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## State may allow development of bushland site

Sunanda Creagh Urban Affairs Reporter  
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THE State Government has refused to rule out allowing a property developer to build 740 houses on valuable bushland in western Sydney that is home to several endangered species and areas of Aboriginal significance.

The property developer IFC Capital Limited bought the 181-hectare site - a former Air Services Australia site in Vincent Road, Cranebrook - from the Federal Government for \$15 million in 2004.

The former environment minister Bob Debus wrote to local environmental activists in November last year to promise that "the protection of the entire site is a priority".

"[The area has] a number of endangered ecological communities, populations of several threatened flora species, habitat for threatened fauna, and areas of Aboriginal heritage significance," he said.

However, Penrith City Council discovered this month that while it has been investigating the effect of rezoning the site for housing, the State Government has decided to fast-track the process by including the site on a list of places earmarked for urban development.

The Department of Planning's Metropolitan Development Program Land Supply CEO's Group will consider adding the site to its list later this month - a step Penrith City Council sees as an act of treachery.

"I am not blaming the developer for using whatever avenue is available to them but I think it's a bit rich to let them bypass council altogether," the mayor, Greg Davies, said.

"We develop local environment plans for the whole area and we have been asked by the State Government to do that, but then they set up a way for developers to go round it."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Planning said listing of the site on the Metropolitan Development Program did not automatically mean the site would be developed.

"It means that it may be investigated for future urban potential, which will take into account all environmental issues. The site has not been declared state significant under the Part 3A process," she said. "The department has been working closely with Penrith council on this issue."

The council, however, said the involvement of the Metropolitan Development Program had taken it by surprise. The council said adding the site to the program suggested development was a fait accompli.

"Our initial assessment of the proposals is that they are highly inappropriate to their location, context and local character," said a planning officer's report that went before council on Monday night. "It is of great concern that the department has developed a process which enables land owners and development proponents to bring forward proposals which are prohibited under local zoning arrangements, seeking rezonings for urban purposes completely outside of the Local Plan process established by the State Government."

The president of the Western Sydney Conservation Alliance, Geoff Brown, said: "[The Planning

Minister, Frank Sartor] has a track record of giving developers a very good hearing. At least through council we have an opportunity for community input."

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