

Report a 'green light' to developers

Residents fear a 'Green Wash'.

Robert Burton-Bradley

Serious doubts have been cast over the environmental assessments used for the sale and proposed development of Rippon Grange estate at Wahroonga.

Some residents went as far as commissioning a report of their own, which was highly critical of the one used by the State Government to sell the heritage-nominated site.

"The language used in the [Government's] report appears calculated to downgrade the value of the bushland remnants present and to give a green light to development," the report, which was commissioned by residents and conducted by Gingra Ecological Surveys, stated.

The Government's report was compiled by Urban Bushland Management Consultants (UBMC) for the Department of Commerce just before the 2.29-hectare property went to tender. A spokesperson for the Department of Commerce said

the department was satisfied with the independent investigation carried out.

A Gingra consultant concluded in his report that: "The Government report is not the objective assessment of ecological or conservation value of the site which one would expect for an area of publicly owned land."

However, UBMC managing director Judith Rawling said: "Both our reports were thoroughly done, however everyone can have a different opinion."

In addition to Rippon Grange and other heritage-significant features, the site contains a large stand of critically endangered blue gum high forest, which residents fear will suffer if development goes ahead.

The site was given to the NSW Government in 1951 by the Williams family to be used as the John Williams Memorial Hospital for sick children. The Government altered the terms of the trust in 2002 so the property could be sold.

The developer, Waterbrook Lifestyle Resorts, which bought the

property in 2005, is also using a report from UBMC for its development application, which is currently before Ku-ring-gai Council. Waterbrook wants to build 78 aged-care units in several six-storey blocks, which residents vehemently oppose.

"They have tried to minimise the heritage and ecological significance of the site to maximise their return," Alan Parr from the John Williams Neighbourhood Group said.

"The site has been nominated by the National Trust for Heritage protection and it is clear the Government refused to State list the site to maximise their profit."

The development proposed by Waterbrook would not be possible if the site was State heritage listed, residents said.

A spokesperson for Waterbrook said the company was satisfied with the quality of the work done by UBMC in support of its development application for the Rippon Grange site.

"We commissioned Urban Bushland Management to compile



a detailed flora and fauna assessment of the property and to work alongside a well respected ecologist, Mark Couston, of Footprint Green," the spokesman said. "Mark Couston has many years of knowledge of the Ku-ring-gai area and in conjunction with Urban Bushland Management they provide the level of expertise a property such as Rippon Grange warrants," the spokesperson said.

Rippon Grange as it stands today and notification of Waterford's proposed development.

