

HORNSBY QUARRY

Will it ever be restored?

INTRODUCTION

Another year, and another rate notice from Hornsby Shire Council with another couple of quarry levy lines. After the shock at the miscalculation and poor judgement that landed something like \$25,000,000 on the ratepayers of the Hornsby Shire, the annual reminder in the rates notice now that looks like it will never cease is just a dull reminder of ongoing pain. Was it a decade ago it all started, more, or less? I keep trying to forget.

It's understandable for the Council to see a project like NorthConnex as a white knight on a charger come to unburden them of their Hornsby Quarry liability. It's equally easy for the Council to imagine that a project like that will be interested in the asset if offered to them lock, stock and barrel. Such a company might be extremely wary though of any attached liabilities, specially if they cannot, within their own project, find enough clean, crushed Sydney sandstone to completely fill, make good and have the restored quarry in a fit state to trade forward at their project's completion. They are, after all, civil engineering project developers, not operators of old quarries as spoil disposal sites, specially for other than from their own projects.

I'm a mining engineer, now retired, but in my time I have worked at planning, digging and managing holes way bigger than Hornsby Quarry as well as some about the same size, and dumping a good part of what comes out of them over high dumps onto pre existing footings of variable quality far below. I know that one doesn't just direct trucks toward the top edge of a place like Hornsby Quarry with an instruction to the driver to tip the load over the edge. That way lies disaster.

During a career detour I was also responsible for disposing of appreciable quantities of several waste streams much less pleasant than clean, crushed Sydney sandstone to what had once been quarries for shale, clay and other materials. As part of my QA responsibilities I inspected the delivery and placement of the waste streams in the old quarries. On the same visits I observed the placement of waste streams other than those I had responsibility for and noted that to achieve proper placement of all the waste streams they were delivered down restored or new haul roads into the old quarries where they were dumped, leveled and then compacted. The old quarries were being filled in the reverse order to the way they were dug - layer by layer but going up rather than down. It's not impossible to imagine a way of filling Hornsby Quarry by tipping and dozing from a top edge, or by some method other than placing and compacting layer on layer from the bottom up, but the clean up of the site and preparing the quarry to receive clean crushed Sydney sandstone to any well thought out program using any practical method will not be cheap, requiring an up front investment more likely to be counted in millions than in hundreds of thousands.

In addition, a full proposal to remediate the quarry and accept the material would need to be prepared and made public along with an EIS, proceed through EIS submissions, a submissions report and all that follows. Not a fast process, and if already not well advanced without being sighted in public it's hard to imagine a start on the process has been initiated, or at least progressed much, by the Hornsby Shire Council at this time.

DISCUSSION

Subject to approvals, construction on NorthConnex is due to start "early 2015" say 6 months away. They have 2.6 million cubic metres, only some of which would be a natural

for delivery to the Hornsby Quarry on a proximity basis so NorthConnex are unlikely to want to own it even if it was given to them because it needs 3.3 million cubic metres to fill it and they'd be left owning a partly filled hole that they couldn't do anything with. It would be even less attractive even as a gift if it was offered without an approval to receive the spoil under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act) and other applicable environmental legislation.

To own and operate it themselves the Hornsby Shire Council would need to get approval fast and take what they could get still from NorthConnex before the project finished producing spoil approved for dumping at the site. After NorthConnex there are other potential sources planned but perhaps after a delay. All in all it doesn't seem like the sort of spending that Hornsby Shire Council should get into, and not the sort of facility, business or time frame for commitment to such an operation that they should be involved with.

It seems to me then that although the Hornsby Quarry is included on the list of possible sites nothing's going to happen there and Hornsby Quarry will continue as it does now; - useless, getting more so, expensive, and an intractable problem.

But one day it will have to be dealt with, filled in, and the created surface area used for maximum community benefit. The longer the delay the more expensive will be the doing of that, and the greater will be the number of persons inconvenienced by deliveries to the quarry.

SUBMISSION

If, within a defined timeframe, such as the end of 2014 to coincide with the expected NorthConnex approval date, Hornsby Shire Council fails to demonstrate a willingness and ability to get the Hornsby Quarry approved in time to receive a significant amount of material from NorthConnex during that project's life, or if they volunteer that they are unwilling to do that by virtue of lack of resource, expertise or for any other reason then the

Department of Planning & Environment should be prepared to negotiate with Hornsby Shire Council to agree a basis by which the Council can be relieved of its ownership of Hornsby Quarry along with authority over its future and responsibility for whatever part of the liabilities attached to Hornsby Quarry is agreed.

Once the NSW Government has full authority over Hornsby Quarry the Department of Planning & Environment, or another more suitable for the task, should plan for developing and using it as a monitored receiving point for defined clean crushed sandstone and like materials from excavations for civil works in the Sydney basin as a project, along the same lines as many such projects described in the Department of Planning & Environment website.

Having defined the project in detail the planning, approvals process, remediation and all other work necessary to be able to receive materials could be done within government, or a PPP, or whatever blended arrangements might be appropriate.

It's a submission I include in support of getting NorthConnex done although I am pessimistic about any of the NorthConnex material ever reaching Hornsby Quarry. Looking at it from the long term interests of Hornsby Shire Council and the State of NSW though there are other major projects already planned but not yet approved such as WestConnex and Sydney Rapid Transit which could supply quantities of spoil that would go a long way to filling Hornsby Quarry. Other like projects will happen in Sydney over the next couple of decades.

Other than major projects there are multiple smaller ones going on all over Sydney at an increasing rate. Some of these materials will pass the test for disposal at Hornsby Quarry and this volume could and should sustain a minimum rate of operation between breaks in supply from major projects.