

Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works - Department of Defence Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Storage Program Tranche 2

Executive Summary

The Orchard Hills Defence Establishment (OHDE) should be decommissioned as soon as possible.

What was once a somewhat remote rural area is increasingly becoming heavily urbanised and the existence of an establishment that has the main purpose of housing explosive ordnance is no longer appropriate.

The land occupied by the defence establishment should be repurposed for much needed housing and recreational green space as was done with the St Mary's munitions facilities.

The existence of OHDE and the activities of detonating controlled explosions is a serious impediment to flight paths from the Western Sydney International (WSI) airport.

The transport of explosive ordnance through increasingly congested traffic corridors poses a serious risk.

In the case of conflict, the OHDE would be a key strategic target in a heavily urbanised environment.

Impediment to Flight Paths

In 2026 the WSI airport will commence operation. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Flight Path design has been published. <https://www.wsiflightpaths.gov.au/>

There are numerous constraints that have been imposed on the flight path design. The OHDE forms a serious impediment to fairer and less impactful flight paths.

Currently, all departing flights from runway 05 are forced to fly north of the OHDE before turning west and south, flying over St Clair, Claremont Meadows, Kingswood (including Nepean Hospital and Western Sydney University), Penrith, Emu Plains and Blaxland. As shown in Fig 1 below. The noise from the aircraft on this flight path will have a serious impact on approximately 100,000 people. Aircraft having the ability to turn west immediately on take-off and travelling directly over OHDE would reduce the impact significantly.

The suburb of St Clair, which has over 3000 residences, is impacted by all flight paths departing from runway 05 and the existence of the OHDE prevents any noise sharing arrangements that would lessen the impact.

Special dispensation has been granted to operate the flight path over OHDE during the night time period, due, I suspect, to the fact that detonations are suspended during night time hours. As shown in Fig 2 below.

The difference in the number of dwellings impacted is easily determined by comparing the two images below.



Fig 1: Proposed Day / Evening flight paths for west and south bound aircraft – runway 05



Fig 2: Proposed Night flight paths for west and south bound aircraft – runway 05

Growing Urban Environment

Housing already has been developed along the western boundary, the suburbs being Mulgoa Rise and Glenmore Park. The Orchard Hills South housing development will result in many new dwellings being constructed right up to the northern and eastern borders of the OHDE. As shown in Fig 3 below.

The western and south-western areas of Sydney are the fastest growing population centres in the Sydney basin. There is still great need for more land to be allocated for housing in these areas. The location of the OHDE is ideally located for housing development.

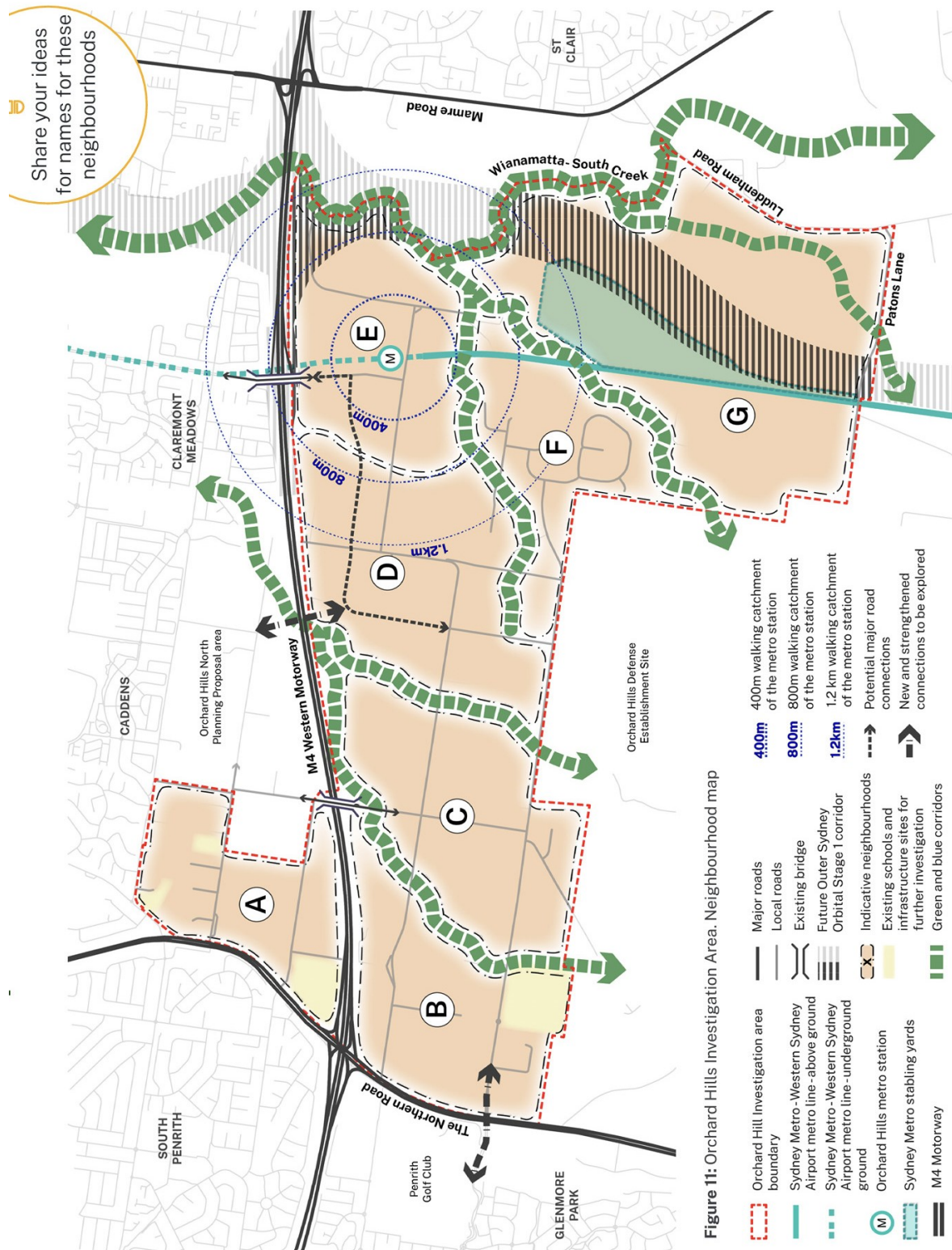


Fig 3: Orchard Hills South housing development plans

The population of the Penrith LGA is projected to increase by 50000 people by 2041. Liverpool LGA is projected to increase by 74000 people. <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/populations>

It is projected that over the next 5 years over 15000 houses will be required for the Penrith and Liverpool LGAs. <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/research-and-demography/sydney-housing-supply-forecast>

Additionally, with the growth in housing developments, there is a demand for more recreational green space. Again, the OHDE is ideally positioned to meet the needs of a growing community. The Orchard Hills South housing development is lacking recreational green space. As the OHDE borders the new housing developments it would be best repurposed as recreational, public green space as this would result in less impact from WSI flight paths.

Risks

While the risk of accidents at the facility might be rated low, that does not preclude the fact that the risk to people increases with the growth of communities in the adjacent areas. I understand that all housing developments lie outside of the “purple line” but risk still exists. Incidents around the world have demonstrated that the range of damage can be well beyond.

The risks of an event during the transport of ordnance must also be increasing as the population in western Sydney grows and with that an increasing volume of traffic and road incidents.

I would like to continue to believe that the risk of conflict for Australia is low, however, consideration should still be given to the fact the OHDE would be a strategic target, whether by military or terrorist attack.

Conclusions

There must be other sites that can be considered that do not have the same levels of surrounding urbanisation.

The site should be decommissioned and repurposed.

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