



Inquiry into DPA-04 – Missing Middle Housing Reforms

Answer to question on notice

Asked by: Fiona Carrick MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development

Reference: Planning

Hearing: 12 February 2026

In relation to: Missing Middle Reforms – Environment Questions

Question received: 18 February 2026

Answer Due: 27 February 2026

Fiona Carrick MLA: Asked the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development -

- 1) Why were stronger environmental standards, such as 30% canopy, 30% deep soil, and stronger WSUD requirements, not included given clear climate, heat and flooding risks?
- 2) How will tree canopy be protected when planting area has been reduced and site coverage increased for multi-unit development in RZ1 and RZ2?
- 3) How will government track and prevent incremental canopy loss from dispersed small redevelopments?
- 4) Why weaken solar access protections (increased the solar envelope from 31° to 45°) during a climate crisis, when energy efficiency and passive solar design are essential?
- 5) Why are special character or heritage-sensitive subzones not proposed, despite the acknowledged need to protect key landscape and heritage values?
- 6) What evidence shows a minimum 350m² block size is sufficient to accommodate canopy, deep soil, solar access and parking in higher-density redevelopment?

Chris Steel MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. Please refer to the responses to QON 01 and QON 11.

Following community engagement, additional guidance has been introduced in the draft Missing Middle Housing Design Guide (MMHDG) to better support high quality living

infrastructure outcomes, including opportunities for increased tree canopy cover, planting area and attention to Water Sensitive Urban Design requirements. The Missing Middle Housing Reforms do not propose any changes for the allowable site coverage for multi-unit development.

2. Tree canopy is protected and supported through a higher canopy cover requirement, increasing from 15 to 20%. Site coverage for multi-unit housing is not increased; rather it is maintained at 45%.

Please also refer to the responses to QON 01 and QON 11.

3. The Missing Middle Housing Reforms aim to prevent incremental canopy loss by requiring every redevelopment to comply with Territory Plan assessment outcomes that mandate sufficient planting area, canopy trees, deep soil zones and measures that reduce impervious surfaces. These requirements apply consistently to all proposals—large or small—ensuring that each redevelopment maintains or enhances living infrastructure and contributes to reducing urban heat impacts. Technical specifications support this by setting clear expectations for tree canopy provision and water-sensitive urban design, with flexibility only where the same outcome can be achieved through alternative means.

In addition to site-based controls, the *Planning Act 2023* requires consideration of how each proposal fits within and affects the broader neighbourhood. This ensures that redevelopment is assessed not in isolation but in the context of the surrounding area, allowing cumulative impacts—such as potential canopy loss from multiple small projects—to be addressed through the approval process. Together, these mechanisms ensure that both individual sites and the wider district continue to meet ACT planning objectives for tree canopy, climate resilience and urban amenity.

The ACT Government undertakes regular aerial imagery, as well as LiDAR, to monitor canopy cover across the urban forest. Information on tree canopy cover including LiDAR results and urban tree canopy cover reports for Canberra are available at <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/trees-and-nature/trees/canopy-cover#report>.

LiDAR data is collected and analysed every five years to monitor progress once tree canopies exceed the minimum height for capture of 3 metres.

For public land, complementary work is conducted in between LiDAR surveys to assess opportunities to plant new trees, assess urban forest condition, and replace dead or decaying trees.

4. Please refer to the response to QON 8.
5. Local neighbourhood character is often defined by the streetscape, which reflects tree plantings on public land. The Missing Middle Housing Reforms highlight the importance of protecting public verges, street trees and canopy as defining elements of neighbourhood character.

Neighbourhood character and heritage are protected through a combination of statutory Assessment Outcomes, design guidance, and heritage legislation.

The Territory Plan includes Assessment Outcomes requiring that:

- The proposed use and scale of development are appropriate to the site and zone.
- Adverse impacts of development on surrounding uses (both within a site and on adjoining sites) is minimised and residential amenity protected. This includes between residential uses and between non-residential and residential uses.
- The height, bulk and scale of the development is appropriate, noting the desired zone policy outcomes and the streetscape. This includes consideration of building envelope and setbacks.
- Considering and addressing site characteristics, including heritage, natural features, topography, infrastructure and utilities

The draft MMHDG provides guidance on how proposals can respond to neighbourhood context, including protecting street character, maintaining human scale, supporting high-quality landscaping, and reducing impacts on neighbours. Following consultation on the draft MMHDG, CED has worked with the Heritage Council to develop further design guidance specific to heritage to be included in the guide. It will be a requirement for any missing middle housing development proposal to demonstrate how they have satisfied the requirements of the MMHDG during the development application process.

Heritage places and objects are subject to additional statutory requirements under the *Heritage Act 2004*, which inform what forms of development are permissible or constrained within heritage sites and precincts. References have been included in the residential technical specifications to support these considerations.

Please also refer to the response to QON 13.

6. Through changes to the Subdivision Policy, DPA-04 proposes to permit block subdivision in RZ1 where each subdivided block is a minimum of 350m². 350m² is considered a mid-sized block under the Territory Plan and is suitable for single dwelling development. The policy applies a maximum 45% site coverage for blocks created through the subdivision of an original block.

While there is no minimum block size for multi-unit development in RZ1, unit-titling can only occur on a block above 600m².

All development needs to balance the developable block area to deliver amenity and living infrastructure outcomes for a site, to accommodate sufficient canopy, planting area, solar access and parking (where required).

OFFICIAL

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Chris Steel', written over a light grey background.

Date:

3/3/26

By the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Chris Steel MLA