

Mr D Koppers  
Independent Planning Commission NSW  
Level 3  
201 Elizabeth Street  
Sydney 2000



26th February 2019

Dear Commissioners

Re: Hume Coal Berrima

The Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) does not support the proposal by Hume Coal to establish a coal mine and associated infrastructure including a rail line at Berrima in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales.

AGHS, which promotes awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes through engagement, research, advocacy and activities is particularly concerned at the proposal to establish a coal mine in what is a truly unique part of Australia.

AGHS objects to the proposal for the following reasons:

### **Impact on the Cultural Landscape of Berrima**

Considerable research as to the significance of the Cultural Landscape of Berrima has been undertaken by Landscape Heritage Consultant Colleen Morris in association with Christine Hay which has confirmed that the land upon which the mine site is proposed is one of a number of areas within the Berrima region that has historic significance at a State level.

An indication of the quality of the landscape in the area can be found in records of some of the early explorers in particular John Price who on 19th March, 1798 recorded the following:

“ We came into the most beautiful country, being nothing but fine meadows with ponds of water in them, fine green hills, but very thin timber. We got to the top of this hill (Mount Gingenbullen) where we had the most delightful prospect of the country and in my opinion one of the finest in the known world. It certainly must be a pleasure to any man to view so fine a country”.

The proposed mine site is located in a rich and varied cultural landscape, shaped by associations with early land grants and settlement of the region and its remnant stands of endangered woodlands, is of aesthetic significance at a State level. The evidence of these associations through early grant boundaries and roads, town layouts, remnant woodlands, clear grazing lands and the placement of homesteads, makes a substantial contribution to the overarching spatial arrangements and visual qualities of this cultural landscape. The attachment to the area by the early explorers and settlers, and their valuing of it, particularly for farming and grazing, is still associated with the area today. The early impressions of a rich and beautiful pastoral landscape remain current with mature avenue plantings and gardens signalling the location of country homesteads and their outbuildings.

The area is also significant for its association with convictism, a convict workforce played a crucial part in quarrying, construction of early buildings and roads and as part of the workforce on early estates in the area. AGHS supports the current work of the Berrima Residents Association to pursue State Heritage listing of Berrima and the surrounding landscape with a view to seeking UNESCO World Heritage listing in the future given the area's links to the social transition which took place in Berrima in the development of the colony.

The region has strong links with prominent colonial settlers, individuals and families and from the latter years of the 19th century, a special association with important wealthy Sydney families. Mereworth which forms part of the mine site is particularly significant as it was part of the original Atkinson land grant of 1820 which is one of the earliest in the area.

There is a strong feeling of continuity, a sense of stewardship of the landscape and participation in history among the local community and various historical societies, in particular the National Trust of Australia (NSW) that continue to care for this area.

It is clear that this cultural landscape, which is rare in the State of New South Wales is highly valued for its historic significance and scenic qualities by visitors from all over Australia and internationally .

AGHS is very concerned that if the mine proceeds the significance of the landscape will be irreversibly compromised and as such it is now recognised as a landscape at risk.

### **Impact on the Paul Sorensen Garden at Mereworth**

Mereworth which forms part of the mine site, is renowned for containing one of the most significant gardens designed by arguably one of the most influential landscape architects that has worked in Australia, Paul Sorensen.

Sorensen biographer Richard Ratcliffe ('Australia's Master Gardener', 1990 Kangaroo Press) considers Mereworth to be his finest garden design and one of Australia's finest designed cultural landscapes. Sorensen's manipulation of the experience of the 2km long drive with its sequence of approach views of district, property and garden is masterful. His management of levels, curving ha ha walls and carefully framed views out from the secluded homestead, its courtyards and surrounding garden rooms makes this design a sophisticated exercise of a designer in full charge of his powers and of a site. The relationship of this secluded country garden with its manipulated views out of the surrounding property and landscape setting are fundamental to its designed character.

Renowned nurserywomen, garden designer, author and media presenter Elwyn Swane has described this garden simply as "one of the finest by Paul Sorensen".

Whilst Hume Coal has indicated that they intend to maintain the garden a recent inspection of the property confirmed the garden is in severe decline and is certainly at risk.

Should the mine proceed AGHS recommends a condition of any consent requiring that a comprehensive conservation management plan is prepared and approved by the office of Environment and Heritage and that Hume Coal implements a regular reporting regime i.e monthly inspections to ensure the preservation of the layout, elements and good condition of this significant garden. The AGHS recommends it be a condition of any consent that requires the Company to provide a bond of \$1,000,000 as a safeguard against breaches of implementation of an approved conservation management plan and any loss of condition, elements or layout.

Ongoing public access arrangements to view the garden must also be agreed to by (or be required by consent conditions on ) Hume Coal. One of the many attractions of the Southern Highlands are

the gardens and landscapes which attracts over 500,000 visitors annually. Given the significance of the Sorensen garden at Mereworth, Hume Coal has an obligation to the community to open the garden on a regular basis (e.g. monthly) for both national and international visitors.

### **Impact on Remembrance Driveway**

The Berrima section of Remembrance Driveway, which extends from Sydney to Canberra was established by Sir Cecil Hoskins in 1956 in memory of servicemen killed in action. This comprises a significant landscaped corridor of over 15 ha just South of the Berrima Township . The corridor contains nine brass plaques on significant basalt plinths and is particularly important not only as it marks the mid way point between Sydney and Canberra but its development was by way of collaboration involving nine major Corporations and several local land holders, one of which was the Cowley Family owner of Mereworth at the time.

The corporations that contributed land and finances to construct this memorial area included John Fairfax Ltd, Australian Iron and Steel, Bank of NSW, Colonial Sugar Refining Company, Commercial Banking Company, the Australian and New Zealand Bank, John Lysaght Steel, Anthony Hordern and Sons and the British Tobacco Company. The plaques in the memorial area also refer to the many employees of these companies who lost their lives in war.

The section of Remembrance Driveway within the proposed mine site at the Mereworth property contains two remembrance plaques in what was a landscaped setting designed by Paul Sorensen who also lost two of his sons in the Second World War.

It is of great concern to the AGHS that the condition of that part of Remembrance Driveway in the Mereworth property has fallen into significant disrepair with the company allowing cattle and sheep to graze the area, damaging mature plantings and putting at risk the original landscape plan of Sorensen.

The lack of good management practices of Hume Coal in not protecting such a significant piece of Australian history is worrying and displays a lack of appreciation of the importance of these areas and the need to honour men and women who paid the ultimate price in war. Perhaps Hume Coal's Korean owners might share this concern, were they aware of it.

AGHS is aware of a proposal to relocate all the plaques in the Berrima Remembrance Driveway which has incensed the local community. Any proposal to relocate the interpretive plaques shows a complete lack of understanding of the significance of the commemorative work ,its meaning and its significance as a unique and lasting memorial created by a philanthropic industrialist with a long and productive patronage of Australia's finest nurseryman and landscape architect. AGHS has assisted in co-ordinating an urgent meeting of all stakeholders including Wingecarribee Shire Council to ensure the preservation of this significant memorial.

### **Conclusion**

It is without doubt that if the Hume Coal mine is allowed to proceed the unique cultural landscape of the Berrima area will be irretrievably compromised. The placement of a coal mine adjacent to a unique heritage village such as Berrima in an area of highly productive agricultural land is unconscionable.

As stated in the Burra Charter, the 'bible' for heritage conservation in Australia and internationally-

***There are places worth keeping because they enrich our lives by helping us understand the past by contributing to the richness of the present environment and because we expect them to be of value to future generations.***

AGHS respectfully requests that the Commission rejects the Hume Coal mining application and recommends to Government to cancel the mining licence for the area.

Yours sincerely

Lyn Barrett  
Chair AGHS Southern Highlands Branch