

6. Site Assessment Procedure

During November 2001 Natural Habitats Ecosystem Management undertook a two-day on-ground survey and assessment of the site. The assessment area was defined by the pre 1947 tramway line adjacent to O'Brien and Somerville Street's to the south and Hewitt's Creek to the north (and including the bushland reserve between Wrexham Road and Seabreeze Place in the northwest of the site). To the west the survey extended to the railway line and to the east the dune formation of Thirroul Beach. Comprehensive photographic documentation was undertaken in conjunction with vegetation profiling and site impact assessment. Aerial photographs were also referenced and supplementary information was gained from discussions with several local residents and interested parties (ie Marcel van Wijk, Jill Merrin, Tramway Wetlands Planning Committee). NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service conservation recommendations, as detailed to Wollongong City Council, have also been referenced.

The major consideration of this report was given to establishing a 'snapshot' of Sandon Point – the existing fauna and flora habitat, and existing threats to these habitats. Some potential bushland remediation strategies are also offered.

Habitat values and conservation significance was determined after assessing and scoring a series of indicators within each management zone. These included:

- Size and shape of an area of remnant vegetation;
- Condition of remnant vegetation (cleared/altered, degraded, modified, near natural);
- Dominance, or otherwise, of introduced species;
- Natural regeneration potential;
- Potential fauna habitat (trees, trees with hollows, shrubs, native herbs and grasses, fallen logs, leaf litter, rocks crevices, wet, marshy, creek)

Other factors that contributed to the habitat and conservation value of an area included prior known rare and significant sites (both natural and cultural) and the connectivity and potential connectivity of a remnant area to wildlife corridors.

Throughout the document the term regeneration has been used. For the purposes of this strategy this term refers to the assisted natural regeneration potential of an area. Assisted natural regeneration enables the inherent resilience of a site to be restored by removing external pressures, such as weeds, and sometimes applying controlled disturbances to trigger germination of native species, such as mosaic and/or ecological burns. Revegetation refers to the re-planting of a site. In general, only areas with low resilience, areas susceptible to erosion or areas with highly disturbed soil profiles where the native seed bank is depleted or removed, or sites that have failed to respond to assisted natural regeneration after a specified period of time, would be considered for revegetation. Revegetation works should always use plant material of local genetic stock.

This report should not be considered a botanical nor fauna survey. Rather plants referred to represent a portion of the potential plant species that may be found at the site. Fauna sightings recorded in this document were carried out by independent interest groups. Invertebrates have not been accounted for in this survey and strategy.

To date, cultural and Aboriginal heritage sites have not been comprehensively located or mapped, with the full extent of the Aboriginal heritage significance of the area yet to be determined. However, a recent review¹² of studies carried out for Stockland Pty Ltd indicates the site may be of importance at the national level.

¹² Hiscock, P. Appraisal of archaeological studies at Sandon Point, New South Wales, (2002)

6.1 Vegetation Profiling and Zone Mapping

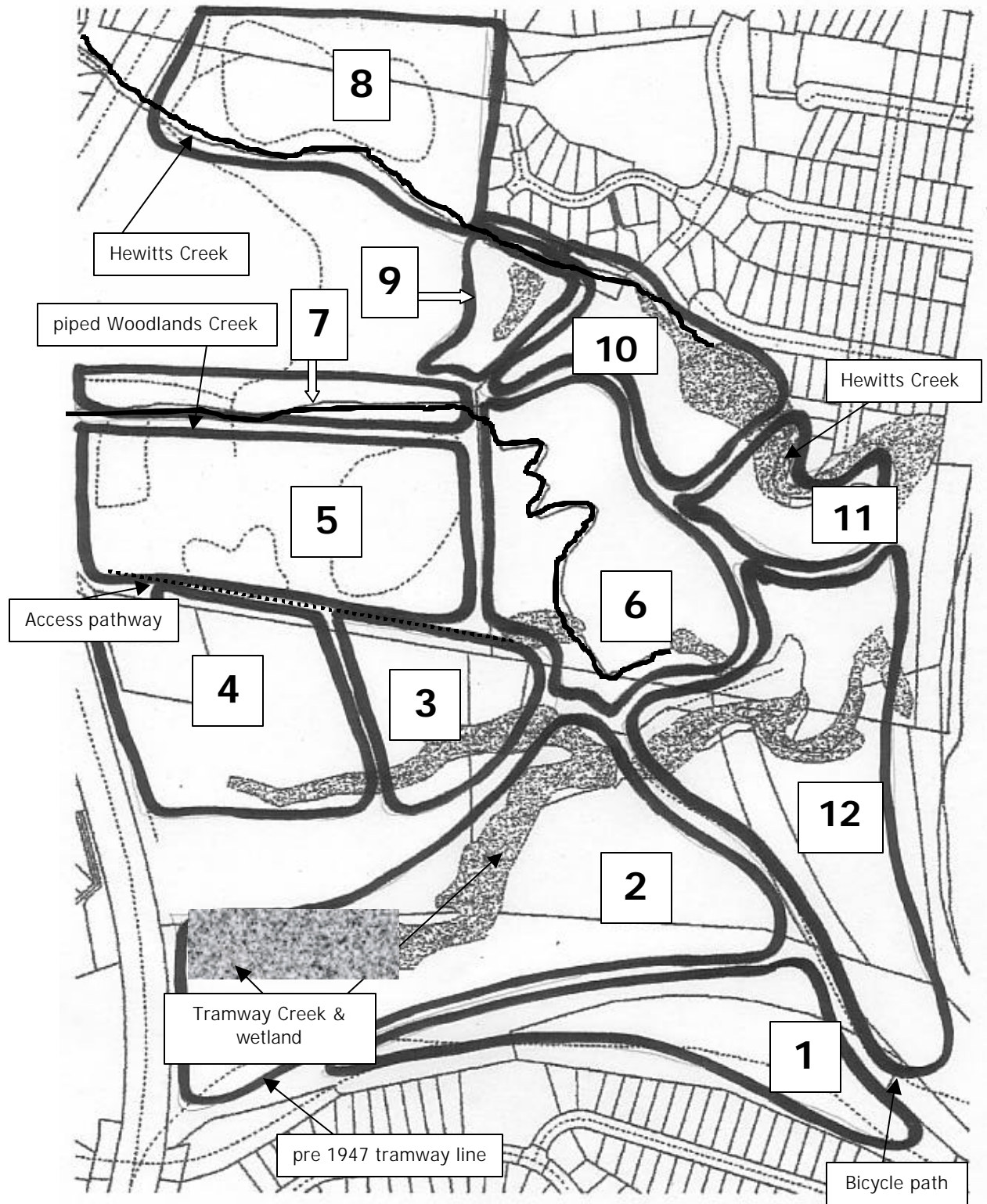
To aid the mapping and assessment process the site was divided into twelve zones (see *Map 2: Site Assessment Zones*). Creeklines, land usage (see *Map 3: Landscape*), and vegetation communities were variously used to define these zones. Significant characteristics were examined within each zone including basic soil profiles, dominant vegetation communities (see *Map 4: Vegetation Communities*) and associations, weed density, habitat values (see *Map 5: Habitat Values*), major impacts and the contribution of the zone to the overall conservation value of the site.

The following is a summary of these observations as at November 2001. Observed native flora and weeds are listed for each zone in Appendix A.

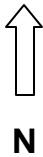
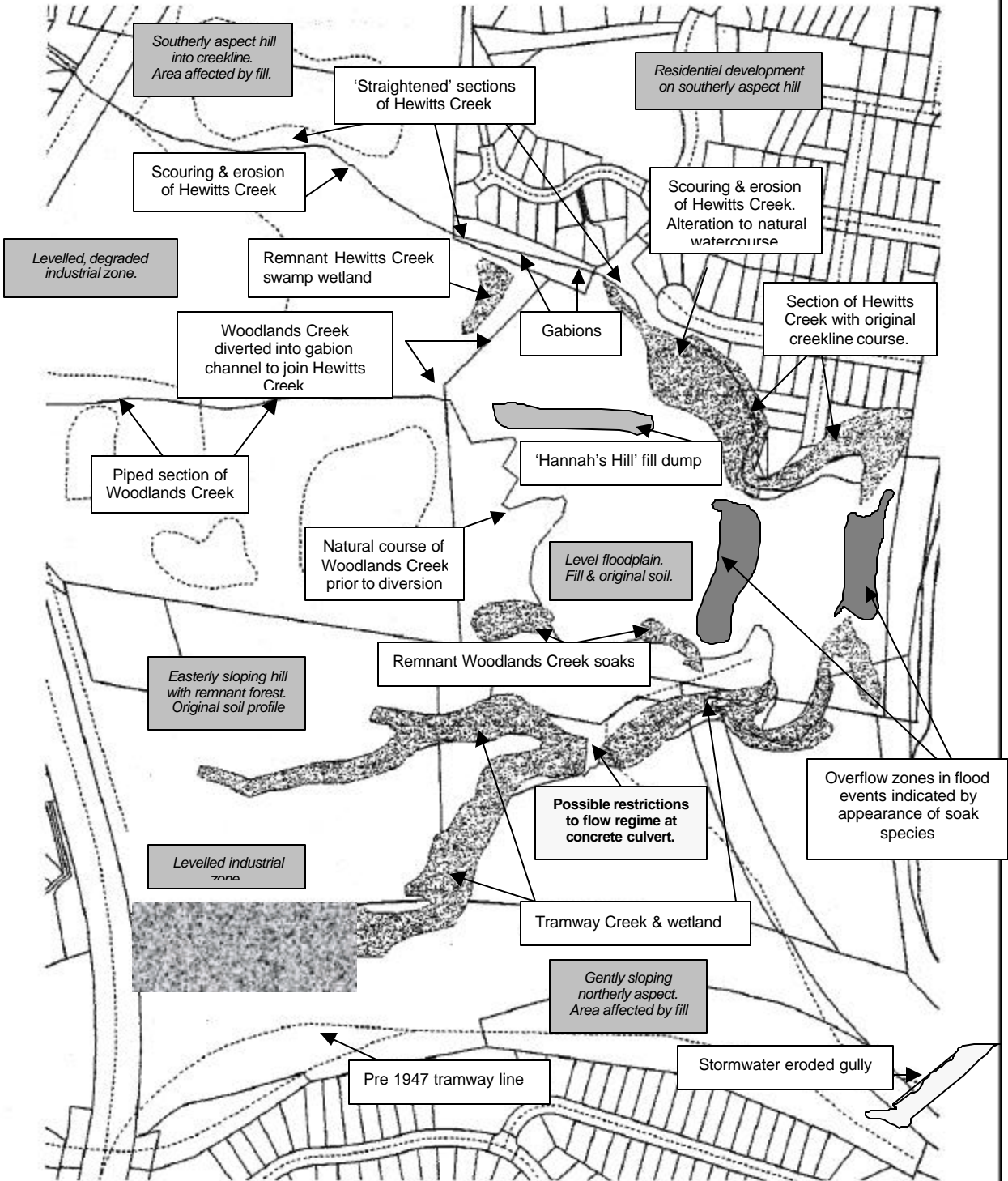
It is anticipated that this snapshot of the survey observations will be the first step in illustrating the significance of the Sandon Point/East Thirroul site and the role it may play in the preservation of local and regional biodiversity.

Zones 1 and 2 have been significantly altered by earthworks since the vegetation profiling and zone mapping were carried out. As a result, much of the habitat value of these areas has been reduced and major rehabilitation will be needed to restore the areas.

Map 2: Site Assessment Zones



Map 3: Landscape



Map 4: Vegetation Communities and location of indicator species for the Endangered Sydney Coastal Estuary Swamp Forest Complex



Map 5: Habitat Values



High Habitat Value
Areas with known habitat or potential habitat for rare, vulnerable, endangered and significant flora and fauna; areas that exhibit a range of potential fauna habitat; areas that are significant for connectivity of wildlife corridors or are critical areas to form links with existing remnant areas to extend wildlife corridors.



Medium Habitat Value
Areas that are modified and/or degraded yet offer habitat values or may be a critical area to link existing remnant areas to extend wildlife corridors. With regeneration the habitat value of these areas could be improved.



Low Habitat Value
Areas that are degraded or highly altered and offer minimal flora or fauna habitat.

