

Nature Society's (NSS) Alternative to Brookvale Park condominium's Proposal for a New Road between Sunset Way and Clementi Road

A) Introduction

Please refer to the Google map attached.

Thank you for the invitation to the stakeholders' feedback session on 29 August 2019.

We concurred with Brookvale-Park's environmental consultant on the rather rich biodiversity of the Maju Forest with its 286 plant species and 146 fauna species. After that session, the Nature Society followed up on an on-site visit to the Maju Forest and the Brookvale area where a new condominium project is planned with the proposed route for a new road. This is in order to get a better picture of the situation in relation to the ground and the ecological impact of the construction and emergence of the road between and along the south-western fence of the Maju Camp and the Maju Forest adjoining this boundary.

NSS has been monitoring the birdlife of the forest here which is also contiguous to the Old Jurong Line, the western line of the Rail Corridor that emerges from the Clementi Tunnel (former rail underground pass) across Clementi Road.

We are against the creation of the new road as projected by the Brookvale consultant. After the site visit to the area and its neighbourhood with a study of the ecological situation and terrain/landscape, we have the following grave concerns and perspectives regarding the new road proposal.

B) Ecological Issues and Other Perspectives

1) Alteration of Natural Terrain & Landscape

The Brookvale Park development proposed new road route will cut along an undulating and steep-sloping terrain all the way from Brookvale Park to Clementi Road about 2-3 metres away from the Maju Camp fence, which is we presume the camp's buffer zone to the forest edge that cannot be infringed. The construction of a road along this stretch will involve inevitably the cutting or shaving the slopes and high grounds for the road to get through. This would cause a drastic alteration of the terrain and landscape. Apart from the aesthetic defilement of this very quiet, peaceful, beautiful and rare corner of suburbia, this drastic alteration will cause big pollution problems during construction (e.g. soil erosion, noise and fume coming from the construction machinery) as well as pollution coming from subsequent regular traffic noises and car-headlights when the road is opened.

2) Shaving off of the Forest for the New Road

The creation of the 2-lane road will inadvertently involve the shaving off of a large tract of the Maju Forest (a relatively small secondary forest of about 25 ha) on its north-eastern flank thus curtailing the size of this last remaining forest along the Old Jurong line of the Rail Corridor. During the session on 29 August, the issue of how much of the forest will be shaved off were not given in the presentation. However, it is obvious that the new road cannot be run on the Maju Camp buffer between the fence and the forest edge, which comes to around 3-6 metres broad. Giving this mandatory allowance for the security buffer of Maju Camp, the new two-laned road will definitely shave off a substantial stretch of the forest all the way from the end of Brookvale Park to Clementi Road. Giving the Singapore's government and the national need to mitigate the global environmental crisis through reduction of the national carbon emission, this is an urgent fundamental issue that must be addressed here as well.

3) Impact on the Wildlife

NSS has been monitoring the birdlife of the forest here for many years. Our observation is that most of the birdlife are concentrated along the north-eastern flank of the forest, especially the stretch closer to Clementi Road. Interesting and/or uncommon bird species such as the Grey-rumped Treeswift, Greater Coucal, Rufous-tailed Tailorbird, Rufous Woodpecker, Oriental Magpie Robin (nationally threatened), the Long-tailed Parakeet (globally vulnerable), etc., are recorded along this stretch. With the exception of the last name species (Oriental Magpie Robin), all the above-named species are forest-affiliated.

Most importantly is the regular presence of the Straw-headed Bulbul in this part of the forest --- a critically endangered species, at both the national and global level. Singapore has become the last major stronghold of this regionally popular songbird with an estimated population of about 200, with the global population amounting to less than 2000 --- and this is declining drastically due to poaching and habitat destruction in its distribution range, which is in the Sundaic region (mainland South-east Asia, Borneo, Sumatra and Java). The creation of the new road, even if it hugs close to the Maju-camp fence will wiped out this section of the forest.

4) Disturbing Impact at the Clementi Tunnel Entrance

The Brookvale Park condominium's proposed road will emerge at Clementi Road close to the Maju Camp fence and this will only be about 10 metres or so away from the Clementi Tunnel, if what we have surmised from the Brookvale discussion session is correct. This we are afraid is too close to the Tunnel on the Maju Camp side exit/entrance --- rendering the situation rather disturbing for the wildlife that we are expecting to use the Tunnel for movement/dispersal between Maju Forest and Clement Forest at the eastern side of Clementi Road. This is especially so when all vehicles have to stop at this junction before moving into the main road, with the engine roaring or humming away. The worst situation will be during night time when the vehicle headlights will also be on.

Avoiding this straight route to Clementi Road by creating a bridge across the rail track further back from the Tunnel will be of course very dis-ecological. Apart from those bird species that are likely to avoid flying across above Clementi Road like those undergrowth-haunting species (e.g. the Tailorbirds, Babblers, etc.), ground-moving wildlife will also be likely to be frightened off from using the Tunnel. For examples, Sunda Pangolin, Green Crested Lizard, Clouded Monitor (all recorded on the Clementi Forest as well as any snakes whether common or uncommon.)

5) Constriction of the Wildlife Connectivity at Southern end of Brookvale Park

This is the point where the proposed new road along the eastern edge of Brookvale Park has to turn west for a very short stretch and then south-eastwards again along the Maju-camp fence all the way to Clementi Road. The green wildlife corridor will be more or less hampered or constricted by concrete surfaces (like the new road) and fences (both the road fence and the Maju Camp security fence).

6) Deprivation of Nature Trail for Nature Lovers

The trail/track along the route of the Brookvale Park proposed road is part of the trail/track going all the way around the forest for nature lovers. This trail/track goes along the disused and broken-down road along the edge of the forest but is now overcrowded with wild vegetation. NSS has been conducting birdwatching trips as well as rambling walks along this trail/track. Also, wildlife photographers and hikers have also been exploring the forest from along this trail/track. The creation of the Brookvale Park proposed new road will deprived all these users from appreciating nature and admiring the charming landscape in this rare suburban greenery. The emergence of the road will entail, as surmised from the Brookvale presentation, the creation of a fence-line along the road and together with the presence of the road will lead to nature appreciation route on this stretch to be rather defiled and the natural beauty and ambience ruined.

C) Nature Society's Alternative Route Proposal

Please refer to the attached Google Map.

1) NSS Proposed Route for the New Road

NSS proposal is to use the existing Maju Drive as the route from Brookvale Park to Clementi Road. We are aware that part of this road run along the eastern boundary of Maju Camp; the problem with this will be dealt with below. However, we see this as the most viable alternative that will not involved big ecological impact and big construction cost.

Given this alternative access route, what is needed is the construction of a new road between Brookvale Park and the PIE hugging close to the existing built-up area --- to join up with Maju Drive. This of course can be easily connected to the

northern end of Sunset Way to allow for other residents of Sunset Way an alternative route to Clementi Road. **For wildlife connectivity for the remnant belt of forest between Brookvale and PIE to Maju Forest, only a culvert under the new road here will be needed.**

The total length of this alternative new road to be constructed to connect with Maju Drive is about 400 metres, while the Brookvale Park's new road between the Maju Camp and Maju Forest will be about 1,148 metres (1.15 km), which is about 3 times longer. Taking into account the ecological, aesthetic, recreational and economic cost involved, this longer route is certainly not an optimal option.

2) The Issue of Using Maju Drive and Mindef Consent:

a) Maju Drive at one time was accessible to the public all the way to the end of the road which comes close to the PIE. But now this road was blocked off by MINDEF about one-third way through with a security gate. The existing road actually runs along the old fence/boundary of Maju Camp on the western side and is still functional as a roadway with no new construction blocking the road (see the Google Map). On the other side is the SUSS/UNISIM campus. There is therefore an urgent need to get MINDEF involved with the decision-making here --- basically to open up Maju Drive as a public road again all the way through.

b) The Security Issue: One obvious problem is the issue of security with public access along Maju Drive. Actually, we don't understand why Maju Road was blocked off to civilian traffic. Is there really an issue of security? As far as security is concerned, there is already an existing fence all around the Maju-camp territory inclusive of the Maju Drive stretch.

c) Congestion during mobilisation exercise of NSmen: We are aware that during NS mobilisation, congestion may arise with vehicular traffic. But this increased in traffic don't occur frequently. In this case, this minor problem can be resolved by expanding a short stretch of the road nearer Clementi Road and the huge carpark now present --- to accommodate the increased of vehicular traffic on such occasions. Looking at the Google map, there is a lot of space for widening the road on the eastern SUSS/UNISIM side and also all the way to the end of Maju Road. **The congestion problem on mobilization can also be resolved by blocking off temporarily residents' and public usage of the road on such occasions (which are usually on or can be restricted to Sundays and public holidays) without causing inconvenience, as the residents and public users can still fall back on Sunset Way where the traffic flow will be minimal on such days.**

D) Concluding Remarks: The Thrust of NSS Alternative Route Proposal

Given the above considerations, we propose that an alternative route for the Brookvale Park new road running between Brookvale Park and the PIE and connecting to the existing Maju Drive, as outlined above, be seriously considered ---- with MINDEF brought in for the decision-making. We are here proposing this

alternative anchored on the following principles/perspectives, which are based on the ecological, aesthetic, outdoor-recreational as well as the economic-cost consideration given above:

- 1) There is the issue of serious ecological impact on the biodiversity of the Maju Forest;
- 2) There is the issue of the loss of nature-appreciation and outdoor-recreation values and potential of the trail /track along the edge of the forest where the Brookvale Park new road is proposed to run; and
- 3) **The need to look at the biodiversity, aesthetic and outdoor recreational values/benefits for the wider community/stakeholders, that is for all Singaporeans, rather than just the Brookvale/Sunset Way community.**

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