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Liz Fitzsimmons, Steph Dos Santos and Joy Sherlock hug their cats. Picture: Phillip Rogers

Up close and purr-sonal

It's time to show some feline affection for International Hug Your Cat Day.

» Full story page 11

Revealed: Proposal turns indigenous land into 156 home sites

PLANS FOR NEW SUBURB

Robbie Patterson and Kathryn Welling

AN INDIGENOUS Land Council wants to turn bushland in Belrose granted by the government 10 years ago into a massive housing development.

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BELROSE

Housing proposal resurfaces

Concerns remain over large lots, loss of natural environment with threatened species and bushfire risk

Robbie Patterson and Kathryn Welling

A CONTROVERSIAL plan to build more than 150 houses on environmentally sensitive land in Belrose is back on the agenda.

The former Crown land was given to an indigenous land council more than 10 years ago.

Northern Beaches Council has encouraged residents to have their say before a final recommendation is made by the Sydney North Planning Panel to the State Government.

The Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council was granted more than 136ha off Ralston Ave in 2006.

It now wants to rezone and develop more than 17ha of it, to be subdivided and sold into 156 large housing lots.

It also plans to create a 3000sq m public park and bike trails around the development to allow easier access to Garigal National Park.

The Northern Beaches Council has concerns about "significant bush fire threats" and environmental protection including 10 threatened species in the bushland.

These concerns led then-Warringah Council to knock back the proposal in 2013.

Former Warringah mayor Michael Regan said it was also refused because "basic things" like road linkages were not included, and the council was seeking more land to be locked up as a nature reserve.

He said the parts of the new proposal which offered jobs for Aboriginal people, as well as the preservation of Waratah Park, were wins.

Mr Regan said the new plan - which allocates a larger nature reserve - was a better compromise - but he feared it would be a wasted chance for better resources.

He cited the fact that each block would be at least 600sq



Latest plan

- » Belrose is made up of more than 2300 houses and the median house price is \$1.52 million.
- » 156 houses, each at least 600sq m are proposed.
- » The plan was first mooted in 2013, but was knocked back due to environmental and fire concerns.
- » Amended plans have addressed some environmental issues asking for more land around the development to be zoned for environmental purposes.
- » The plans can be viewed at northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au

considered when making a development judgment.

Davidson state Liberal MP Jonathan O'Dea said he shared the concerns of the RFS and Environment Department. He said he hoped to see a sporting facility included.

Because of the complexity of the proposal the council has received extensions to consider the application.

Now, however, a regional planning panel has determined that the application can be exhibited for community consultation.

Northern Beaches Council chief executive Mark Ferguson, said a large component of the original refusal was over fears of the fragile Duffys Forest Ecological Community but zoning changes had solved that.

"The development does have some constraints but the purpose of the exhibition is to make those elements of the development available for public input and evaluation before a final decision," he said.

The MLALC was contacted by the *Manly Daily* but did not respond to questions before deadline.

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"I will be interested to hear what the community has to say about so much bushland being cleared for 156 project homes that will no doubt sell for \$2 million each," he said.

"It just disappoints me that if the State Government approves this, we have again missed the opportunity to perhaps look at some of these lots being for affordable housing, or even some basic variety such as town houses."

Mr Regan - a chief adviser to administrator Dick Persson - said he would encourage the council to pursue better housing variety and affordable housing options.

People living nearby have until June 25 to comment.

Mackellar federal Liberal MP Jason Falinski said he had concerns with the proposed new plan.

"I am worried about loss of

I will be interested to hear what the community has to say about so much bush being cleared

Former mayor Michael Regan

natural environment, over-development without improved public transport and roads, and even other things like sporting fields to cater to the people who are already here," he said.

The Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council has

permission to seek land grants for areas significant to indigenous people in NSW as compensation for land dispossession.

A report prepared in February for the MLALC said the Ralston Ave land sale would not impact the area's Aboriginal archaeological heritage value and the proceeds would provide housing, education and employment for the Aboriginal community.

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) has argued since 2013 that the land at the end of Ralston Ave and northwest of Wyatt Ave presents a significant bushfire threat if developed.

The Northern Beaches Council's information page

says the owners haven't fully addressed the concerns of the RFS.

"The NSW RFS will review all documentation on the planning proposal for the Ralston Avenue site as part of the public exhibition process," a spokesman said.

"Feedback will be provided if appropriate."

The council environment officer said ecological surveys were inadequate and studies paid for by the MLALC had shown more than 10 threatened species in the area including the powerful owl and eastern pygmy possum.

And the council said the MLALC had yet to highlight areas of high conservation value, which needed to be

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