

*Your local voice*



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Dear ACT PLA and NCA

### **Submission by the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) on :**

- Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 281;
- Preliminary assessment of the draft variation; and
- Draft Amendment to the National Capital Plan No 63 – Molonglo and North Weston.

This submission is in two parts. First, it lists specific concerns of Weston Creek residents about the Molonglo development. Second, on the basis that the development may still proceed as currently planned by the Government, this submission proposes the setting aside of a relatively small parcel of land as a forest buffer space between the new Molonglo development and the existing suburbs of Weston Creek.

#### **Part 1 – Concerns of Weston Creek residents about the Molonglo development**

Some of the following concerns were raised at the Weston Creek Community Council public meeting on Wednesday, 26 September 2007, at which representatives from the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the National Capital Authority spoke about the development of Molonglo and North Weston.

The Molonglo development is driven by an assumption that there will be and should be, an increasing Canberra population which will need accommodation. Given the current emphasis on environmental matters, a number of Weston Creek residents consider that it would be appropriate to carry out a re-appraisal of the sustainable and desirable population level for Canberra before committing further significant resources to the Molonglo development.

The Molonglo development will have a profound impact on the environment of the Molonglo Valley. Weston Creek residents would like to see a reduction in the area of land marked for development in order to retain more land for local flora, fauna, water-ways and recreation, and to retain more of a 'bush feel' to the area of Weston Creek and Molonglo.

There has been no indication that there has been sufficient planning to upgrade infrastructure and services in Weston Creek (i.e., roads, shops, schools, childcare, etc) to address the impact of the increase in population in Molonglo. Such infrastructure and services will be particularly important in the earlier stages of the development, before facilities are available in Molonglo.

While it is understood that the Cotter road will become multi-laned eventually, the impact of an increased number of vehicles in the short term on the present Cotter Road, and the flow-on impact on its connections to other roads in Weston Creek does not appear to have been addressed. As Molonglo grows, there will be a need for mass transport. Planning for that seems to be missing in the design of the suburbs.

It appears from current plans that the Molonglo development will not retain adequate open space between it and the Weston Creek suburbs. The loss of properly managed broadacre recreation space following the bushfires will become a permanent loss for Weston Creek residents. The space between Molonglo and Weston Creek will be largely taken up with a multi-lane highway.

Under the current proposals for Molonglo, there will be a narrowing of the river corridor in some places. Residents have expressed concern about the adverse impact this would have on water quality.

It has been pointed out that the Molonglo development is in a pathway that has been susceptible to a high number of bushfires over the last 30 years. This aspect does not appear to have been adequately considered by the Government.

There was an expectation that planning for the new suburbs should be visionary in tackling climate change and other environmental issues. The plans do not include a large-scale water-recycling system or mandatory private grey water systems, water tanks and solar-powered systems for all homes. There are also concerns about the orientation of blocks to ensure that most, if not all, houses are oriented to capture solar power.

Concerns have been expressed about the Molonglo development proceeding at a time when there has been a shortage of water for a number of years in a row, and when no one can be sure that this situation will improve in the future. Current proposals for the Molonglo development do not adequately address the issue of long-term water supply.

Residents are concerned about the planning of walking and cycling trails. The WCCC proposes that walking and cycling trails should be provided within the Molonglo suburbs, with connections to Weston Creek, and supports the Canberra Off-Road Cyclists (CORC) submission with one exception: The “purple” link between Weston and Stromlo Park is incomplete as it finishes at Stromlo Village rather than the Stromlo Forest Park.

The Stromlo Forest Park is developing into a world class sporting facility, however, the Government plan does not provide for off-road walking/cycling links to business centres and possible accommodation facilities. Of major concern to Weston Creek residents is the lack of such a off-road trail between Mount Stromlo and the Weston shopping precinct, which is the major shopping/restaurant centre in the area.

Finally, it is recognized that the Molonglo development will meet the need for more high-quality townhouse and other accommodation in Canberra and that the development has the benefit of being close to Civic. However, this has to be balanced against the concerns above.

## **Part 2: Proposal for forest buffer space between the Weston Creek suburbs and Molonglo suburbs**

### Location of the forest space

The Weston Creek Community Council proposes the creation of a forest buffer space (“forest space”), zoned as a nature park/open public space between Weston Creek and the new Molonglo suburbs as depicted in Map 1 attached.

The area lies to the north of the suburbs of Weston, Duffy and Holder and borders the Defense buildings to the east, Uriarra Road to the west, the Cotter Road to the south and as far as the Molonglo river to the north. Existing structures such as the Forestry buildings would remain. The area is currently loosely referred to as ‘Deek’s Forest’. It is envisaged that there would be no sealed roads going through this forest space. As the Cotter road and Uriarra Road will become multi-lane busy roads, access to the forest space will be needed for both people and wildlife – perhaps in the form of generous-sized underpasses.

### The case for the “forest space”

A natural corridor between Stromlo Forest Park, the Arboretum and Black Mountain nature reserve can be created by setting aside as forest space the small parcel of land described above. It will serve as a sound barrier; allow the area to revert to a ‘quiet bush feel’; provide habitat for flora and fauna; provide cycling, walking and horse riding access between Weston Creek and Stromlo Park, the Arboretum and Lake Burley Griffin. It would provide access for wildlife from Stromlo Forest to the Arboretum thereby adding a new dimension to that facility. It could be partially or wholly incorporated into the Arboretum thereby making the Arboretum a more significant asset and unique tourist attraction. The WCCC sees this as a once-only opportunity to retain recreational space for both Weston Creek residents and future residents of the Molonglo suburbs. Additionally, it would add significantly to the land values in both Molonglo and on the Weston Creek side of the forest space.

While the users of Stromlo Forest Park would have access to the proposed forest space, it is expected that the primary uses of the new forest space would be orientated more towards family activity and less towards sport– assuming past usage as a guide. It is envisaged that the proposed forest space would once again have Deek’s Drive as its focus, leading down to the river where the picnic/barbeque area would be reinstalled. The proposed forest space would incorporate the water catchment pond at the east end of the forest space.

The specific area selected in this submission as a forest space was by far the most heavily used portion of the forest prior to the bush fires. While it was primarily used by Weston Creek residents and their visitors, it was also used by other Canberra residents. There is a strong desire within the community for the reinstatement and use of the facility. Because of the history of this land there is a high degree of certainty that it will be heavily utilized.

The buffer zone planned between East Molonglo and the Belconnen suburbs of Aranda, Cook, Weetangera and Hawker is large. This submission to redevelop the forest space is therefore reasonable and consistent.

The proposal for the forest space will provide an opportunity for more 'on' and 'off' road cycle/multi use trails to be developed. The current Government proposal does not depict an off-road trail linking Weston Creek shopping centre to Stromlo Forest Park, but the forest space now proposed would facilitate this.

Other aspects of this submission

If designed and planned properly, this relatively small and narrow strip of forest space will not be a fire hazard.

The Weston Creek Community Council would contribute towards rehabilitation of the area, and help harness volunteers to assist.,. Other volunteers may come from Greening Australia, the Canberra Off Road Cycle Club, and the prison work scheme.

Please note that the Council has also lodged a submission on the North Weston Development in conjunction with the Orana School, Bahai Community and Sikh Community. That submission is regarded by the Council as a separate issue.

The Weston Creek Community Council is a voluntary organisation which receives funding from the ACT Government to advocate for the interest of Weston Creek residents and businesses.

The Council would welcome an opportunity to meet with the relevant people in ACT PLA to discuss the details of this submission and, in particular, to discuss the creation of the proposed forest space. To contact the Council, please telephone me on (02) 6288 8975.

Yours Sincerely

*(electronic submission)*

Tim Dalton

Chairperson

December 2007

