4.0 THE LANDSCAPE OF THE SCENIC HILLS

Figure 4.0.1. The historic pastoral character of the landscape of the Scenic Hills has survived largely intact due to the introduction of planning controls in the 1970s to protect the Scenic Hills from urban sprawl. Traditional rural uses continue to dominate the cultural landscape (St Andrew's Road - SH-LU1).
4.0 SCENIC HILLS

4.0.1 INTRODUCTION

The Scenic Hills study area is characterised by its complex and rolling hillscapes of pastoral land falling from the prominent ridge line which marks the eastern edge of the Cumberland Plain and extending from Denham Court in the north of the Campbelltown LGA to Mount Sugarloaf in the south. The Scenic Hills provide an ever-present background to much of the daily life of Campbelltown and are prominent elements in many views of the City. As such they have become an important reference point or landmark in the mental mapping of untold generations of people – and not just those living in Campbelltown. The Scenic Hills are to Campbelltown as Mount Ainslie, Mount Majura and Black Mountain are to inner Canberra and Mount Wellington and its associated ridges are to Hobart.

The Scenic Hills have been recognised as being special since the earliest days of recorded settlement. Navan Officer’s 2002 Aboriginal Heritage Study\(^\text{25}\) identified at least six known and reported Aboriginal sites or places within the Scenic Hills, suggesting that it was also an important area for its original owners. The first layer of town planning in the Campbelltown area was formalised by Governor Macquarie in 1810, when the core of the grid was laid out, including the alignment of streets and location of major public parks and infrastructure. Campbelltown Road (then known as the Appin Road) was the main thoroughfare through the district, and was followed by roads to districts such as Narellan and Leumeah. Each of these was aligned to major features within the landscape of the Scenic Hills, and where the roads continue to follow their original alignment these features remain prominent and accessible elements in the landscape.

The landscape’s outstanding scenic values were a strong influence on the selection of the Campbelltown valley as the location for Sydney’s first satellite city; and as was seen in

\(^{25}\) Officer, Navan. 2002. Ibid. p. 92
Section 3 of this report, the protection of both the integrity of the hillsides as a rural landscape and as a setting for the urban area of the LGA has remained a high priority in Campbelltown Council’s strategic and statutory planning processes since this time.

The main ridgeline of the Scenic Hills coincides with the boundary between Campbelltown and Camden local government areas and the eastern edges are defined by the main valley of Campbelltown’s urban area. The area of the Scenic Hills identified as needing protection extended originally to the west into the Camden LGA and to the north into the Liverpool LGA, but the scenic qualities of the landscape in these areas has been significantly eroded by successive planning decisions and policies over the past 50 years to the point where they now provide an unsympathetic contrast to the high quality of the landscape still evident in the landscape of the Scenic Hills of Campbelltown.

Despite periodic attempts by developers to release land for various schemes in recent years, the wider community has expressed its appreciation of the quality of the City’s setting and Council has continued to uphold the principles of the compact city with clearly defined edges protected from the sprawl of ‘transitional’ development.

The undulating ridgeline with its punctuating hills is a prominent part of the landscape but much of the scenic quality is derived from the secondary ridges that fall away from the main north-south ridge in folds towards Bunbury Curran Creek in the east. The network of smaller and more intimate valleys created between these ridges offers a counterpoint to the spectacular panoramas and vistas found in other parts of the landscape and helps to create a sense of spatial depth and three-dimensionality which are missing from many less scenic landscapes.

The prevailing character of the landscape is pastoral with grazing lands defined by paddock boundaries and occasional stands and drifts of trees along ridges and watercourses. Some areas of remnant Cumberland Plain Woodland have also survived, particularly in the northern part of the Scenic Hills, on Mount Annan and on the higher slopes and near ridges throughout the area. A less welcome Colonial legacy is the infestation of African Olive and Box Thorn that now dominates some ridges and hilltops, including Bunbury Curran Hill, Mount Annan and Mount Sugarloaf.

The appreciation of the landscape’s qualities by the early settlers led to the development of what became a richly detailed Colonial Cultural Landscape and which in turn can be appreciated by the community today. The predominantly grassland character of the landscape is a legacy of the clearing done to create the pastoral lands. One of the notable attributes of the traditional pastoral landscape which contrasts strongly with that of the contemporary urban is the extent and speed to which its aesthetic character changes in response to prevailing conditions, and in particular the transformation brought about after a period of rain when the dry yellow-brown hillsides transform to bright verdant green.

An important characteristic of the Scenic Hills is that it is a landscape that can still be appreciated ‘in the round’. The qualities of the landscape first recorded by the early Colonial visitors can still be experienced when moving through the landscape – distant, sweeping, confined, framed, serial and composite views are all available from innumerable publicly accessible places such as major transport corridors, local roads and the network of open spaces throughout the LGA.
The prevailing character of the landscape is one in which the aesthetic of the natural landscape dominates over the constructed even though it contains many historic farms and structures at a density which is now rare in such close proximity to a major conurbation such as the Sydney metropolitan region. Most evidence of human occupation 'sits lightly' in this landscape, being modest in scale, simple in design and built using traditional materials and finishes. The more sympathetic structures are visually connected to the landscape through densely planted gardens around the house which blend into the landscape when viewed from a distance. Outbuildings, sheds and fences are simple, vernacular structures and are unobtrusive in their siting and construction.

Many of the early farmhouses in the Scenic Hills have survived and most of these are now recognised as being of State heritage significance. The survival of whole Estates has however been a rarer phenomenon, with Varroville being a rare and highly significant example of an early Colonial property (from 1810) still in its original landscape setting, even though the ownership has been divided and the management of its significance as a visually intact historic landscape is now a challenging one. The Blairmount estate is another example of a farmhouse surviving from the Victorian era which has retained much of its setting although it has been legally excised from much of its original land. Both Glenlee and Sugarloaf Farm have retained their rural setting thus far but both will be affected (Glenlee more significantly than Sugarloaf Farm) by the development of the Menangle Park Urban Release Area.

Most other estates remained intact until the major development of the late 20th Century, but their paddocks, fences and rural character were overwritten by suburban housing and they no longer read as being in a 'rural setting'. Examples of important estates that have now been substantially surrounded by housing include Epping Forest at Kearns (1820s) and Eschol Park (1870s - formerly known as Eshcol Park) which have both lost their curtilage to suburban development. Others include Denham Court (1830s) and its associated (though now alienated) chapel (1830s), Robin Hood Farm (1820s), St Andrews Farm (19th century), Glen Alpine (1830s), Hillcrest (1850s) and Glenroy (1890s). Gledswood (from 1810s), Raby (from 1910) and Denham Court's Chapel are also nearby but not located within the Campbelltown LGA. St Gregory’s College, straddling the boundary of both Campbelltown and Camden, was also the site of an earlier farmhouse and part of its historic fabric and cultural landscape survives.

Infrastructure is an important marker of European occupation of a landscape and much significant public infrastructure has survived in the landscape of the Scenic Hills. The main traffic routes such as Campbelltown, Denham Court, Raby, Badgally, Narellan and Menangle Roads were all formed during the Colonial and early Victorian periods, and their alignment survives as physical evidence of the boundaries between many of the early estates. Their generally straight alignment today facilitate the appreciation of the topographic complexity of the landscape as the road rolls across the hills and valleys from west to east, each ridge revealing a new panorama in the sequence. A more recent (late 20th Century) addition is the south-western freeway (now known as the Hume Highway). This multi-lane road in a dedicated and otherwise inaccessible corridor acts as an artificial edge to the Scenic Hills as it passes through the LGA. Major roadworks were underway during the period of fieldwork to increase the lanes from four to six to cope with the ever-increasing traffic flows.
Another important link between the Scenic Hills and the early Colonial settlement of Campbelltown can be seen through the alignment of the original town grid. The streets were oriented to allow views to terminate at major features such as Badgally Hill, Kenny Hill and Mount Universe. Many of the other early roads in the main valley, including Narellan, Leumeah and Minto Roads were also aligned to the prominent features of the Scenic Hills. The quality of these views has remained substantially unaltered and the hills continue to enjoy their close visual connection to the main urban area.

The main ridge of the Scenic Hills also marks the boundary between the Georges River and Hawkesbury/Nepean River catchments and the supply of water is an important theme in the evolution of its cultural landscape. The explorer Charles Sturt owned Varroville in the early 19th Century and is known to have built a network of dams to ensure the supply of fresh water to each of the paddocks on his Estate. Documentary and physical research suggests that at least some of these structures may have survived without significant alteration since the 1830s, and therefore potentially be amongst the earliest evidence of water conservation to have survived in NSW. Another major infrastructure project was the construction of the Upper Canal, a system of tunnels, aqueducts, open canals and dams designed to supply water diverted from the Nepean River to the reservoir at Prospect through a fully gravity-fed channel 64 kilometres long. The canal was constructed in 1888 and still supplies water to Sydney today. The system winds through the Scenic Hills from the southern end of Mount Sugarloaf to Denham Court (crossing into the Camden LGA for part of the route) via both open canals and tunnels. A major ancillary dam is also located near the western boundary of the Scenic Hills between St Andrews and Raby Roads. An associated item of infrastructure is the (now disused) reservoir at Kenny Hill which originally supplied the town of Camden. Other significant infrastructure passing through the Scenic Hills is the Sydney-Moomba Gas Pipeline which also runs underground from south to north through the Study area close to the alignment of the Upper Canal; and the high-voltage electricity lines which cross the landscape from east to west.

Figure 4.0.3. The Scenic Hills provide a spectacular setting to the urban area of the Campbelltown LGA and are prominent elements in views from throughout the area. Particularly good distant views over the Scenic Hills are available from the ridges of the valley to the east (the EESPLs). This view is taken from the site of Kyngmont, a late 19th Century farm at the southern end of the East Edge Scenic Protection Landscape Unit 4 (E-LU4).

Figure 4.0.4. From St Andrews Road looking towards north-east towards Bunbury Curran Hill and over the significant Colonial cultural landscape of Varroville.
Some views, such as from vantage points such as Hurley Park (Campbelltown) or Eagleview Road (Minto) are highly panoramic, whilst others, for example from beneath the Council offices, aligned down roads or between natural features are of a highly directed or framed character. The difference of textures created by pasture, vegetation and suburban development are clear even from these distant views from Hurley Park.

Figure 4.0.5

Figure 4.0.6 and Figure 4.0.7 (detail) Framed views to Badgally Hill are even to be found under Campbelltown Council’s offices

Figure 4.0.8. Looking towards Badgally Hill from Appin Road near Bradbury.
Figure 4.0.9. Expansive views towards the ridge of the Scenic Hills are available from Eagleview Road in E-LU4. The alternating bands of light-coloured grasses and darker trees below Badgally Hill are still visible from this distance and add visual and textural depths to the landscape. Much of the panoramic quality of this view has been lost since this photo was taken through the development of the land as part of the Minto Renewal Project, although it can still be appreciated from places.

Figure 4.0.10. Many of Campbelltown’s roads were aligned to features in the landscape of the Scenic Hills across the valley. Leumeah Road for example is aligned to Mount Universe and the succession of ridges and valleys when travelling along the road from east to west creates a sequential viewing experience.

Figure 4.0.11. Good views over the central part of the Scenic Hills (SH-LU2, SH-LU3 and SH-LU4) are to be found from throughout the upper part of the Georgian grid of Campbelltown, including from Hurley Park and near the old St John’s Church.
Figure 4.0.12. The topography of the landscape of the Scenic Hills is spatially complex and visually compelling as it extends along the western boundary of the LGA from Denham Court Road in the north to near Mount Sugarloaf in the south.
The development of the lower slopes of the Scenic Hills as part of the major urbanisation of the LGA since the 1960s has led to the loss of the connectivity between the hills and the valley floor when viewed from a close position such as the freeway, but the Scenic Hills remain prominent in more distant views, such as from the eastern slopes and ridges of the main valley. One of the most important attributes of the Scenic Hills is that it continues to define the experience of arriving in the Campbelltown LGA whether travelling on Campbelltown Road or via the freeway.

The busiest route of arrival in the Campbelltown LGA from the north however is via the freeway which forms part of the Hume Highway, the main route between Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. The freeway follows the alignment of the main valley and good views are
available to the landscape of the Scenic Hills, particularly north of St Andrews Road where they extend over the Scenic Hills Riding Ranch and Varroville; and help to define Campbelltown’s unique scenic landscapes.

The Scenic Hills also define the setting of the City when arriving from the south. Mount Annan and Mount Sugarloaf are prominent ‘natural’ elements in the landscape, and wrap around the southern end of the LGA’s urban development, with the freeway in particular passing through a narrow valley to the east of Mount Annan. The character of serial views when passing south through this link are also definitive, with an abrupt change in landscape character experienced at the threshold between the high relief landscape of the Scenic Hills and the more open, rolling landscape to the south.

High quality arrival views are experienced when travelling between the flatter landscape of the plateau in the Camden LGA to the west and the richly undulating landscape of the Scenic Hills. Three of the five main east-west roads between Campbelltown and Camden are connected through the Scenic Hills, and each provides a different quality and character of arrival.

4.0.2 ISSUES AFFECTING THE SCENIC HILLS

As has been noted earlier in this report, the protection of the unique values of the Scenic Hills has been a priority in both the strategic and statutory planning processes in the Campbelltown LGA for over fifty years, and Council’s resolve in refusing inappropriate development has led to the ongoing quality of the landscape. Even though most properties in the Scenic Hills have been created and/or purchased as rural land to be protected in perpetuity, the landscape continues to be subject to demands for rezoning for more intensive development such as broadacre residential, major commercial development such as a business park, transport infrastructure and other purposes.

Complex landscapes such as the Scenic Hills are not viewed from one location only. They are looked towards, looked over, looked into and looked out of. They are passed through and engaged with. They are experienced as a multi-dimensional place and in many different ways. They demand imaginative and sensitive strategies if any development is to be achieved without significant adverse impact.

The Scenic Hills should not be seen as a static picture, or ‘stage set’. Such an approach implies that the overlapping hills and hidden valleys are akin to wings, and makes no reference to the concept of spatial complexity and depth which the landscape of the Scenic Hills demonstrates so strongly and which makes it unique. Dismissing this complexity and justifying the development of an area within an important landscape because “it can’t be seen” demonstrates a significant lack of understanding of the issue of land use integrity in the establishment and management of the scenic landscape.

The landscape of the Scenic Hills is essentially a cleared, pastoral one. The areas of significant tree growth are limited to the highest prominences and in gully lines, and the remainder of the landscape is undeveloped. The juxtaposition of these in distant views creates a textural depth to the landscape that is lost when developed, even if screened by emergent trees.

Any increase in the density of development and/or introduction of non-agricultural uses into the landscape of the Scenic Hills will have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the
City of Campbelltown and its integrity as a mature and truly unique urban landscape which has been so carefully protected over the last 50 years of development.

One argument cited by prospective developers is that improvements to technology now allow water reticulation to RL 118, and that development up to this level should be permitted in the Scenic Hills. As was identified in Section 3 of this Report, if technology is allowed to drive the footprint of development in the Scenic Hills the unique qualities of its landscape will effectively be lost. Only the uppermost ridges will remain clear of development (or at least until water reticulation technology improves yet again). The ability to interpret and appreciate the complexity of the historic setting of the City of Campbelltown will never be regained.

Other proposals for development attempt to be justified by intentions to site structures out of view. ‘Screening’ development to minimise its impact is becoming more and more difficult to achieve with the increasingly large footprints; two-storey building heights, minimal building setbacks from boundaries and the high amount of site paving and swimming pools found on most properties; none of which is conducive to the growth and survival of canopy-forming trees to maturity. Earlier suburban areas that are now well screened demonstrate significantly lower building footprints and are mainly a single storey in height with a single garage. This modesty of development allows space for the growth to maturity of effective canopy-forming trees. As was noted above, it is critical that the landscape is not managed as a stage set, and that development that is not visible from a certain point is not assumed to be acceptable for this reason.

The integrity of the cultural landscape of the Scenic Hills depends not only on the aesthetic qualities of views over the landscape, but also the retention of rural land uses throughout the area. Although the desire of owners to pursue active farming activity varies, the Scenic Hills still contains a range of rural uses including dairy farming, large-animal grazing and the growing of plants such as grapes and olives and these should be encouraged to continue and thrive through land use zones. This includes ensuring that the uses allowed in adjoining zones will not be likely to give rise to complaints and conflict over the essential incompatibility of some agricultural uses and suburban living caused by pollutants such as noise and odours. One type of land use that has a strong precedent in the landscape of the Scenic Hills is that of education and religious centre St Gregory’s College, the Mt Carmel High School, the Carmelite retreat and priory and the recently approved St Sava’s College are all within the landscape. It should be noted however that none of these uses includes facilities for active worship such as churches or other religious gathering places.
Figure 4.0.14. The landscape of the Scenic Hills contained significant areas of Cumberland Plain Woodland before Colonial occupation. The remnant Woodland on Mount Annan was an important influence on its selection and designation as the Royal Botanic Garden's Australian Native Garden. (SH-LU4)

Figure 4.0.15. The Scenic Hills is significant today as a cleared, pastoral cultural landscape which provides the Campbelltown LGA with a very high quality setting (view from Badgally Hill over the Blairmount valley to the Campbelltown City centre in SH-LU3).

Figure 4.0.16. The Scenic Hills provide a spectacular entrance to the Campbelltown LGA when travelling south along Campbelltown Road.
Contemporary urban development is commonly of a scale, form and density that overwrites all evidence of the original landscape and allows no space for the growth of trees on private property. The visual character of this form of development is dense and dominated by hard edges, and all that remains of the cultural landscape is the underlying topography. The impacts are exacerbated by steep topography as residents seek views over adjoining houses. The efficacy of street tree planting alone to screen the impacts of development would be limited due to the steep topography and the vandalism in other LGAs with expensive views of street trees considered to obstruct expensive views. (Blair Athol and Glen Alpine).
4.0.3 RECOMMENDATIONS RELEVANT TO ALL LANDSCAPE UNITS WITHIN THE
SCENIC HILLS

The following recommendations apply to all Units in the Scenic Hills. They should be read in
conjunction with the specific recommendations for each Unit in the relevant section.

Protecting Campbelltown’s Setting

- The landscapes of the Scenic Hills provide the setting for the City of Campbelltown
  and are what make it a truly unique example of a satellite city. The need to protect
  this setting in its undeveloped, rural state was one of the highest priorities in the
  original planning for the satellite city, and has continued to be respected as a
  fundamental principle through successive local environmental plans and council
  policies.

- The protection of the scenic quality of the land between the urban areas of
  Campbelltown and Liverpool was a major promise when Campbelltown was first
  developed as a satellite city and should continue to be respected.

Continued Protection from Inappropriate Development

- The research has found that the scenic and cultural landscape values of the Scenic
  Hills are of the highest quality and need to be protected rigorously from
  unsympathetic development for the benefit of the whole community. The types of
  development most likely to destroy these values are urban in their nature, including
  residential, industrial and commercial activity. These should be actively discouraged.

- It should be acknowledged that in many instances any intensification of development
  will not be appropriate within the Scenic Hills.

- Introduction of further institutional development is not likely to facilitate development
  that will help to conserve the scenic and historic qualities of the landscape.

- Given the ongoing erosion of the traditional active agricultural landscape in the area
  (which has led to increasing passive-rural development and more recently to the
  increasing suburbanisation of built forms found in the landscape), consideration
  should be given to re-emphasising the importance of active rural activity to prevent it
  being further eroded. This could be achieved by allowing the erection of a dwelling
  only when ancillary to agriculturally productive land uses.

- The nature of significant views makes them particularly vulnerable to
  unsympathetically designed and sited structures. Continue to limit the density, range
  of permissible land uses and the built form of any new development to ensure that it
  does not have any adverse impact on the scenic qualities of the landscape.

Impacts of Urban Expansion

- Expansion of urban development into the surviving rural areas would have significant
  and irreversible adverse impacts on the identified values of the Scenic Hills. Due to
  the nature of contemporary urban development (including ‘large lot residential’ or
  ‘statement houses’), the complexity of local topography and the multiplicity of
  viewpoints from, within and beyond the Scenic Hills; the screening or otherwise
  attempting to ameliorate the impacts of development on the integrity of the spatial
  complexity of this landscape and ameliorating its impacts successfully would be
effectively impossible. The need to screen a development to reduce its impact on the visual setting of the City of Campbelltown reinforces the argument that the development is not appropriate in the first place.

**Future Zoning**

- The zoning of land within the Scenic Hills should encourage the continuation of appropriate traditional and active rural uses that contribute to the scenic values of the area such as small-scale dairy farming and viticulture. This may need further discussion with the Department of Planning and the owners of these active rural uses.

- The Sydney Water Supply infrastructure including the Upper Canal, Tunnel and Weir is a significant heritage item that follows the alignment of the main ridge throughout the Scenic Hills study area. It should not be encroached upon or obscured by any development proposal. Its management in a suburban landscape such as is proposed for the East Leppington urban release area will trigger the need for very sensitive conservation management techniques to allow its ongoing use, interpretation and important role in the landscape without compromises to the fabric or its setting.

- Prevent development that will have an adverse impact on the identified significant natural habitats or views within the Scenic Hills.

- Retain the current visual balance between the open paddock areas and the backdrops of tall trees.

- Retain old-growth and mature re-growth vegetation. The clearing of land to provide space for development is not appropriate.

- The undulating, pastoral quality of the landscape is to remain the most prominent visual element in the landscape – including in views towards and over the Scenic Hills.

**Design and Siting Guidelines for Future Development**

- Ensure that any new development is visually subservient to the landscape. It should be modest in scale, sympathetically located and finished in materials that will have a negligible visual impact. Traditional rural/bushland cottage-scale forms and materials are generally likely to be more appropriate than a standard suburban-style design.

- The primary issue is urban design – the need to ensure that houses and other buildings read as recessive uses to the rural quality of landscape.

- The use of extensive cut and fill to facilitate the siting of a building or other structure on steeply sloping land should not be supported.

- Good design controls are needed that require a thorough understanding of the context of any development as part of the landscape of the Scenic Hills, and not as a free-standing element to be inserted into the landscape. Evidence that the aesthetic context of the setting of any new development has been assessed in detail should be submitted with any Development Application in the area, together with details of the ways in which this impact will be prevented and the scenic quality of the landscape protected. Compliance with this requirement and the achievement of the desired
outcome, that any further development blend into the landscape, could also be facilitated by the preparation and publication of a model for development in the Scenic Hills.

- Fencing should be visually transparent so that it does not distract from views over the landscape.
- Any new dwelling, other building or major outbuilding should be sited to comply with the Rural Fire Service’s publication “Designing for Bush Fire Protection” (2006). This is a particularly relevant matter to those parts of the area which have retained significant natural vegetation cover. If this separation cannot be achieved without adverse impact on significant vegetation or habitats; residential or other development which may be susceptible to bushfire should not be permitted in the Scenic Hills.
- The development potential of any Landscape Unit regardless of zone or nominal development potential may be limited by the need to protect property from fire. This means that in parts of the Scenic Hills no further development may be possible.
- In areas of high visual and ecological sensitivity, such as development under the canopy of mature trees, alternative fire protection solutions such as drenching systems should be sought. Further research on how best to achieve this needs to be undertaken.
- The use of ‘large lot’ (0.4ha) residential lots at the urban/rural interface has not achieved significant aesthetic benefits. Such development reads as residential and has effectively extended the footprint of the urban area further into the Scenic Hills than was intended under the original controls. Any new development that will act as an interface should respect the principles of a compact urban footprint with a clearly defined edge.
- The interface between the landscapes of the Scenic Hills and the adjoining residential areas should be marked by a publicly accessible roadway and not the boundaries of private property.
- Much more careful attention needs to be given to the detailed design and location of development within existing urban areas that may affect the quality of the scenic landscape. This includes development that has the potential to affect significant vistas towards the Scenic Hills.
4.0.4 VISUAL LANDSCAPE UNITS WITHIN THE SCENIC HILLS

Although the Scenic Hills demonstrate strong common characteristics and values there are differences in the qualities and characteristics within the landscape. Five sub-precincts, or landscape units, have been identified to allow a more detailed analysis of the qualities of each, together with recommendations to protect these values through the planning process. The location of the Landscape Units is shown in Figure 4.0.20 below.

Figure 4.0.20. Location of the Landscape Units of the Scenic Hills.