

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
14 April 2013

Standing Committee on Planning,
Environment and TAMS,
Office of the ACT Legislative Assembly



Dear Legislators,

DV308: Cooyong Street Urban Renewal Area

Ten years ago my wife and I chose to retire to Canberra. We did so because we judged that this city offered a quality of life unequalled elsewhere in Australia. The city of Canberra was designed to fit into its environs. And through much of the 20th century, considerable attention was paid to conserving and improving Canberra's natural setting.

This city is not a pale shadow of Sydney or Melbourne. It stands in its own right as a legacy to those who have worked diligently and with foresight to develop it in accordance with sound principles of civic design in keeping with its natural setting. Canberra well deserves the epithet, "Bush Capital of Australia".

The key to successful redevelopment in Canberra is appropriateness of scale to context. Importantly, context includes the surrounding landscape, which thankfully is still visible from most parts of the city. Unfortunately, the scale of the buildings permitted under the revised proposals for DV308 – like the proposals considered in February last year – fail to match their context.

Please take the time to compare two parts of the revised master plan (dated February 2013): on the one hand the area comprising Precincts IV and V (in Reid) and on the other the area comprising Precincts VII and VIII (in Braddon).

Precincts IV + V (Reid) **comprise almost the same total ground area** as Precincts VII + VIII (Braddon). They have the same dimensions, and the same orientation (long axes approximately north-south).

Yet in the latest version of the master plan, it is proposed that these two areas of land **will have very different buildings built upon them:**

- Precincts IV + V (Reid) will have buildings 15, 10 and 6 stories in height.
- Precincts VII and VIII (Braddon) will have buildings 6, 5 and 3 stories in height.

In other words, the buildings proposed for Precincts IV and V (Reid) are of quite a different scale – much taller and of much greater bulk – than those proposed for Precincts VII and VIII (Braddon).¹

The only obvious reason for such different treatments of Precincts IV + V (Reid) and Precincts VII + VIII (Braddon) is that this part of the Braddon site is adjacent to an area of low density housing (single-storey houses built from the 1920s) while Precincts IV and V (Reid) are adjacent to an area of medium-density housing (2- and 3-storey town houses and 3- and 4-storey apartments) built in the early 1980s.

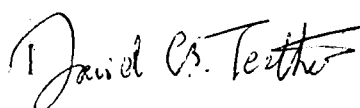
This 1920s housing in Braddon is heritage listed. The 1980s housing in Reid could well be deemed worthy of such listing, since it is an outstanding, early example of medium density development in Canberra.

But irrespective of their heritage-listing status, both these areas of existing housing adjacent to the proposed redevelopment are currently occupied by **citizens of Canberra who, like residents elsewhere in this city, are entitled to a reasonable expectation that their homes will not be overlooked and overwhelmed by grossly over-scale residential or commercial development out of keeping with their neighbourhoods.**

Somewhere between the scale of the present residential buildings in Reid and Braddon, and the current proposal for yield-maximising over-development, lies a happy medium that should satisfy residents of the site itself, residents of the nearby suburbs, and proponents of redevelopment.²

I wish you success in achieving this goal.

Yours sincerely,



David C.B. Teather

¹ No less than 386 apartments will be constructed on Precincts IV + V (Reid), while 136 apartments will be constructed on Precincts VII + VIII (Braddon). The total floor area of the buildings proposed for Precincts IV + V (Reid) is 37 thousand m², while the total floor area of the buildings proposed for Precincts VII and VIII (Braddon) is 15 thousand m². (Source: Master Plan, Final Recommended Variations, Appendix 4, Tables headed "Perspective with Yield".)

² Recommendations A3 and A4 of my submission on DV308 to the Territory Plan Review and Implementation Section of ESDD, in February last year, summarise what I considered to be appropriate height limits for new buildings in Section 7, Reid. I enclose a copy of this document as part of this present submission (pages 3-7, which follow).

**Submission re Draft Variation 308 Cooyong Street Urban Renewal Project, including
Redevelopment Proposals for Section 7, Reid and Sections 52 and 57, Braddon**

Submitted by: David C.B. Teather, [REDACTED]

**To: Territory Plan Review and Implementation Section, ESDD, GPO Box 1908,
Canberra ACT 2601**

In the limited time available to me to write this submission, I have focused, in Part A, on the relationship between Section 7, Reid, and the proposed redevelopment as a whole. Part B is concerned with Public Consultation, and Part C with the stated rationale for the redevelopment.

For your convenience, the recommendations are summarised below. The main text follows.

David C.B. Teather
12 February 2012

Summary of recommendations:

- A1. The redevelopment of Section 7, Reid, should be considered independently of the redevelopment of Sections 52 and 57, Braddon, taking account of the different characteristics, constraints and potentials of the Reid and Braddon sites.*
- A2. The designated use of Section 7, Reid, should remain as residential (not a mix of residential and commercial usages).*
- A3. The maximum height of new buildings in Section 7, Reid, should be limited to six (6) storeys, and the area designated for buildings of up to six (6) storeys should be restricted to that fronting Cooyong St, from the intersection of Cooyong St and Akuna St to the intersection of Cooyong St and Ainslie Avenue.*
- A4. The maximum height of new buildings on all other parts of Section 7, Reid, should be three to four (3/4) stories (as at present).*
- A5. Special care should be taken to ensure that Kogarah Lane will efficiently and effectively discharge any additional functions consequent upon the redevelopment of the area.*
- B. I recommend that legislation be enacted to ensure that existing residents and owners of properties likely to be affected by proposed Variations to the Territory Plan are formally advised of such proposals. In medium density residential areas it is essential formally to advise bodies corporate.*
- C. I recommend that specific and effective mechanisms be put in place to ensure that planning decisions, that by their nature have long-term consequences, are not unduly influenced by short-term financial considerations.*

Part A: Site-specific characteristics, constraints and potentials.

A major failure of DV308, of the proposed Precinct Code, and of the Planning Reportⁱ that DV308 is designed to facilitate, is that it takes little account of the site-specific characteristics, constraints and potentials of the two, distinct and very different parts of the area designated for redevelopment.

More than three-quarters of the land designated for redevelopment comprises Sections 52 and 57, Braddon. Less than one quarter comprises Section, 7 Reid.

The land in Reid differs from that in Braddon in several important respects:

1. The depth of the block facing Cooyong St, in Reid, from SW to NE, is only half the depth of the block in Braddon.
2. Section 7, Reid, is bounded on the NE by medium density housing, which continues along the whole length of Ainslie Avenue (approx. 750m) to the junction with Limestone Avenue. By contrast, Sections 52 and 57, Braddon, are bounded on the NE by the historic Gorman House, which provides a buffer between the proposed development and residents in existing, medium density housing along Ainslie Avenue.
3. The NE boundary of Section 7, Reid, is the narrow, Kogarah Lane, which is approximately 13m wide (building line to building line). The NE boundary of the Braddon area is Currong St, a suburban street approximately 41m wide (building line to building line).
4. To the SW, much of Section 7, Reid, looks over public green space, Glebe Park. By contrast, Sections 52 and 57, Braddon, look SW over multi-storey car parks and other commercial buildings servicing the Canberra Centre.
5. Section 7 is part of the Suburb of Reid, which is residential in nature. Most of Reid is designated as a "Garden City Heritage Precinct". By contrast, Sections 52 and 57 are part of the suburb of Braddon, which already has extensive areas of commercial development along two streets parallel with Northbourne Avenue, Mort and Lonsdale. The area north of Donaldson Street, immediately adjacent to Section 52, is also zoned commercial. No adequate reasons have been given to permit commercial development, and the attendant service requirements for commercial activities, in Section 7, Reid, which is situated in and part of a residential neighbourhood.

Despite the above differences between Section 7, Reid, and Sections 52 and 57, Braddon:

- the proposed rezoning for Section 7, Reid, (CZ5) is identical to that for the part of the Braddon site fronting Cooyong street (Fig 2, Proposed Territory Plan Map, DV308ⁱⁱ);
- the areas specified in the Precinct Code as suitable for taller buildings than those permitted in CZ5 are a mirror image, on the north and south sides of Ainslie Avenue (Fig 4, Building Elements, Precinct Codeⁱⁱⁱ).

It is as though those who devised the Concept Master Plan Layout (Planning Report, page vi) first decided on a solution for the larger Braddon site and, having done so, then tried to shoehorn this solution into the much smaller Reid site.

This solution does not fit the site-specific context of Section 7, Reid, as the points below demonstrate:

1. To ameliorate the effects of the bulk and scale of adjacent high buildings, the plans for Sections 52 and 57 Braddon specify a reduction in maximum building heights across the site from the SW (Cooyong St) to the NE (Currong St). Building heights decrease sequentially across most of this site from 10 stories, to 8, to 5/6 to 3.

By contrast, in Section 7, Reid, the site lacks sufficient depth (SW to NE) to permit such a gradual reduction in height. The maximum building heights, from the SW to the NE, proposed for Section 7, Reid, do decrease, but the decrease is only marginal: from 15 stories to 12 along the Ainslie Avenue frontage, from 12 stories to 9 in the next major block, and from 9 to 8 in the third. (Adjacent to Boolee St, the decrease in height is in the opposite direction, on account of the retention of an existing 3-storey block.)

The height and bulk of the new buildings immediately across the narrow Kogarah Lane from the existing 2-4 storey buildings of Argyle Square are quite unacceptable. The heights of the proposed buildings are 12 stories, 9 stories, 8 stories and 9 stories, respectively.

A better solution would be to reproduce in Section 7, Reid, the buildings specified in the Planning Report for the parts of the site labelled VIII and VII (Concept Master Plan Layout, page vi). Indeed the size and shape of the area of land labelled VIII and VII (to the South of the intersection of Donaldson St and Currong St) is almost identical to that of Section 7, Reid! This solution would result in buildings of three stories along Kogarah Lane, and 5/6 stories along the Cooyong Street frontage.

2. To provide an adequate buffer between Section 7, Reid, and the existing medium density, residential buildings of Argyle Square, Kogarah Lane should be widened and the proposed building line along the SW of Kogarah Lane should be set back.

3. Sixty percent of the Cooyong Street frontage of the new development in Section 7, Reid, is opposite Glebe Park. This green space in the city is much used by adults and children alike.

The shadow diagrams in the version of the Planning Report dated September 2011 were erroneous and misleading. After these were corrected (at the end of January 2012, long after the text of the Planning Report itself was written), it became clear that the high buildings proposed in Section 7, Reid, would cast shade into Glebe Park, shortening the time in winter days when the area is free of frost.

In recent years Glebe Park has been put under increasing pressure from oversized residential and commercial buildings. High priority must be given to preventing further erosion of this vital and historic public space.

Why have we been presented with such a dysfunctional proposal for Section 7, Reid?

One government department currently administers whole of the area designated for development in DV308, and both sites, in Braddon and Reid, happen to have become available for development at the same time. Also the whole development fronts onto Cooyong Street.^{iv} Perhaps these are the reasons why very different areas of Braddon, on the one hand, and Reid, on the other have been considered as one in the planning process.

As shown above, there are cogent reasons that dictate different planning outcomes, in accordance with the site-specific characteristics, constraints and potential of each area.

Even the hackneyed idea of twin 15-storey towers, each the mirror image of the other, to punctuate the present end of a foreshortened Ainslie Avenue,^v could benefit from some wider thinking.

As an architect and planner, and former colleague, commented to me after reviewing the Planning Report: "It's all very well signifying the end of an avenue with two identical towers. How best to signify the end of an avenue with two buildings of markedly different heights would be a much more interesting architectural problem."

Recommendations:

A1. The redevelopment of Section 7, Reid, should be considered independently of the redevelopment of Sections 52 and 57, Braddon, taking account of the different characteristics, constraints and potentials of the Reid and Braddon sites.

A2. The designated use of Section 7, Reid, should remain as residential (not a mix of residential and commercial usages).

A3. The maximum height of new buildings in Section 7, Reid, should be limited to six (6) storeys, and the area designated for buildings of up to six (6) storeys should be restricted to that fronting Cooyong St, from the intersection of Cooyong St and Akuna St to the intersection of Cooyong St and Ainslie Avenue.

A4. The maximum height of new buildings on all other parts of Section 7, Reid, should be three to four (3/4) stories (as at present).

A5. Special care should be taken to ensure that Kogarah Lane will efficiently and effectively discharge any additional functions consequent upon the redevelopment of the area.

Part B. Public Consultation

It is anomalous that, while there is a statutory responsibility for the government to inform residents of adjacent properties of development applications (DAs), there is no such statutory responsibility for the government to inform those likely to be affected by Draft Variations of the Territory Plan (DVs).

Through the establishment of site-specific precinct codes, Territory Plan Variations set the parameters for subsequent development applications. Since such precinct codes override traditional zoning (if the requirements of the code and zone conflict), it is at least as important that residents be informed of DVs as they are of DAs.

In the case of DV308, the scale and height of the buildings proposed are such that they will affect many more residents than those immediately "adjacent" to the designated development sites.

Recommendation:

B. I recommend that legislation be enacted to ensure that existing residents and owners of properties likely to be affected by proposed Variations to the Territory Plan are formally advised of such proposals. In medium density residential areas it is essential formally to advise bodies corporate.

Part C. Rationale for inner-city residential development

Page (ii) of the Planning Report states four objectives for inner-city residential development, as follows:

- Highlights environmentally sustainable development
- Promotes an inclusive community in inner-city living, including public housing and community facilities
- Responds to changing market demands, including an ageing community through adaptable housing and universal design principles
- Optimises the financial return from the development of the site.

All of these objectives are no doubt worthy. Clearly the last of these, optimising financial return, is constantly in the forefront of the minds of private developers. So the community relies on appropriate legislation, and its practical application by government agencies, to ensure that other important considerations are also taken into account.

Unfortunately, of the above objectives, financial return is most easily measured.

If, because of this or other reasons, short-term financial return assumes overriding importance, we can say goodbye to any hope that Canberra will continue to provide a pleasant, or even a satisfactory, environment in which to live and work.

Sustainable and liveable cities will not happen if they are subject solely to the criterion of short-term, commercial profitability.

Recommendation:

C. I recommend that specific and effective mechanisms be put in place to ensure that planning decisions, that by their nature have long-term consequences, are not unduly influenced by short-term financial considerations.

Notes:

ⁱ Planning Report, Volume 1, Urban Renewal Project, Sections 52 & 57, Braddon & Section 7, Reid. ACT Government Community Services, September 2011.

ⁱⁱ Draft Variation to the Territory Plan 308, November 2011, page 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Draft Variation to the Territory Plan 308, November 2011, Appendix A: Precinct Code .

^{iv} Until recently, Cooyong St was designated as two separate streets, Cooyong St and Ballumbir St.

^v This designated "Main Avenue" of the NCA Plan formerly continued through what is now the Canberra Centre to London Circuit.