Housing Choices
Planning Policy
Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
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**DEAKIN RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATION RESPONSE TO HOUSING CHOICES DISCUSSION PAPER**

Dear Sir/Madam

The Deakin Residents’ Association (DRA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Housing Choices Discussion Paper released by the ACT Minister for Planning and Land Management in November 2017. The Paper provides a basis for community comment to inform future planning decisions on improving housing choice.

The DRA is a member of the Inner South Canberra Community Council (ISCCC) and the Association’s views are reflected in the ISCCC response to the Discussion Paper. This submission focuses on issues of more direct relevance to residents of Deakin.

The objects and principles of the Deakin Resident’ Association are:

*“ to enhance the residential, suburban, social and environmental aspects of Deakin, consistent with garden city planning principles through participation in community discussion on and input to planning and land management in the ACT as it impacts on Deakin residents, including through advocacy to the ACT and Commonwealth Governments and advocacy to, and representation before, tribunals and courts.”*

Deakin is a unique residential suburb of Canberra and one of significant historical significance. It is located adjacent to the National Parliament and accommodates the Prime Minister's Lodge. It is the headquarters for many national industry, community, lobby, cultural and professional associations, as well as home to foreign embassies and High Commissions. It is also a growing hub for specialist health services, including a hospital, medical and allied health service providers. Key historical sites, parks and other green space, including the natural ‘flow’ of Red Hill into the suburb, are an integral part of Deakin. Its residential areas reflect a diverse community and, in earlier times, comprised a healthy mix of public and private housing.

Unlike most suburbs, certain parts of Deakin are subject to the planning provisions of both the National Capital Authority (NCA) and the ACT Government. In fulfilling its responsibilities, the NCA has recognised the value of the Garden City concept and the importance of Deakin in demonstrating its benefits.

Because of its age and location, Deakin has been the subject of redevelopment and renovation over a number of years. This is continuing and has led to an increase in multi-dwelling units such as duplexes, and townhouses. Construction of multi-storey apartments has been minimal. New dwellings are typically larger, with increased hardscape and subsequently decreased soft landscaping. While most of the redevelopment has been to existing structures and blocks, there has also been some development of residential properties in “greenfields” sites, for example along Adelaide Avenue between Hopetoun Circuit and Kent Street.

The Discussion Paper states that Government policy is based on “developing a more compact city by focussing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along major transport routes.” Part of the rationale for this is that it is a cheaper option and builds on, and uses, existing infrastructure. Such developments will comprise predominantly high rise and medium density housing. The implication seems to be that such proposals would largely accommodate Canberra’s growing population well into this century. The Paper states that changes to the RZ1 Zone, which forms a significant part of Deakin, are expected to be modest.

The Discussion Paper documents the clear preference of the vast majority of the population to continue to live in single dwellings which is at odds with the Government’s intensification policy. Not everybody wishes to move to a high rise apartment. It will be important to ensure that an oversupply, or glut of the latter does not eventuate and result in a distortion of the housing market. The DRA is aware of the view put forward by the building industry that development of high rise structures of less than six stories is not viable. Regardless of the unsubstantiated claims of the industry, six storey developments in Deakin would be totally unacceptable to the suburb’s residents

The DRA accepts that some urban intensification is necessary and inevitable in Canberra but cautions against a blanket city-wide approach being adopted. The available data suggest that South Canberra already has one of the highest shares on apartments in the ACT. Of major concern to DRA is the lack of a Master Plan and consequently uncoordinated, piecemeal and haphazard development that is occurring in Deakin, threatening our garden city status with resulting negative impacts on traffic and distortions to visual aspects of the suburb. This is one of the reasons why the DRA has opposed the development of a large scale residential aged care facility on Block 13, Section 49, Deakin. While recognising the growing need for such facilities, **this** proposed facility is considered to be inappropriately located, too large for the site, and will impact negatively on traffic in the area. The DRA is also of the view that it also contravenes aspects of the relevant NCA Development Control.

The DRA has long advocated and continues to argue for the development of a Master Plan for all Deakin to facilitate future coordinated development throughout the suburb.

One of the reasons given for concentrating intensification in major town centres, around group centres and along major transport routes is that it builds on, and makes use of, existing infrastructure. In Deakin, much of this infrastructure is ageing and in need of repair. At a recent public meeting, Minister Gentlemen stated that Canberra feeder roads currently carry less than 10,000 cars a day and are well capable of carrying many more. The latter comment is patently not true. Ask any motorist trying to access Kent Street during peak hours following development of the Equinox Centre in West Deakin. This is likely to be further exacerbated in the event of development of Equinox Mark 2 and the proposed development of Section 44 in Kent Street. Traffic around the Deakin shops has also reached dangerous proportions and is now posing major risks to pedestrians and cyclists.

The Discussion Paper documents the changing age profile of the Canberra population and the impact that this will have on housing choices. In relation to older people, who no longer want, or are able, to live in a big home, it notes their desire to remain in their immediate surrounds where they may have lived for 50 years or more, rather than move to a remote, unfamiliar locality. A number of residents have indicated a preference for a smaller single storey property that provides better options for the elderly and mobility impaired. Unfortunately, Deakin is currently deficient in this type of accommodation. Consideration should be given to the suggestion of Dave Shearer, Director, Project Planning of the Independent Property Group, that lifting of restrictions on individual strata titles could promote greater investment in housing of this sort.

Successful examples in Canberra of single storey developments for the over 50’s include the large complex in Lyons near Hindmarsh Drive and the redeveloped properties on the former convent site in Campbell near the War Memorial.

The DRA notes that major intensification and redevelopment has implications for Deakin’s aging infrastructure and street layout. Intensification of housing development and downsizing can lead to loss of soft landscaping and garden space and an increase in hard landscaping with consequential undesirable environmental and sustainable development effects, for example run off after heavy rain. There is also a loss of tree canopy cover at a time when tree canopy is increasingly valued in cities for its environmental impact and a consequent negative micro-climate effect. This is not consistent either with good environmental planning or protecting Deakin’s Garden City status. There should be a requirement for all future developments, and particularly redevelopments, including dual occupancies, to meet mandatory standards for a proportion of soft landscaping (say 35 per cent) as well as mandatory standards that address the impact on neighbouring properties.

Greater pressure is now being placed on existing parks and open space. Deakin residents very much value their small parks, such as Latrobe Park, The Lodge Park and Rosemary Dobson Park and other open spaces which are seen as an integral part of Deakin ‘s garden city make up. It is essential that they be enhanced and maintained for community and public use. This is vitally important in a densifying suburb. There is also a disturbing tendency throughout Canberra for community, sporting and public recreational spaces to be sacrificed in favour of developers’ interests, particularly when most primary schools, which are surrounded by extensive green space and open land which has previously been used for recreational purposes by the general community, are now fenced off.

DRA believes that future planning for housing choice in the ACT provides an opportunity for the development of creative and innovative structures that take account of future technological advances that will affect housing. This is consistent with the Minister’s statement in the Discussion Paper that mandates the delivery of “an outcome-focused planning system to reward design excellence and innovation.”

There is a perception that Deakin is a suburb of predominantly older people. The DRA questions this assumption and notes that it has traditionally enjoyed a wide age demographic. In recent years, there has been an influx of new residents following the redevelopment and refurbishment of the pre-schools and other “state of the art” educational institutions. Equally Deakin has, and will continue to be, a favourable location for many families because of its proximity to a range of government and private schools.

Block sizes vary significantly throughout Deakin. Blocks in the Deakin/Forrest Precinct area are typically larger. Advice from the NCA is that the size of normal residential blocks range from 1050 sqm to 3832 sqm for the largest, with an average size of 1662 sqm. Some larger blocks also exist in the area next to this Precinct. By contrast, many of the blocks on the on the lower side of Hopetoun Circuit are considerably smaller.

The NCA has recently proposed that future development of the majority of the Deakin/Forrest Precinct should be limited to one dwelling per block, on the grounds that this will help preserve the 20th century Garden City planning concepts that the Griffins’ adopted in their design for Canberra. The DRA supports the NCA’s efforts to maintain the Griffins’ vision for the area.

In summary, The DRA supports the development of a coherent and coordinated planning system designed to meet the needs of the entire Canberra community into the future. This needs to be informed by, and take account of, the views of all sections and age groups, not just people under 45 years of age. Deakin and its immediate surrounds will continue to require a mix of suitable housing choices to meet the needs of its diverse community. Of paramount importance is the need for all developments to be consistent with maintaining garden city principles and values. A blanket city-wide approach is not appropriate, given the particular needs of individual suburbs, having regard to their age, composition and special characteristics.

The ISCCC, in its submission, is recommending establishment of an Independent Planning Authority that reports directly to the ACT Legislative Assembly. That body would include suitably qualified professionals with expertise and experience in town planning matters. Enforcement of ACT planning and building rules would be transferred to that body. The DRA strongly supports this proposal.



John D Bell
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