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Riverstone East Precinct - Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Riverstone East draft Precinct Plan.

I register this submission as a local ecological expert who has assisted landowners within the precinct in restoring native wildlife on their properties.

Regardless of public concerns this precinct will be developed according to the approved growth targets. It is important to note that irrespective of any ameliorative measures this proposal will permanently decimate the native biodiversity of the precinct and result in a serious net loss of NSW biodiversity.

For this submission I have focussed on the positive opportunities for ameliorating the impacts of this proposal.

Improving the Cudgegong – First Ponds Creek Corridor location

It is wonderful to see the Growth Centres planning to retain vegetated corridors between areas nominated for biodiversity protection. This is a major step forward after much work by community & experts advocating for this basic principle of biodiversity planning.

The link to be retained connects Cudgegong Reserve and First Ponds Creek. In general the proposal is sound however the selection of the portion between Cudgegong Reserve and Tallawong Road is extremely poor and should be reconsidered.

A map is enclosed highlighting the current and potential link options.

The current proposal for this portion is located on 56 Tallawong Rd. This parcel is an intensive market garden and has few/no remnant trees and no native groundcovers and is indicated in the photo below.



The next property to the south (Number 58) retains some trees but mostly exotic groundcover as shown below:



The third property to the south (Number 60) retains strong canopy and considerable areas of native groundcover.



It is critical to ensure that any biodiversity corridors **retain a canopy link** to avoid immediate disconnection between Cudgong Reserve and First Ponds Creek and resultant loss of species.

Currently wildlife can use open space (terrestrial species) or canopy links (arboreal species) linking these areas. Any corridor layout will maintain open space for terrestrial species however the current proposal would remove canopy links. Arboreal wildlife cannot be expected to wait 100 years for new trees to grow in the proposed corridor.

This section of the corridor must be shifted further south as far as practical to maintain as significant canopy links as possible.

Proposed acquisition of VCA to widen Oak St

The property at 26 Oak St Schofields (Lot 33 DP 39341) has been successfully registered under a Conservation Covenant ('VCA') through the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW (NCT). The holding is approximately 2 ha of intergrade Riverflat Forest and Cumberland Plain Woodland.

The precinct plan proposes compulsory acquisition of a covenanted portion of this property for the purposes of road widening. It is understood the landowner and NCT have not been consulted in this regard.

The landowner and/or NCT may refuse acquisition in which case the proposed road design will need to be changed. As this design will not be able to proceed without consent of both the landowner and NCT their position(s) must be determined prior to release of any final road design or precinct plan. The apparent failure to do so for the draft precinct plan is alarming.

Consolidating protected ENV – potential addition

The vegetation (ENV) retention targets for the Growth Centres provides scope for an additional 8 – 10 hectares of conservation in this and other precincts.

Previous precincts have protected ENV in many small and isolated remnants, almost entirely riparian. This is a very poor conservation outcome and a waste of resources. Wherever possible ENV shortfalls should be directed to the expansion of proposed conservation areas – resulting in larger, more resilient remnants.

The Oak St Conservation Area (VCA) and adjoining Water Management area provide an ideal opportunity for expanding protected areas.

Between 2 – 3 hectares of the ENV (Cumberland Plain Woodland) located Northwest of the Oak St conservation area should be added to the conserved vegetation (see map attached). This land could be managed by Council or covenanted and managed by an accredited community organisation (e.g. Cumberland Land Conservancy).

This addition would conserve Cumberland Plain Woodland (rather than riparian communities of lower conservation status) and result in a greater net conservation outcome than could be achieved by conserving 2-3 hectares of ENV elsewhere.

Maintenance of waterways within VCA

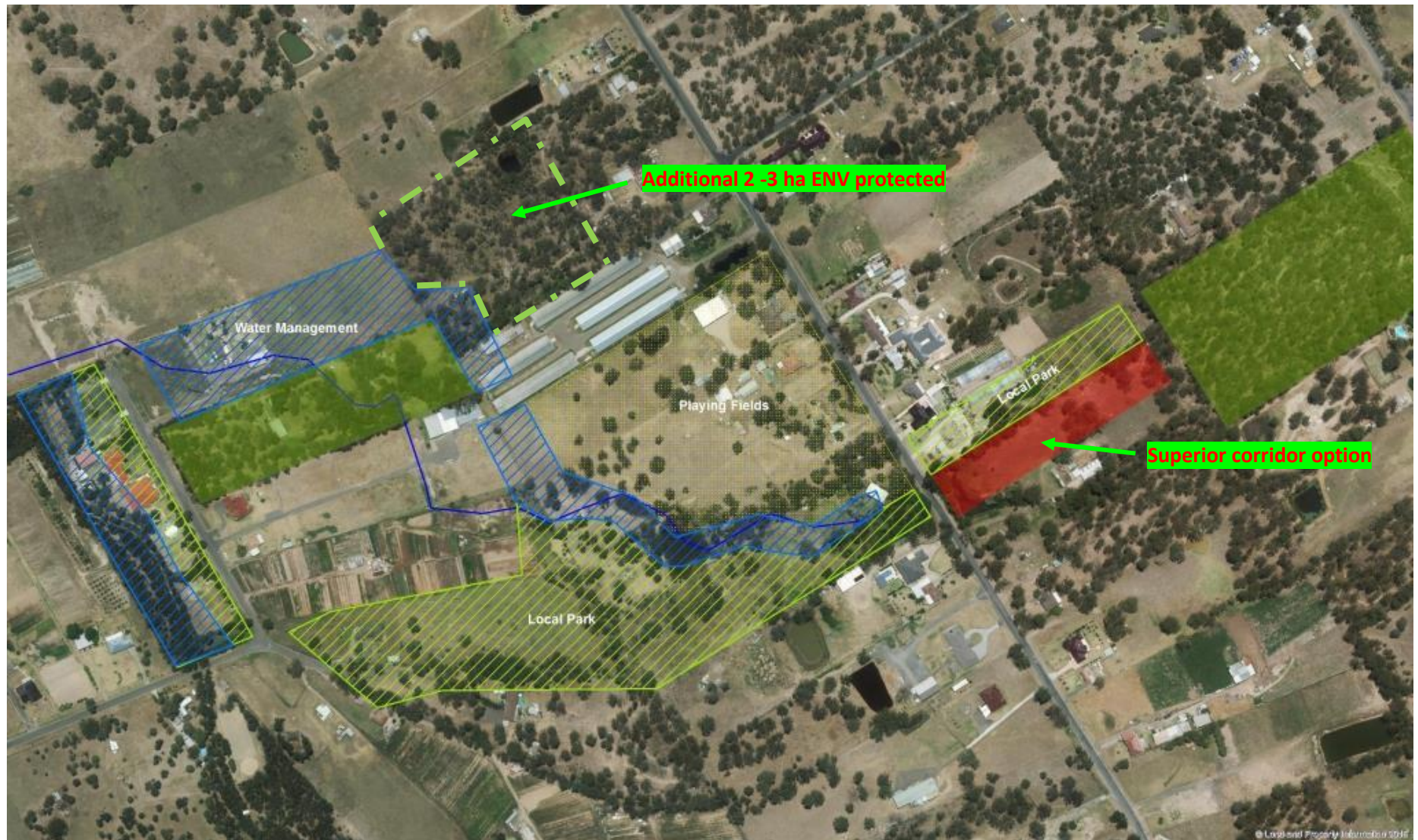
The draft Precinct Plan would remove existing drainage which feeds a natural creek within the VCA at Oak St.

The landowner and NCT should be consulted and options determined to maintain suitable water flows and associated biodiversity in this conservation area.

Opportunities for Water management land bordering VCA

The Water Management land located north of the Oak St Conservation Area (VCA) provides ideal opportunities for creating a water management wetland suitable for native biodiversity.

The relatively large footprint available allows for broad, shallow ponds as are required by native species and particularly declining migratory waders. It is common for designs to create deep ponds and revegetate surrounding areas with woodland. This is not the best outcome for threatened biodiversity and should be avoided. Instead any future design should maximise the extent of shallows and use the unique opportunity to create significant waterbird habitat in this location.



I appreciate your time and that of your consultants and planning partners in considering these matters, and look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. Ridgeway". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "P" and "R".

Peter Ridgeway