

DECEMBER 2019 REPORT

The future of the Mt Coot-tha Quarry

Michael Berkman
Greens MP for Maiwar ▲

On Wednesday 9 October, Mt Coot-tha Protection Alliance (MCPA) and Michael Berkman, Greens MP for Maiwar, co-hosted a community forum to facilitate a conversation about the closure and rehabilitation of the Mt Coot-tha Quarry (MCQ). More than 100 people attended to hear from MCPA community representatives and rehabilitation expert Corinne Unger (UQ), and to participate in an informal workshop to gather ideas for rehabilitation. The goal of the forum was not to measure support for closing the quarry, but rather worked on the basis that the quarry will be closed by 2025, in line with BCC's Mt Coot-tha neighbourhood plan, and aimed to better understand the community's priorities for the future of the site. The following is a summary of the key findings of the workshop. A full verbatim transcript of responses is available [here](#).

More than 100 people attended, and 146 responses were gathered on what the future of Mt Coot-tha quarry could hold.



The Future of Mt Coot-Tha Quarry Forum

MAJOR THEMES

- **Recreation activities that build off the natural landscape and blend into the existing Botanic Gardens, such as walking trails, rock climbing, and gardening**
- **A publicly owned space not run for profit**
- **Planting flora native to the area and protecting native wildlife with a rehabilitation centre and minimally invasive observation opportunities**
- **Using the space as an education centre for both children and adults**

LEGAL POSITION OF THE QUARRY

The Mt Coot-tha Quarry (MCQ) has been in operation since 1895 and has been owned by Brisbane City Council (BCC) since 1925. The quarry has long been used as a source of rock for Brisbane's roads and building projects. The resulting 30 hectare scar on the landscape continues to grow as blasting and quarrying continues, posing health and wellbeing risks to nearby people, animals, and the surrounding environment.

Because of its long history, the quarry operates under conditions that would not be approved for another quarry anywhere in Queensland, let alone so close to residential suburbs. In particular, the noise limits for blasting in Mt Coot-tha quarry are 10 dB greater than other Queensland quarries¹, resulting in blasts that are twice as loud.²

Furthermore, quarries typically require a 500 metre buffer area surrounding them³ yet Mt Coot-tha quarry lacks such a buffer between itself and the residential area, exposing residents to potentially unsafe conditions.

The timeline to close the quarry has continually changed over the years, from 1998 to 2015, to 2025 - each time without public consultation. In 2002 a letter from a Councillor revealed that

BCC had voted to extend the life of the quarry to 2032.⁴ BCC has not committed to a firm closure timeline and has no plans for rehabilitation.⁵

BCC's own Mt Coot-tha Neighbourhood Plan indicates that the quarry will close in 2025 and states BCC's commitment to commence planning for post-quarry use around 2015,⁶ but recent correspondence with the Lord Mayor has revealed that BCC currently has no intentions to close it, and that no funds have been set aside for quarry rehabilitation. Many concerned locals, including members of the Mt Coot-tha Protection Alliance (MCPA), have been pushing BCC to close the quarry for years, only to be ignored.

1 Model Operating Conditions: ERA 16 - Extractive and Screening Activities (September 2017) https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/89144/pr-co-extraction-and-screening.pdf

2 Environmental Authority Registration Certificate ENRE00761408 (2000, 2010) <https://apps.des.qld.gov.au/env-authorities/pdf/epr00447313.pdf> Accessed on 21 November 2019

3 Key Resource Area Reports and Maps (April 2016) <https://dsdmipprd.blob.core.windows.net/general/spp-guideline-mining-key-resource-area-maps-reports-41-80.pdf#page=4> Accessed on 21 November 2019

4 Letter from Cr Judy Magub, Toowong Ward: https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/maiwargreens/pages/400/attachments/original/1574384422/Quarry_letter_Cr_Magub_-_re_2032_extension.pdf?1574384422

5 Letters from Lord Mayor to Michael Berkman, MP for Maiwar, 26 October 2018 and 18 November 2019 https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/maiwargreens/pages/434/attachments/original/1574391778/2018-10-26_Letter_Lord_Mayor_to_Berkman_re_Mt_Coot-tha_Quarry_rehab.pdf?1574391778 and https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/maiwargreens/pages/434/attachments/original/1574391773/2019-11-20_Letter_from_Lord_Mayor_re_Mt_Coot-tha_Quarry_Finances-2019.pdf?1574391773

6 Brisbane City Council, Brisbane City Plan 2014: 7.2.13.9 Mt Coot-tha Neighborhood Plan Code (2014) <http://eplan.brisbane.qld.gov.au/> Accessed on 14 November 2019

WORKSHOP RESPONSE THEMES

FREE

PRINCIPLES

FREE. ACCESSIBLE. PUBLIC.

These are the three main principles that emerged from the workshop. While the rehabilitation of the quarry could draw inspiration from commercial sites like the Eden Project (UK) and the Butchart Gardens (Canada) the space will best serve the community if it is free, publicly owned, and accessible to all, including the elderly and people with disabilities.



Eden Project (UK)



Butchart Gardens (Canada)

“Good access for all people on foot and in wheelchairs or with disabilities” - Forum Participant

The community wants to ensure good planning for public transport for the site. Currently one bus, route 471, provides access to Mt Coot-tha, only running from 7:45am to 5pm on weekdays, and 10am to 5pm on weekends. Likewise, the two routes that reach the Botanic Gardens, the 598 and 599 ‘Great Circle Line’, while they do

run more frequently, are often unreliable. Both services follow a circular route around the city, meaning they are constantly delayed due to traffic. These services are inadequate to meet current demand, and this means most visitors travel to Mt Coot-tha via car, placing intense pressure on the car park. Parking availability was frequently mentioned in the forum. With the rehabilitation of the quarry providing new areas for visitors to explore, it will be critical to have well planned public transport and vehicle access to accommodate the increase in patrons.

Much of the feedback focussed not so much on what we build, but how we build it. Transforming this quarry in a consultative and sustainable way sends a message to the community and ensures that the area can be enjoyed by this generation and the next. As one citizen noted, the goal should be “carbon neutral or better”.

**“A space of tranquility and beauty for a breathing space in our city”
- Forum Participant**



CHILDREN/EDUCATION

The site presents an opportunity to benefit the next generation. Inviting children into the space is critical; structuring a part of the quarry to be a field trip destination for primary and elementary students would allow children the opportunity for hands-on learning. Offering opportunities for children to learn about nature, sustainability, and First Nations history is important to the community, and will allow students the chance to connect with the world around them in a unique way.

There are also educational opportunities for visitors of all ages and backgrounds. Educating all patrons on composting, sustainability, climate change, and the local area itself will connect global issues to a personal place, allowing people to be inspired to search for a better future.

**“Environmental education center for children, students and adults, possible option of camp outs to experience night time”
- Forum Participant**



HERITAGE

This site provides opportunities to recognise Aboriginal cultural heritage, environmental history, as well as the more recent industrial history of the quarry. Mt Coot-tha is a site of enormous cultural significance to Indigenous people locally and from further afield. The mountain is named for the native honey bee, indicating its importance as a source of nutrition.

“Identify if possible traditional routes up and around mountain” - Forum Participant

First Nations people from northern NSW have described ancestral links to the mountain, as their forebears visited their northern neighbours for significant cultural gatherings. The community expressed a strong view that there should be Indigenous involvement in planning for the site's future use. Currently, despite the quarry being in operation since 1895, very little information on the site is available. During rehabilitation the community is interested in documenting the history of the area so it is publicly available, through signage, posters or a visitor centre.

“First Nations historical education center / extension of fresh food bushcraft” - Forum Participant



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LANDSCAPE

One of the key functions of Mt Coot-tha is the natural breathing space that it provides Brisbane. The quarry site should enhance that role in the future, with landscape design that builds from and enhances the existing Botanic Gardens. Viewpoints expressed at the forum painted a picture of observation decks, open space, walking trails, and a community garden, accented by sculptures and artistic features made from mining machinery.

“Extend the botanic gardens, its facilities and lakes” - Forum Participant



RECREATION

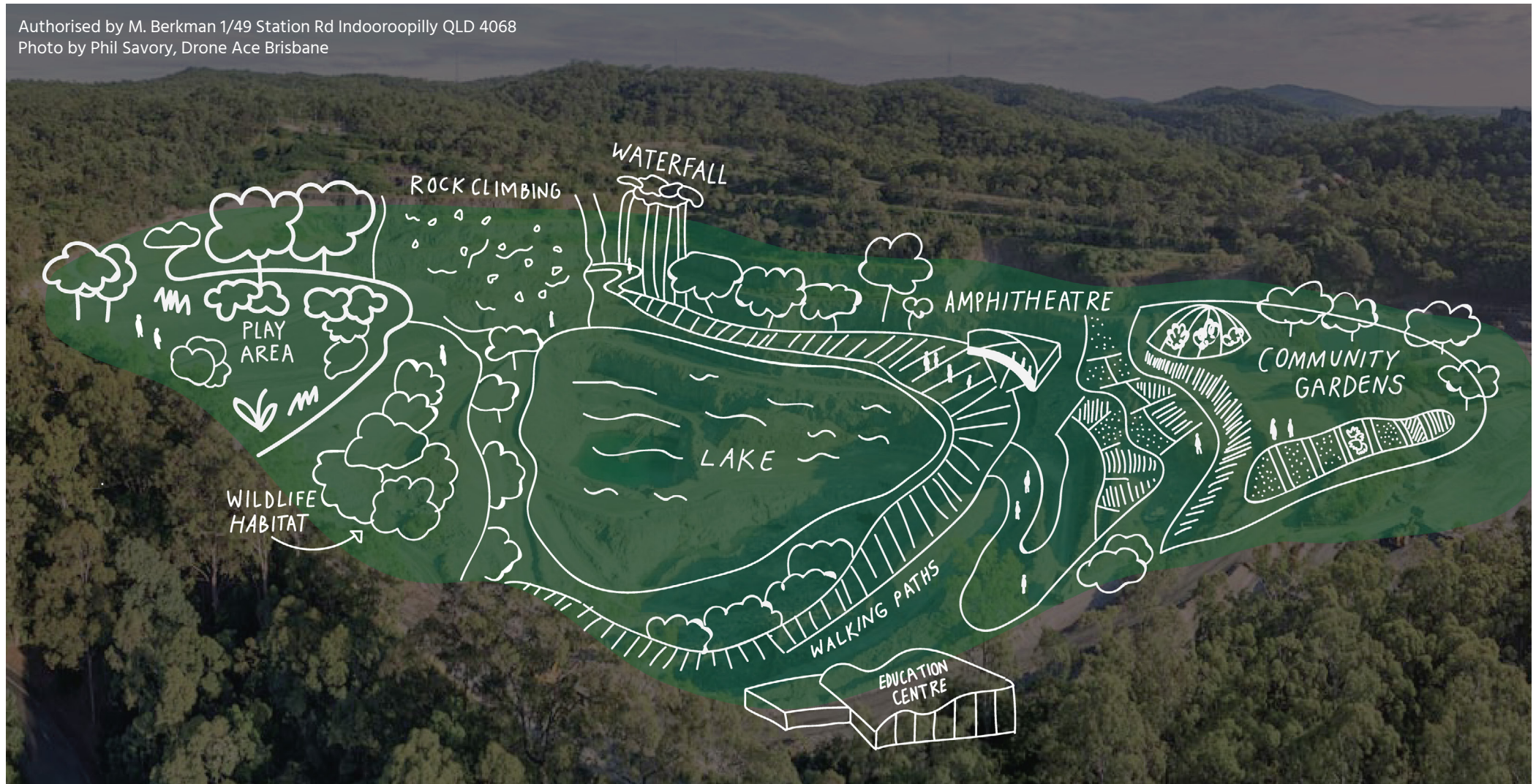
The structure of the space will be influenced largely by how the community hopes to use it. Many people passionately suggested a community garden, or a place to provide healthy food for the surrounding community. A garden, combined with walking trails, provides recreational activities the community can use to engage with the world around them. Walkways and trails that lead to lookouts and hidden green gems will enable the space to be enjoyed by all.

There were numerous suggestions for activities including a space for open theatre and musical concerts, rock climbing, fitness and picnic areas, increasing the tourism appeal of Mt Coot-tha.

“Provide a source of food for the community - a food forest especially native bush food species” - Forum Participant

“Make it an important outdoor recreational area that is complementary to the botanical gardens such as an outdoor open theater for musical concerts - this would have tourism value” - Forum Participant

Authorised by M. Berkman 1/49 Station Rd Indooroopilly QLD 4068
Photo by Phil Savory, Drone Ace Brisbane



Artist impression of the future Mt Coot-tha Quarry site.



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**WATER**

The quarry site presents opportunities for incorporating interesting and useful water features for the community to enjoy. From lakes to waterfalls, fountains, and ponds, these elements would add visual enhancement as well as the possibility of access for swimming. A large body of water may also prove useful in the future during fire emergencies.

**“Water will be an essential element for all other plans”
- Forum Participant**

However, the community was concerned to ensure the water is protected from both noise and water pollution, disallowing motorboats, jet skis etc from use of the site.

**“Create different wetland habitats, waterfalls, cascades, ponds, riverine vegetation, the fauna will come to the created ecosystems”
- Forum Participant**

**WILDLIFE**

With recent changes in the environment and available habitat, much of Queensland's wildlife is threatened. In order to combat this, a rehabilitation centre was proposed for the quarry site, to care for and release injured animals. Sections of the newly established green

space could also create sanctuaries for native bee species, supporting pollination of local plants.

The community is keen to foster a welcoming place for native plants and animals, and also create opportunities for the public to observe them in a non-invasive manner.

**“Use Qld native plants only”
- Forum Participant**



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“Create microclimates as sanctuary for local species as climate change brings higher temperatures and weather extremes” - Forum Participant

Mt Coot-Tha Quarry Timeline

1895

The quarry opened and began to be mined for rocks and other materials

1942

In June 1942 the quarry closed after several years of decreasing production, but reopened quickly when new demand surfaced

1925

The Brisbane City Council took ownership of the quarry

1988

The quarry was scheduled to close, but the date was pushed out to 2015

2014

The Brisbane City Plan 2014, released by Council, states a quarry closure date of 2025, with a rehabilitation plan scheduled to begin in 2015
<http://eplan.brisbane.qld.gov.au/>

2015

2019

Successful campaign to protect Mt Coot-tha from the zipline project ignites new push to close quarry.

Community pushes Council to hold to their 2025 projected end date for the quarry.

2020

By the end of 2020, the community demands Council releases a rehabilitation and closure plan for the quarry site

2025

By the end of 2025, the quarry must be closed and rehabilitation in progress



CLOSURE AND REHABILITATION PROCESS

During the workshop, a presentation by University of Queensland rehabilitation expert Corinne Unger provided listeners with information on global best practice for effective quarry rehabilitation. Ms Unger noted that, in order for a rehabilitation plan to consistently be productive and avoid risks, it must be ongoing. The plan must be in place and in practice while the quarry is still in use and extractive operations are being phased out. Thus, BCC needs to establish and implement a rehabilitation plan well before the closure date of the quarry if the space is to be repurposed quickly and without unnecessary cost or risk. The neighbourhood plan outlined rehabilitation planning commencing in 2015 before the 2025 closure date. There's no doubt BCC is aware of the need for an ongoing rehabilitation plan, yet there is none in place and we're aware of no consultation underway.

Ms Unger's presentation also discussed the role of community engagement in effective rehabilitation plans. BCC's plans will have the greatest impact if they empower the public by listening and acting on community input. Giving the public meaningful input at all stages will bring out the best ideas and result in a highly usable space.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from this informal community consultation that the community wants the quarry closed and rehabilitated as soon as possible, and as BCC has previously committed to. The community has expressed a strong view that they want the future use of the site to be consistent with the natural heritage values of the Mt Coot-tha precinct, to be connected to the Botanic Gardens, to be publicly owned and accessible to all, and they want to have a meaningful say in the future of the site.

This campaign is pushing BCC to close the quarry by the end of 2025, as promised in their neighbourhood plan, with a rehabilitation plan beginning to be put into effect by 2020. Follow the campaign at www.michaelberkman.com.au



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