is in the south east of the Estate, outside the boundaries of the early Edward Cox land grant and was originally granted to William Cox Snr. The Mulgoa Village of today is within the boundaries of this early land grant to William Cox Snr. This Precinct includes the site of the last slab cottage in Mulgoa Valley, used as a post office from 1883 to 1893.

The Precinct is bounded by a large dam to the west and includes the drainage catchment and riparian corridor of Littlefields Creek. The northern and western boundaries transition to woodland communities that connect to the open rural landscapes of the Rural Parkland Precinct.

The Precinct has a large frontage to Mulgoa Road and includes two modern residential dwellings and their associated gardens and vacant land adjacent to Mulgoa Village and Mulgoa Public School.

SIGNIFICANCE

This Precinct is significant as part of the series of early land grants in the area to the Cox Family, in this instance to William Cox Snr, and the subsequent occupation of Mulgoa Valley by the early British colonists and enclosure of the land. Some parts of the site are also significant for its research potential regarding Aboriginal land management practices and history and for the archaeological potential related to the early slab hut used as Post Office.

This Precinct is partly under a biodiversity stewardship agreement to the north and west. The vegetation in areas subject to the agreement and the open woodland to the northern boundary of the Precinct also provide breeding and foraging habitat for endangered migratory woodland birds. There are some significant very old remnant native trees in this Precinct.

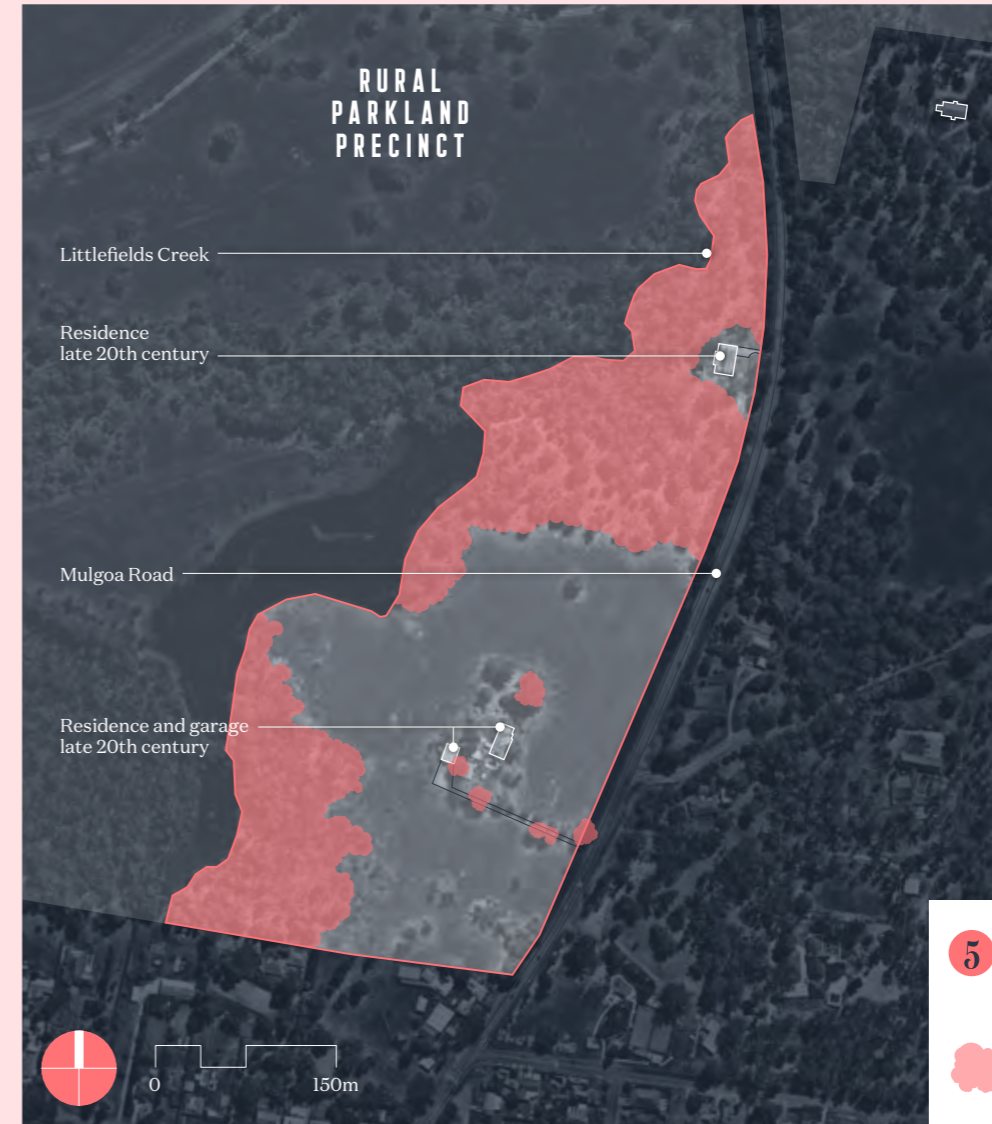
The lots in this Precinct are listed as items of either local heritage or archaeological significance.

LAND USE OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural Conservation
- Cultural Heritage Conservation
- Recreation
- Lifestyle
- Existing Residential



Former slab hut



5 LITTLEFIELDS CREEK

 Natural bushland and significant trees

MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

Estate stewardship

- Investigate archaeology of the early slab hut
- Manage the biodiversity assets of the Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements and Littlefields Creek riparian corridor
- Prepare and implement a tree management plan for habitat and cultural values

Sustainable and resilient

- Investigate leasing opportunities for existing residential buildings and their curtilage to maintain activity
- Investigate leasing opportunities for residential, community or education uses that complement the activities of the adjacent Mulgoa Village and the core of the Estate to create a long-term sustainable business model to activate and manage the whole Estate
- As the Airport becomes operational and the population in the Western Parkland City increases, continue to seek opportunities to meet emerging community needs in the Precinct.



Making it happen

In developing this plan, we recognise that population and economic growth in the Western Parkland City will change this broader region and its context. We have considered short-term and long-term actions that are set out in terms of:

Activating Fernhill Estate - how we intend to bring about activity, visitors and community interest in the Estate.

Making it happen – the important planning, building and servicing work that will enable activation.



ACTIVATING FERNHILL ESTATE – THE FIRST 12 MONTHS

- Opening the Estate for walking, picnics, programs and events and other activities and opening the house as appropriate for tours or special events
- Allowing short-term commercial leasing opportunities for non-heritage buildings
- Delivering an annual event such as a music or equestrian event or outdoor gallery
- Creating Fernhill Estate website and community and stakeholder engagement strategy
- Re-leasing the equestrian facility, including for public uses such as recreational riding and eventing
- Implementing the first stages of the Fernhill Estate landscape master plan
- Making good the Estate, being responsible caretakers of the heritage buildings and interpreting heritage stories

Making it happen

- Undertake site investigations and prepare a Fernhill Estate landscape master plan including access and service provision, costings and an implementation plan
- Commence service infrastructure provision including sewer, water and better access off Mulgoa Road along with internal road upgrades
- Investigate leasing opportunities for Littlefield Creek Precinct and commence business modelling for the long term management of the Estate

ACTIVATING FERNHILL ESTATE – TO 2030

- Restoring and refurbishing Fernhill House and establishing a major tourism destination or arts and culture precinct
- Adaptively re-using existing buildings for additional activations
- Continuing to implement the Fernhill Estate landscape master plan
- Working with Penrith City Council on the potential provision of specialist sports such as archery
- Creating broader walking and cycling connections with Penrith City Council to create long distance iconic walking and hiking trails from the Blue Mountains to Fernhill and south to Camden
- Developing and activating Littlefields Creek Precinct to create long-term financial sustainability for activation and management of the Estate
- Continuing to make good the Estate, acting as caretaker of heritage buildings and interpreting the heritage stories

Making it happen

- Manage infrastructure and service upgrades to Littlefields Creek Precinct in association with Sydney Water and Penrith City Council
- Encourage Destination NSW to refresh their visitor economy strategy for Western Sydney
- Preparing and implementing an interpretation strategy for the Estate
- Implement leasing opportunities for Littlefield Creek Precinct to drive the Estate’s sustainable funding model
- Developing bush fire risk management and dam safety strategies

Definitions

Aboriginal cultural heritage

- The living, traditional and historical practices, representations, expressions, beliefs, knowledge and skills, and the associated environment, landscapes, places, objects, ancestral remains and materials, that Aboriginal people recognise as part of their cultural heritage and identity

Biodiversity

- The variety of all life forms on Earth — the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, and the ecosystems of which they are a part

Biodiversity stewardship agreement

- An agreement that will provide for the permanent protection and management of biodiversity and allows for the creation of biodiversity credits

Cultural landscape

- Defined by UNESCO as the combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between people and their natural environment

Cumberland Plain

- For the purposes of the draft *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan*, approximately 200,000 hectares primarily within the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA) Cumberland subregion as well as some minor areas of the Sydney Cataract and Wollemi IBRA subregions. The area includes parts of eight local government areas— Wollondilly, Camden, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Penrith, Blacktown and Hawkesbury

Plan of management

- Developed to define the vision, objectives and strategies for land or a place, and the heritage policies and management priorities to achieve these

Riparian

- Relating to, or situated on, the bed and banks of a river or watercourse.

Setting

- The immediate and extended environment of a place that is part of or contributes to its cultural significance and character

Western Parkland City

- Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly LGAs with the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and the Aerotropolis at its centre





For you