

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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Mr Peter Johns
Manager
ACT Land Development Agency
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Dear Mr Johns

Broadacre Estate Study - Sections 83 and 94 Weston

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) has been actively involved in lobbying for an area management study for the land bounded by Cotter Road, Streeon Drive, Unwin Place and Hickey Court since October 2001. The study commissioned by ACT Land Development Agency (ACT LDA) does not cover this entire area only a small portion. It does however address some concerns which impact the entire area. The WCCC welcomes the request by ACT LDA for comments on the draft final report.

Over the past 3 years the WCCC have discussed issues covering the identified area. The WCCC is a non-political, voluntary lobby group representing the residents of Weston Creek and is an informed, active and pragmatic contributor to public debates in Weston Creek. Our website (www.wccc.com.au) has further details about the WCCC.

In Weston Creek our community is very active in the affairs of the ACT Government and this is reflected in the degree of engagement in reviews and studies being carried by the ACT Government. The WCCC therefore is presenting the attached submission on the *draft* final report of Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd on the Broadacre Estate to the ACT Land Development Agency.

The WCCC looks forward to consultation on the final report and involvement with ACT LDA on future public consultation requirements in respect of any decision making process.

Yours sincerely

(signed)

Pat McGinn
Interim Chair

**Submission of the
Weston Creek Community Council
on the
Broadacre Estate Study – Weston**

*Report of Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Pty Ltd (GHD)
to
ACT Land Development Agency (ACT LDA)*

OVERVIEW

Residents of Weston Creek, through the efforts of the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) have been active participants in the various consultation processes on planning matters that the ACT Government has conducted over the last three years on this area.

Throughout this period, our community has been very aware of the stagnation that has occurred within our district over the last decade or so as a result of a steadily decreasing and ageing population. During this time we have experienced mergers and closures of local schools and colleges, increased vacancy rates in our local shopping centres and a steady decrease in public transport services and community facilities.

Our community has realised that in order to maintain our existing facilities and services, the population of Weston Creek must be maintained at existing levels, or preferably, the resident population must increase.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Monthly meetings of the WCCC in 2003-2004 have attracted more than 60 and up to 200 participants. The Broadacre Estate Weston has been discussed regularly since 2001. Minutes of these meetings are available at www.wccc.com.au and the following meetings provide detail of these discussions:

- October 2001: Orana School/ACT Forests land swap (traffic issues).
- February 2002: Compact housing need for ‘empty nesters’, ‘Front door’ to Weston Creek.
- March 2002: Minister Corbell, questions about re-zoning.
- August, September and October 2002: Madison Lifestyle Communities Pty Ltd.
- March 2003: New Creation Ministries
- April 2003: Aged care included in Study
- May 2003: (then) Land Group, Department of Urban Services, Mr P. Johns
- June 2003: Community Facility Needs Study. Kerry Browning and Joyce Rajasekaram, Planning and Policy Section, ACT Planning and Land Authority.
- August 2003: Aged Care facilities in Weston Creek
- September 2003: New Creation Ministries, J Macknamara and architect F Kasparek.

- October 2003: GHD information session on the Study, Andrew Brown. Concept outline, Madison Lifestyle Communities Pty Ltd.
- November 2003: GHD feedback session, Andrew Brown.
- March 2004: Presentation and release of GHD final draft report to ACT LDA.

These meetings, together with a considerable e-mail and telephone response, indicate the extent to which WCCC has tried to glean meaningful comments from the community, but we realise that some residents will feel disenfranchised by the consultation process on this area.

Residents have expressed:

- The desire for an appropriate 'gateway' for all residents of Weston Creek.
- Planting of native vegetation and/or developing the area for recreation uses or open space is a popular concept among some parts of our community, but maintenance issues have been raised by relevant ACT Government agencies which could count against this concept.
- An interest in the provision of Aged-care accommodation on this sole remaining site in Weston Creek which is large enough to provide the minimum 6-7ha required for an economically viable facility having at least 100 beds.

The consultancy issued by ACT LDA on the Broadacre Estate followed considerable pressure from the WCCC.

This pressure was brought to bear because of concerns by the community that the whole area was being leased to organisations in a haphazard manner with no apparent overall planning, particularly in respect of access and traffic management. Concerns about traffic problems have been expressed by all existing leaseholders in Sections 83 and 94, and by numerous members of the community.

SCOPE OF THE REPORT

The WCCC lobbied to have the terms of reference for the Study broadened to cover the larger area and also include other lease purposes such as 'community facility' rather than just the existing 'Broadacre' land use. The area investigated was limited to an area of 9ha and did not canvass the important issue of change of the lease purpose of the land. The WCCC is concerned that the terms of reference have limited the scope and usefulness of the report, despite repeated requests from the WCCC to look outside the 9ha area to the total area of the Broadacre Estate (see correspondence dated 22.10.2003).

WCCC is aware that there are currently two parties interested in leasing the Broadacre Estate:

- New Creation Ministries proposes a stage one building of 1400 square metres which includes live-in accommodation and 250-350 car spaces on-site (WCCC minutes 24 September 2003).
- Madison Lifestyle Communities Pty Ltd (aged care) have submitted a concept for a community which would be approximately seven clusters of 25-30 single storey low rise self-care units, a 70 bed dementia unit, pool, gym, library, craft room sports facilities in a communal park of native vegetation. (WCCC minutes August 2002) This would most likely necessitate a change of lease-purpose.

The GHD report might have benefited from also examining projected land releases in the surrounding areas e.g. across Cotter Road, North Holder/Duffy and the timing of development of Molonglo Valley. If some development was to proceed in the Molonglo Valley it is suggested that this would not occur until 10-20 years have elapsed. However the community cannot wait this long for the facilities which could be accommodated in the Broadacre Estate. This area needs to be developed to provide for short to medium term solutions; the Molonglo Valley development could provide longer-term development of services.

The important issue of a possible change of lease purpose to facilitate aged-care was not explored at all. The concept of accommodation for older residents presented by Madison Lifestyle Communities Pty Ltd, which attracted great interest from residents at WCCC meetings appears to have received token recognition. Responses at meetings that the gradient of the site and its distance from facilities make it unsuitable for aged-accommodation indicate that convincing responses to these issues at WCCC meetings were ignored. At the WCCC meeting 28 May 2003, Mr Peter Johns stated “There are a number of aged-care facilities in Canberra on a range of different slopes, in fact it is very difficult to find flat land in Canberra. The design and siting can minimise the impact of slope’. At the May 2003 meeting, Mr Johns indicated that there was no other land of suitable size in Weston Creek for aged persons”. At the WCCC October 23 meeting 2003 Mr David O’Keeffe of Madison Lifestyle Communities Pty Ltd indicated that the concept sketch presented to the interested community that night ‘did not take in the sloped land’ which would seem to support the meeting’s feeling that the gradient issue is a non-issue given that much of the area is gently sloping.

The reasons for the recommended and preferred Option, two blocks, are not convincing. The very large size of one site with suggested uses of a church, a pre-school and community centre suggests that the size has been selected to accommodate a request from New Creation Ministries, an already identified potential user, as few others could manage such a large site, except for aged care. Many residents have commented that a statement by a church, through a large building, is an inappropriate ‘gateway’ for Weston Creek. The possibility of a lease-change to enable the construction of aged-care facilities would be stymied by the proposed block division given that a viable aged care facility needs at least 6-7 hectares.

The possible use of a block for a future school attracted a strong negative response at WCCC meetings. Residents quoted the number of school/college closures in Weston Creek in recent years and expressed strong concerns about road safety for children.

INTEGRATING EXISTING USERS

There are several existing leaseholders whose aspirations in the area need to be taken into account. Their future plans for activities on their respective leases will impact on the conclusions reached by GHD. The Orana School, the Baha'i Association and the Sikh Association will continue to grow. The activities of the Australian Federal Police and the National Forensic Laboratory need to be factored into the outcome.

The fact that the Report suggests that the AFP site is a better site for aged care accommodation because its lease will expire in the next few years is unconvincing when it is considered that the AFP have spent millions of dollars upgrading their forensic facilities and other assets at this site - an investment that they would forfeit if they vacate the site.

The report does not address the issue of traffic management in terms of re-routing the road which dissects the Orana School. This is a major concern and will still be an on-going issue for ACT LDA, ACTPLA and ACT Roads if this current process does not deliver a viable and workable solution.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT AND ROAD ACCESS

WCCC meeting minutes contain numerous and repeated references by residents and existing leaseholders about traffic hazards. The WCCC has requested a traffic management plan prior to any more grants of leases. The Options indicated by GHD will attract much concerned comment.

- Slip lanes, the minimal treatment were not regarded as adequate at the presentation of the Final Draft plan at the March 2003 WCCC meeting.
- Parking is inadequate.
- Unwin Place/Streeon Drive intersection is already at 'saturation point' (GHD report 1.2.3 page 3).
- A public road already intersects the Orana school site. The school will expand to 750 students, there are currently 50 staff.
- The school is 'very interested in a gateway concept' (28 May 2003 WCCC) and expressed 'interest in forging links with the elderly' (WCCC minutes 23 October 2002)
- Roads are too narrow for the current and potential increase in the volume of traffic. (WCCC minutes 24 April 2002)
- The lease application by the NCM indicates that the increase in traffic will be considerable and not limited to weekends. (WCCC minutes 24 September 2003).

- NCM is anticipating 5,000 members by 2010. There are currently about 960 people active in weekly activities of meetings, youth group, dance and drama classes.
- The Baha'i Association intends to expand. (WCCC minutes 24 September 2003) and participants have expressed their concerns about traffic management. The Sikh Association will continue to grow.
- Traffic movements for an aged care facility would not be in peak periods.

The report notes (page 4 Appendix 1) that ACT Roads prefers a fully signalised intersection at Streeton Drive/ Unwin Place, possibly based on the knowledge that slip lanes will not alleviate current and future problems.

An expansion of the scope of the report might have also looked at the traffic created by the co-location of the Australian Federal Police, including the recently established National Forensic Laboratory. The introduction of regular 'water wise' workshops by the Xeroscape garden are attracting large groups. The minimal traffic created by an aged accommodation facility, given that such facilities have their own bus, attracted favourable comment at meetings.

The preference of Option 4 has a traffic solution of a road through Block 1 to access Block 2. It in no way addresses the current traffic problems, but appears to be a claim in respect of reducing potential future problems when these blocks are released.

The WCCC is aware that there is a need for the new Emergency Service Authority (ESA) to be involved in this process in respect of access and egress of land development (WCCC meeting Apr 2004). In terms of access the ESA is being, and will need to be, consulted by ACTPLA and Urban Services in terms of physical access in planning and infrastructure. This will also be of greater importance in cul desac and dead-end streets. Given that a critical member of emergency services provision, the AFP, are in this area the access and egress through one entry does not meet the new requirements. If there are few options in terms of access and egress the area becomes of significant interest to ESA in an emergency.

TIMING OF DEVELOPMENT IN MOLONGLO VALLEY

If some development was to proceed in the Molonglo area it is suggested that this would not occur until 10-20 years have elapsed. However, the community cannot wait this long for the facilities which could be accommodated on this Broadacre Estate. The land needs to provide short to medium term solutions. Services needed in the long-term could/may be provided by the proposed Molonglo Valley development. It should not be assumed that the Molonglo Valley development would proceed and provide the services being foregone on the Broadacre Estate site.

LAND VALUE

A significant number of parcels of land in Weston Creek have been provided under concessional lease arrangements. The provision of land at less than cost is revenue forgone by the ACT Government and eventually is made up from rates fees and charges from residents. The extent of the proliferation of 'concessional leases' has brought about a review of concessional leases, how they are issued, to whom they are issued and covenants to manage further sale by the lease holder to avoid speculative gains on land prices.

The commercial operator of an aged care facility in the Broadacre Estate would pay market price for the land and pay for the development of infrastructure, such as off-site capital works and traffic management solutions. The traffic management costs would be borne by the commercial operator not the ratepayer, as would be the case if the lease(s) are provided to other types of organisations

CURRENT INTEREST

The WCCC and the general public are well aware of the two main uses competing for the land in this limited study. The community is aware that New Creation Ministries has already made an application for the site, and that they already have a site allocated to them in Dixon Drive Holder. Although GHD advised on 24th March 2004 at the WCCC meeting that there were other sites suitable for aged care any vacant sites appear to have the incorrect land zoning, are too small to be commercially viable or are not in Weston Creek. The loss of opportunity for the best use of this site will be detrimental to the aging population of Weston Creek.

The REPORT – errors and inconsistencies

There are concerns on the accuracy of the report

- Some stakeholder comments and concerns have been relegated as minor and de-emphasised. Although it is appreciated not all comments could be recorded those repeated from a number of stakeholders are missing (page 11)
- A Swimming Centre would be a use consistent with the aspirations of Weston Creek residents and dismissed in the report
- The maps used are out of date.
- The report has indeed gone beyond the apparent Terms of Reference by suggesting uses such as 'educational establishment' and 'place of worship'.

- The use for a ‘small scale school’ would not add to the morning traffic flow if under 200 enrolments (verbal at WCCC meeting 24 March 2004); but pg 5 Appendix 1 ‘am peak traffic would need further investigation’ (sic) for a small school.
- Section 4.4 page 15 lists suitable uses under Broadacre and ‘special care’ and ‘special care hostel’ are recorded as potentially suitable but are not investigated further in the report.

TOWARDS A PREFERRED POSITION

Weston Creek Community Council on behalf of Weston Creek residents expresses regret that the final draft plan by GHD for the Broadacre estate, Weston:

- Misses the opportunity to provide an appropriate gateway to Weston Creek incorporating open space and native vegetation.
- Misses the only remaining opportunity to provide older residents with alternative housing which would enable them to remain in their community.
- does not reflect the level of community concern about traffic management
- Is open to suggestions that the scope has been deliberately restricted to produce an outcome which could favour a party already known to be interested in obtaining a lease on at least part of the study site.

Notwithstanding the limits of this report, the WCCC has tried to glean meaningful comments from members of our community, but we realize that a significant number of residents will be discontented and feel disenfranchised by the present consultation process on this area.

The WCCC appreciates the commendation on page 34 of Appendix A

WCCC April 2004