

## **CONCILIATION CONFERENCE**

**MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2009 – 7.00PM**

**PROPOSAL:** High Wire Rope Adventure Course

**PROPERTIES:** Lot 45 DP 748695, Lots 836 & 910 DP 752028, Lot 7063 DP 1070983 and Lot 7062 DP 1070987.

Bidjigal, Excelsior and Ted Horwood Reserves, Cnr Park and Renown Roads Baulkham Hills

**APPLICANT:** Adventure Forest Pty Ltd

### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL:**

The proposal seeks consent for:

- Construction of a high wire rope adventure course, timber reception cabin and two picnic tables within Bidjigal, Excelsior and Ted Horwood Reserves.
- Use of existing amenities and car parking areas in Ted Horwood Reserve.
- Hours of operation are daylight hours all year except Christmas Day and Good Friday.

The high wire adventure course is built of wood, rope and wire up in the tree canopy. Ropes, nets, zip wires (similar to flying foxes) and other crossings are attached to trees between 3m and 15m high up in the tree canopy.

The course is made up of a training zone and an adventure course comprising five activity zones which are linked together by natural footpaths. Participants are each fitted with a climbing harness before being trained by instructors in how to use the course safely. After the training all participants then practice their techniques in the training zone under individual supervision.

Once the training zone has been satisfactorily completed the participants commence the adventure course. Each zone starts with the participants climbing a rope ladder to reach a small wooden platform that is braced around a tree trunk several metres above the ground. From here the participants negotiate a series of activities consisting of various types of rope bridges as they pass from one tree to the next. At the last tree in the zone a zip wire or rope ladder brings the participant back to ground level where they walk to the next zone.

In addition to the adventure course it is proposed to construct a timber cabin. The cabin is used to welcome visitors to the site and is intended to fit into the surroundings. The cabin includes a veranda which will be used to provide shelter from the weather and space for participants to wait for their start time.

The cabin provides a secure space to leave equipment overnight, while also providing a space for refreshments to be served and a computer that is used to track bookings and arrivals.

In general 40% of course users are expected to be families with children aged from 10 years. A further 40% are expected to be in the 18 – 45 age bracket with no children. The remaining 20% are expected to be 45 +, corporate visitors and international tourists.

During peak season (school holiday weekends) it is expected that 14 participants would start the course every 30 minutes. Mid season (school holiday weekdays and school term weekends) 14 participants would start the course every 60 minutes. Low season (school term weekdays) when 14 participants would start the course every 2 hours.

### **SUMMARY OF SUBMISSIONS**

To date 188 submissions have been received comprising 176 objecting to the proposal and 12 in favour.

### **BUSHLAND IMPACTS**

- The proposed tree removal is excessive and unnecessary. The proposal is for the use of 42 trees, yet removing 77 (of which 44 are healthy and 10 more are not too bad) and 1730m<sup>2</sup> vegetation not classified as trees such as sapling and undergrowth. Yet Go Ape insist their proposal is REVERSIBLE!
- Some of the trees proposed to be removed are home to the Ring Tail Possum which is the Totem of the Darug Clan.
- The vegetation being removed provides valuable habitat and food for native animal species. Without them these animals will die. It is not sufficient to say they will just move somewhere else.
- The proposed removal of remnant native vegetation should not allowed.
- Areas of natural bush are rare in the city and should be preserved at all costs.
- The rehabilitation works proposed will not mitigate the damage of the bushland proposed. The 2:1 rehabilitation rate proposed is too low.
- The development is contrary to the bush regeneration work being undertaken in the reserves.
- The following Council's policies and strategies are contrary to this proposal:
  - Plan of Management for Natural Areas – Bushland 2008
  - *Environmental Management Plan 2005* – Section 3 – Biodiversity Conservation
  - Council's *Guidelines for the Great Outdoors*
  - Council's leaflet *Bush Neighbours*
  - Council's *State of the Environment Report 2007-08*
- Rope ladders, ribbons, sacrificial battens, fences and other visual eyesores are not in keeping with the natural beauty of the Reserve.
- Natural paths in bushland are not 1.4m wide. The proposed paths will be a blight on the Reserve.

- The extent and details of the wooden stockades to protect ladders, extent of clearing for zip wire landings, extent of clearing for the Reception Cabin, reception area, two small shelters and training zone (fencing required?) have not been sufficiently detailed.
- It is anticipated that 30,000 people will visit the adventure course each year. This will have an unacceptable impact upon the fragile native understorey (eg trampling, rubbish, erosion, sedimentation and weed invasion). Does this figure include non-paying spectators?
- There is no guarantee that people will stay on paths. Go Ape's FAQ says that "spectators are more than welcome to watch friends and family trek, swing, crawl and zip from tree to tree".
- Forests NSW rejected the proposal due to:
  - Safety management concerns,
  - Inappropriate fixing methods to trees,
  - Tree load testing damage to trees,
  - Inadequate environmental processes and
  - Lack of scientific evidence and understanding of the nature of Australian Forests.

#### **FLORA & FAUNA**

- The effects on the removal of hollows for prey of the Powerful Owl have not been assessed and the impact upon the foraging resources of the Grey-headed Flying Fox have not been adequately considered.
- The Flora and Fauna report is incomplete it misses a colony of *Epacris purpurascens var. purpurascens* – a threatened species at the base of one of the zip wire access points, the Green Hood Orchids, *Boronia rubii*, and , and 43 bird species which frequent the area.
- The proposal will lead to the fragmentation and disturbance of a highly significant regional vegetation corridor and an area of high habitat value (as assessed in DECC's *Rapid Fauna Habitat Assessment of the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority area*).
- The Flora and Fauna report is incomplete. It misses within 1km of the site.
- The Baulkham Hills Council Website says the Bidjigal Reserve contains over 370 native plant species, why does the Flora and Fauna report only mention 129?

#### **TRAFFIC & PARKING**

- Renown Road is a dangerous stretch of road. More vehicles will be of great concern.
- The Park Road and Renown Road car parks as well as the surrounding streets already struggle to accommodate vehicles during weekend sports.

- The Parking Study was done during a period when junior soccer was not in full swing and as such as limited value. Many sports games were cancelled on the day the survey was undertaken as it had been raining the preceding 3 days.
- The Statement of Environmental Effects states that between 10,000 and 30,000 people are expected to attend each year. That is 200 – 600 per week, largely on the weekend. The Traffic and Parking report is inconsistent with this.
- Council’s mulching service at Bidjiwong Nursery has recently been extended to two Saturdays per month. This is already causing traffic chaos. Why wasn’t the parking survey carried out on mulching Saturdays.
- The parking and traffic assessment in Appendix D depends entirely on the fact that the average vehicle occupancy rate in the UK is 3.9 people per vehicle. Is there any evidence at all that this bears any relationship to vehicle occupancy rates in Australia? It seems very high.

The calculations are also based only on the expected number of paying participants, and take no account at all of non-paying spectators.

## **NOISE**

- People using aerial activities such as zip wires will yell and scream. This will impact upon the amenity of residents in Larra Crescent and users of the Reserve particularly those immediately below walking along Darling Mills Creek. Youtube videos shows the zip wires themselves to be noisy let alone the people yelling on the zip wires as well.

## ***Acoustic Report***

- The noise logger used to characterise the existing noise environment was located in entirely the wrong location, being placed right in the middle of three actively used sporting fields, next to a car park, and closer to Renown Road than any affected resident, and nowhere near any noise sensitive locations.
- Whilst the claim that the nearest affected neighbouring residences are in McGee Place and George Muir may be true in relation to the Park Road car park, it is clear that the Report has failed to take account of the eastern and northernmost extents of the course; these sections will generate the most noise from users via shouting and screaming as they use the zip wires.
- The location of the proposed adventure facility as shown on page 4 is not accurate.
- Go Ape even actively encourages noisy users: “Or maybe you just want to make like Tarzan and swing through the trees shouting, ‘arrrrhaarrhaarrhhhh!’ We’re fine with that too.” ([www.goape.co.uk](http://www.goape.co.uk)).

## **SIGNAGE**

- Too many signs are proposed along Park Road and Renown Road.
- The signs display apes which hardly seems appropriate in the Australian context.

## **GENERAL**

- There does not appear to be any satisfactory financial arrangements set out for the removal of the course and buildings should the project fail.
- Using public land for a private purpose is unfair.
- The proposal will detrimentally impact on the value of nearby properties.
- The UK course in Thetford has been operating for 8 years. Over this time 70% of the course has changed/ been re-routed. Will the proposed course be similarly changed?
- The DA plans don't clearly show what sort of activity is located where.
- The proposal does not detail emergency or maintenance access roads or tracks. Details of medical emergency procedures together with an integrated access plan are required.
- What toilets will Go Ape be using?
- Fire is an ever present danger. Cigarette butts are a principle source of bush fires. Will the Go Ape visitors be allowed to smoke?
- At peak periods it is stated that 14 people per half hour will use the course. The zip wire goes over Darling Mills Creek in both directions. This means that one person will fly through the air every minute.

## **BENEFITS OF PROPOSAL**

- It is a fun, safe and environmentally sensitive new adventure experience that is within both geographic and economic reach of all people.
- It is an activity where people can safely experience adventure, without resorting to extreme sport such as bungee jumping.
- It is in the interest of public health, safety and wellbeing.
- This venture will add spirit, life and revenue to the local community.
- Currently the area is underutilised only serving the very closest local residents many of whom are walking their dogs or just going for a walk in the bush.
- There is huge educational benefit to be derived. Many of the participants are expected to be children on school outings, who will have an opportunity to discover and appreciate our bushland as well as gain an appreciation for Darug culture and heritage.
- There will be a net increase in the total area of bushland through the 2 for 1 off set plan to be funded by Go Ape.
- Weeds will eventually encroach on the bush causing degradation in the quality of the bush. Go Ape's proposal will rectify this through an ongoing weed management program for the area in which the activity will operate.