

SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT ON DV281

Area this submission is addressing

This submission mainly addresses the area to the east of the CIT Horticultural School, Orana School and the Baha'i Centre towards the top of the ridge in what will be North Weston. It is bounded by Cotter Rd to the north and Heysen St to the south. This area is mainly a peninsula shaped outcrop of Oakey Hill, basically a ridge, which has its shape accentuated by the cutting for the Tuggeranong Parkway. **Attachment 1** is a suburb map of this area, showing the land by block and section. I have included it to help make the discussion in this submission clearer. The area in North Weston that this submission addresses is shaded blue.

This submission also briefly comments on ACTPLA's revised plans for Deeks Forest. This area is between Uriara Rd, Cotter Rd, the proposed Weston Pond, and Molonglo River.

Summary

One of the legacies to Canberrans from the Griffin plan is leaving the area around the top of the ridges and hilltops for public use. Another is the green corridors between larger green spaces that allow for recreational circuits. These two ideas help make Canberra the unique city it is. ACTPLA's proposals contradict both these ideas in North Weston and at Deeks Forest.

I propose the elevated area marked blue in **Attachment 1** should be left as much needed public recreational amenity for Weston residents and the thousands of future North Weston residents, and balance the loss of Broadacre space elsewhere in Weston and north of Weston Creek. I propose a walking/cycle track between Heysen St and Cotter Rd on the west side of the ridge. This green corridor would link the CIT Arboretum to the ridge area behind the Baha'i Centre and Orana School.. It needs to be about 100m wide minimum, so as to provide sufficient space for the walking track to be some distance from the traffic noise of the Tuggeranong Parkway, for the users amenity.

I support the NCA's proposal that the elevated area above the Baha'i Centre and Orana School down to Cotter Rd become Hills, Ridges and Buffer Zones. Buildings and roads in this area may also have a detrimental effect on the security of Government House and its south western lawn.

In regards to the CIT School of Horticulture, Mr Barr has spared the arboretum and woodland gardens from becoming housing areas. However there may be more trees worthy of retaining than only what is in the arboretum and woodland gardens. Grouped plantings of trees, such as on Block 3 Section 81, on the CIT School of Horticulture site should be analysed by horticulturists and flora heritage assessment to see if they should be retained.

The site also contains the Xeriscape Garden into which the Horticultural Society of Canberra have put thousands of dollars and many hours of their members time. I believe it should be retained.

I support medium density dwellings on the Australian Federal Police site and suitable parts of the CIT site but only 2 storeys high, not the 4 storeys high housing proposed.

I also support there being a 300m wide recreational space buffer zone between Cotter Rd and the suburb of Wright to allow room for recreational users.

Could the Committee please consider recommending naming the ridge at North Weston, 'Illoura Ridge' after the homestead that once existed on its eastern side.

Existing elevated walk in Weston, next to Tuggeranong Parkway

Figure 1 shows where residents in the southern part of Weston and Lyons can currently walk, without needing to drive a car to reach it, when they want elevated views. Weston residents wanting to walk on the ridge, created by the freeway cutting, south of Heysen St have to walk behind homes on Rubbo St. However the path is bounded by back fences and a 6ft high cyclone fence that runs along the Freeway. Between Daplyn Close and the top part of Hilder St the path is only roughly ten metres wide. Between Daplyn Close and where the path ends at Rubbo Crescent, it is 30 metres wide at one point but is mainly 10 metres wide.



Figure 1: Walkway at north part of Hilder St, next to Tuggeranong Parkway

The extensive public views west from this track were lost to private houses in the 1970s. The narrowness of this public space means there is little view of Weston Creek except at each end of this path. Instead the views are looking north and south, through the mesh, along the freeway. The cyclone fence is breached in many places by walkers looking for more space in the freeway cutting (the one not used by traffic).

ACTPLA's proposal repeats this mistake at North Weston. The CIT at its south eastern end is currently fenced to within 10m of Tuggeranong Freeway. See **Figure 2**. ACTPLA's proposal ensures that this is the only elevated area left residents will have to walk, that is not a road for traffic, between Heysen St and east of the Baha'i Centre. The higher up this ridge you walk the more audible the traffic noise and the less pleasant. For the ridge to have amenity for walkers and cyclists the path(s) have to be a certain way down. Residential development to the extent proposed ensures a more elevated, less pleasant in terms of noise and views, track.



Figure 2: Path east of CIT School, next to Tuggeranong Parkway

An additional reason to leave some of the eastern part of the CIT site in public hands is the possibly significant tree plantings there. This is discussed later.

Another possibility for walks with views in this area is Oakey Hill, but it is intersected heavily with unappealing electrical lines from the Lyons sub-station. The path on the hill is too stony for pushers or strollers.

The Views between the ridge at North Weston and Government House

I support the NCA's proposal that the elevated area above the Baha'i Centre and Orana School down to Cotter Rd become Hills, Ridges and Buffer Zones. ACTPLA's revised proposal for this area is for a mixture of broadacre and residential. This land is basically Block 2 & 3, Section 83 as given in Attachment 1. The proposed park next to Cotter Rd is centred around a brick sewer vent.

The National Capital Plan, section 8.5.3. (c) says

The hilltops will continue to be used as key vantage points for viewing and understanding the National Capital. Development will be sited so as to minimise its visual impact on the Central National Area and any environmental impact on the hill tops.

The ridge at North Weston has extensive views to Government House building, which is only 3kms from the top of the ridge next to the Baha'i Centre. There are also views to Capital Hill and Captain Cooks Jet. All these areas are part of the Central National Area (CNA) as is part of the Tuggeranong Parkway, which is discussed later. **Figure 3** provides a photo of the view of Government House, 3 km distant, from the top of the ridge, due east of the Baha'i Centre.



Figure 3: The view to Government house from the ridge east of the Baha'i Centre

On **Attachment 2**, which is a contour map, I have shaded in orange the area from where there are views of Government House. This is my rough estimate from walking it. Block 2 Section 83, immediately north of the Baha'i Centre, has views of

Government House from its top to about a third of the way down this slope to Cotter Rd, until Government House is screened by intervening trees.

On **Attachment 2**, I have drawn the Baha'i Centre building where it seems to be according to ACTPLA's proposal map. The roof of the Baha'i Centre and an area of the ridge, including its northern slope, is visible from the Governor-Generals Lookout on Lady Denman Drive, which is part the CNA. The elevation of the Baha'i Centre building is around the 588m contour line. Government House is north east of the Baha'i Centre, across contour lines of 590m to 594m in elevation. The proposed development east of the Baha'i Centre is on land the same elevation as well as higher ones and some of it further north. So the elevation of the proposed development means it is likely to be visible from the CNA, including Government House.

Furthermore the category 'broadacre' allows for buildings with no restrictions on height or scale. Yet there will need to be some strict restrictions as otherwise it is highly likely the buildings will be visible from the CNA and Government House.

The south western vista from Government House towards the Brindabella Mountains is presently of the Australian landscape with eucalypts and is free of buildings except for the Baha'i Centre's orange roof. As the residence of Australia's Head of State, where other head of states are entertained I believe it is more fitting and symbolic of Australia and its landscape that the vistas seen from Government House should be of Australian landscape rather than buildings.

Canberra town planning policies suggests this ridge should be classified as National Capital Open Space System, due to the views to and from it. As noted earlier the ridge is 3km from Government House. According to a report by JVP Visual Planning and Design, *Visual Assessment: Molonglo River Urban Design and Study, October 2004*, NCOSS directs that landscapes in the middle ground (1 to 5km) from Nationally Significant Areas, such as Government House, should be preserved as open space, landscape areas. This does not apply to the ridge presently, as its not classified as NCOSS. However given the ridge is undeveloped landscape, with some yellow-box eucalypts, why isn't it NCOSS?

It is also inconsistent that Misery Point, above the RSPCA, at 3km from Government House, is classified Inner Hills and to be largely free of development. While the ridge at North Weston is 3.2km from Government House and is to have housing put on its prominent northern slope.

Another difficulty with ACTPLA's proposal is that the most northern broadacre block is most likely too narrow for broadacre development. The contour map suggests there is only 70 metres from the eastern boundary of the Baha'i Centre and the top of the ridge. Yet the plans indicate a road on its western side and ACTPLA repeatedly claims it is not going to the top of the ridge. This suggests the available land will be only 50m wide and it is questionable whether this is a practical size for broadacre.

Security of Government House

Commonsense suggests putting buildings with a line of sight to Government House may theoretically increase the potential security risk to Government House in the

future and reduce its privacy. At the very least it would increase the costs of maintaining a protective cordon for the Governor-General and visiting heads of states. Government House's light color means dark objects moving in front of it can be more easily seen from a distance.

At the moment accessing the ridge takes time. There is no road leading directly to the ridge's viewing points of Government House. To reach the views you have to go up to the end of Unwin Place in Weston and then walk about 600 metres, looking out for bulls and kangaroos. Cattle graze periodically on the ridge for bushfire prevention and there are several paddocks with barbed wire fences, so walking down to Cotter Rd or the Tuggeranong Parkway involves getting over several fences. The open nature of this space means it is quite easy for the area to be scanned by security staff with binoculars from Government House lookout on Lady Denman Drive to see who is there.

Development will mean several roads much closer to the viewing points and houses and other buildings to provide cover for any potential security threats.

I have been told that during the 1970s and 80s the CIT had access to this land down to Cotter Rd. The CIT was not allowed to erect any buildings, not even a garden shed, because of the risk to the security of the Governor-General. There is a fenced planting of fruit trees and vines from this time next to the southern end of the Orana School property on its eastern side.

Other CNA views to and from North Weston Ridge

As mentioned earlier, the ridge area north of Unwin Place provides excellent views across to Capital hill nearly 6 km distant, and Captain Cook Jet. See **Figure 4**.

The Tuggeranong Parkway, north of the Molonglo River, is part of the CNA. The northern slope of the ridge towards Cotter Rd and the orange Baha'i Centre roof is visible from the Parkway, from around where the electricity transmission wires cross the road. Drivers are facing the northern end of the ridge as they drive south. **Figure 5** shows the view from the Tuggeranong Parkway in the CAN, of the northern front of the ridge.



Figure 4: The top of Capital Hill from the ridge east of Orana School



Figure 5: The view from the Tuggeranong Parkway of the northern front of the ridge

To sum up this section, the ridge area north of Unwin Place is a key vantage point for viewing the National Capital. It will be difficult to site the development proposed by

ACTPLA to minimise its visual impact on the CNA. Therefore, as the NCA proposes, it should become a Hills, Ridges and Buffer zone.

Australian landscape character of the ridge

The National Capital Plan, section 8.5.3 (e) says

The environment and Australian landscape character of the hills and ridges will be protected and enhanced to provide a unified landscape setting for the National Capital.

Unlike most of the inner hills on the western side of the Tuggeranong parkway, this ridge was never covered in pine forest. Before sub-division it was a sheep station and not all the trees were cleared. The ridge has some yellow box-red gum woodland, which is declared under ACT and Commonwealth legislation an endangered ecological community.(See bottom right corner of **Attachment 3**). Some of the eucalypts are large and probably more than 200 years old (see **Figure 6** for a typical example of an eucalypt on the ridge). Somehow the majority of them are surviving the current long drought, as they survived previous ones, though it is not pristine bush. The ridge is grazed by cattle (and kangaroos) to keep the grass down but the bush is regenerating in areas fenced off from stock. So the character of the ridge's landscape is very Australian (as can be seen from **Figure 7**). While some of the old gums could have housing built between them, such a change to their environment may lead to their demise.



Figure 6: An example of vegetation on the ridge



Figure 7: The ridge looking north-east from the boundary with Orana School.

‘Illoura’ Ridge?

Finally, this ridge does not seem to have a name. Could the Committee please consider recommending naming this ridge ‘Illoura Ridge’ after the homestead that once existed on its eastern side, close to the Tuggeranong Parkway. The Illoura property was owned by the Tanner family for around 40 years until the land was acquired by the Commonwealth for sub-division. There are local precedents for this. For example the Illoura Community Horse Holding Paddocks on the east side of the Parkway; Cooleman Ridge and shopping centre after Cooleman homestead; the suburb of Weston after the Weston paddock in which much of the suburb is located

Eastern part of CIT site should be left for green corridor

The CIT School of Horticulture was developed in the 1970s. **Attachment 4** is an aerial map that I have prepared of some of the areas of interest to residents, to make discussion easier. It is wonderful news that Mr Barr has spared the arboretum and woodland gardens from becoming housing. However ACTPLA still proposes the extension of Hilder St north to Unwin Place where to the east will be a series of cul-de-sacs with single dwellings. These will run across what is currently Blocks 3 and 5, Section. 81.

The area of these cul-de-sacs should become public green space instead. It could incorporate the possibly significant vegetation on Blocks 3, Section 81. Plantings on the CIT School of Horticulture site should be analysed by horticulturists and flora heritage assessors as there may be more trees worthy of retaining than only what is in

the arboretum and woodland gardens. CIT staff did not stick to the arboretum's boundary but planted exotic trees in other areas of the school grounds as well. Some of the trees or seeds they are grown from came through quarantine. An example of the plantings in Block 3, Section 81 is in **Figures 8 and 9**. Figure **10** illustrates this area through which this recreational path could pass and avoid the noise and pollution of the Parkway. There is also a mobile phone tower in this area which would need to be removed if the houses are built here.



Figure 8: Rare oak trees in Block 3, Section 81, Weston



Figure 9: Hazelnut bushes apparently sourced from USA and went through quarantine, in Block 3, Section 81, Weston



Figure 10: View of Block 3, Section 81, Weston, looking north

There is an existing bike track that finishes at the junction of Heysen and Bunny Sts and the proposed bike/walking track could start across Heysen St from there. Currently ACTPLA proposes a park around the sewer vent on Cotter Rd and the bike path could connect with Cotter Rd there. As Cotter Rd is to be a main access road to the new suburbs, a pedestrian bridge or underpass could be the safest way of crossing this road. The bike path could be continued along Cotter Rd until it reached the proposed pond and then link up with the existing bike path to the city.

No four storey development on AFP and CIT sites

I support medium density dwellings on the Australian Federal Police site and suitable parts of the CIT site but only 2 storeys high. I think the proposed four storey height is out of keeping with the rest of Weston Creek. Particularly given the tall dwellings will be on a slope from 588m in elevation, next to the arboretum, to 560m in elevation at Streeton Drive. Areas such as Kingston with 4 storey apartments are on more level ground, so they do not dominate the landscape to the extent they will on such a slope. Also as some of them will block out part of the northern aspect of the CIT arboretum and woodland gardens, one of which has a large lawn, they will cast a large amount of shade which will be to the detriment of the vegetation's health.

Retain the Xeriscape Gardens

The Xeriscape gardens have become an important educational tool for the public in learning how to maximise water efficiency in their home gardens. The Horticultural Society of Canberra has spent many thousands of dollars and hours of their members time to get it to its present glory. It is also a small parcel of land. The Xeriscape Gardens are just across the service road from the larger woodland garden so almost adjoining it, as Attachment 4 shows. Particularly now that the arboretum and surrounding gardens have been put aside from housing there is sense in extending the boundary of the horticultural assets saved to include the Xeriscape Gardens. If the Committee and Mr Barr decide against this then it seems fair that the Society should be compensated accordingly and a new site provided for them.

Another reason for leaving the Xeriscape Garden in its present location is that it is now on the edge of a greenfield development site and close to the future new residents for whom it could be very useful.

Noise and pollution

The proposed residences backing onto the freeway between Heysen St and Cotter Rd would experience significant traffic noise especially at peak hour. Along the ridge between Unwin Pl and Heysen St, even at 4pm, the traffic noise is so loud it is extremely unpleasant. I presume houses in south Weston at Rubbo St were permitted to back onto the freeway as they are at a greater elevation than land next to the CIT, and have the unused freeway cutting as well to deflect some noise.

The freeway overpass over the top of Heysen St, next to Block 7, Section 81, is significantly higher than the ground to be built on so future residents will receive a lot of car pollution. Of course there are already houses around the corner of Heysen and Hilder Sts receiving pollution but that land was developed before the Tuggeranong Valley and perhaps town planners in the 1960's could not envisage the amount of noise and pollution this area was to receive. Given the noise, pollution, and mobile phone tower in its corner Block 7, Section 81, should be left open space and zoned Hills, Ridges and Buffer area zone.

Loss of Broadacre space in Weston

I understand the pond north of Cotter Rd is being offered to residents to compensate the loss of Broadacre space with the development of North Weston. Also the WCCC is seeking to have a district park on the site of the current Weston oval. I think these are great ideas and will provide water amenities which Weston Creek lacks. However the ridge with its large yellow box trees, very Australian rural setting and almost 270 degree views should be seen as a complementary, rather than alternative, public space.

Deeks Forest area

Deeks Forest is bounded by Uriarra Rd, Cotter Rd, Weston Pond and Molonglo River. Before the 2003 bushfires it was part of the larger Stromlo Forest, which was popular with Canberrans. The 1992 report by the Joint Committee on the National Capital, *'Our Bush Capital: Protecting and Managing the National Capital Open Space System'* noted:

'Recreational use of Stromlo Forest is extremely high. On most weekends, hundreds of people visit Stromlo, either attending organised events or undertaking passive recreation.' (p44).

The Deeks Forest Park area was not officially categorised as recreational area although being so close to Weston Creek it was used as such. The government provided toilets, picnic tables and barbeques. I understand the present Stromlo Forest Park provides excellent cycling facilities for serious riders. However it is a partial substitute only for the previous Stromlo Forest, given its much smaller size and no access to Molonglo River. Many people, for example those with young children in strollers or older people trying to maintain their constitution want to walk in a linear fashion perhaps to a focal point such as Weston Pond or Molonglo River. Many people prefer to ride a bike in a leisurely fashion and not on a constrained circuit. Stromlo Forest Park does not provide for these people.

Traditionally within NCOS there has been green corridors linking areas. ACTPLA is proposing an 80m buffer zone between Cotter Rd and the suburb of Wright. This is inadequate in width to cater for horseriding as well as cycling and walkers moving from Stromlo Forest Park to the Inner Hills. A more serious concept would be a minimum of 300m. This is approximately the distance between the toilet block at Deeks Forest and Cotter Rd. Cotter Rd is to become dual carriage way south of Deeks

Forest eventually and the additional traffic noise make ACTPLA's proposed corridor width inadequate for existing and future residents.

Since May 2008 ACTPLA have offered a green corridor from Cotter Rd to the Molonglo River cutting through Wright and Coombs. The corridor is 50m wide most of its length though at one point is 100m wide. Again this is simply not wide enough to accommodate all users as discussed above.

Traditionally within Canberra's town planning concepts, suburb areas, such as Weston Creek, have had buffer zones which help define them as well as being green corridors. ACTPLA argue the vacant land between Warragamba Ave/Dixon Drive and Cotter Rd, which is bordered by John Reserve, next to Streeton Drive and Stromlo Village at Eucumbene Drive is a buffer zone and a movement corridor. They are investigating putting recreational trails under Cotter Rd to permit movement from Stromlo Forest Park to Weston Pond. ACTPLA's proposal means due to the narrowness of the buffer zone/green corridor and that it is going under Cotter Rd presumably twice that it is convoluted and noisy, and so of less amenity to users.

I suspect Deeks Forest area is especially valuable to ACTPLA because its contours are mainly to the north and north east. So more solar passive houses can be crammed onto this area than if the land sloped in other directions. It is a much better building site for solar passive houses than the land of Stromlo Forest Park which in winter would be shaded during much of the afternoon by Mt Stromlo and whose contours generally are due east. However this does not mean the houses built on Deeks Forest area will be solar passive. Weston Creek residents are to lose the open amenity of the area despite their historical use of it.

Positive aspects of ACTPLA's proposals

These are:

- retention of the Sewerage Works Caretaker Cottage, if it passes heritage assessment. The revised plans show some green area around the cottage, indicating the cottage is standing alone, close to Weston Pond rather than buried in the suburb.
- Weston Pond and making Streeton Drive's stormwater drain a more 'natural' water course with reeds.
- Retention of the natural stream area and small dam within CIT site
- ACTPLA has publicly promised 18m distances between the front boundaries of facing properties in North Weston. This permits (hopefully) street trees to survive and not have their roots compacted from cars parking around them due to the roads not being wide enough to permit parking on roads. This is the standard in the quiet streets of Weston.. I am disappointed that ACTPLA says that this is not possible for future developments such as Wright and Coomb.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Blocks 2 and 3 Section 83, Block 5 Section 81 Weston. Source: *Maps of Canberra By Suburbs and ACT Districts*, 2007 edition, ACTPLA.

Attachment 2: Area of Blocks 2 & 3, Section 83 Weston visible from Government House. Source of contour map: North Weston, 2m Contours, 2007 Commonwealth of Australia.

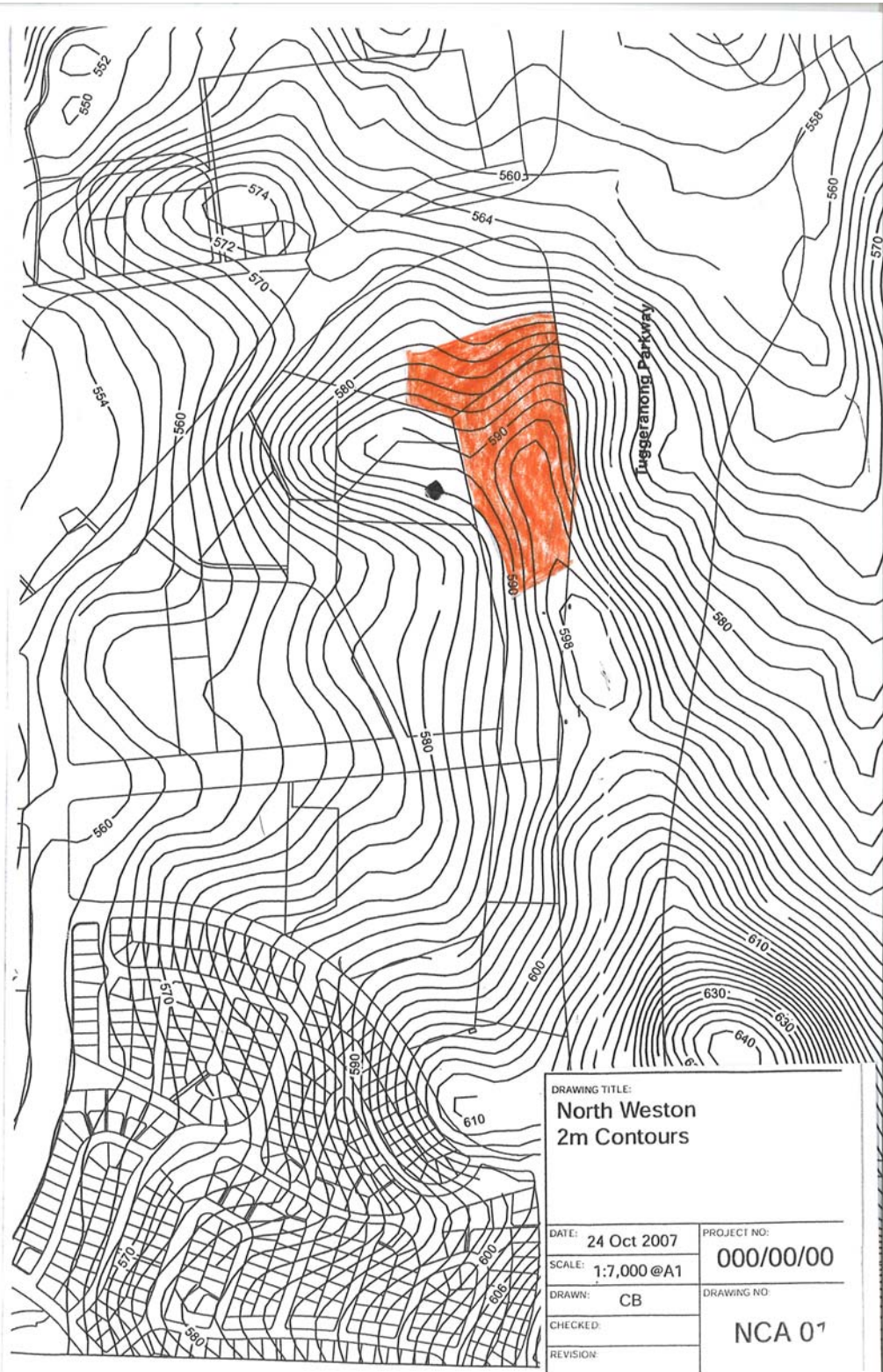
Attachment 3: Distribution of Yellow Box Red Gum Woodland through North Weston and Molonglo Valley. Source: *Molonglo Valley Planning Study*, Figure 16, COX, December 2004

Attachment 4: Aerial photo of the CIT School of Horticulture and Australian Federal Police sites at Weston. Source: Google, 2007 Digital Globe

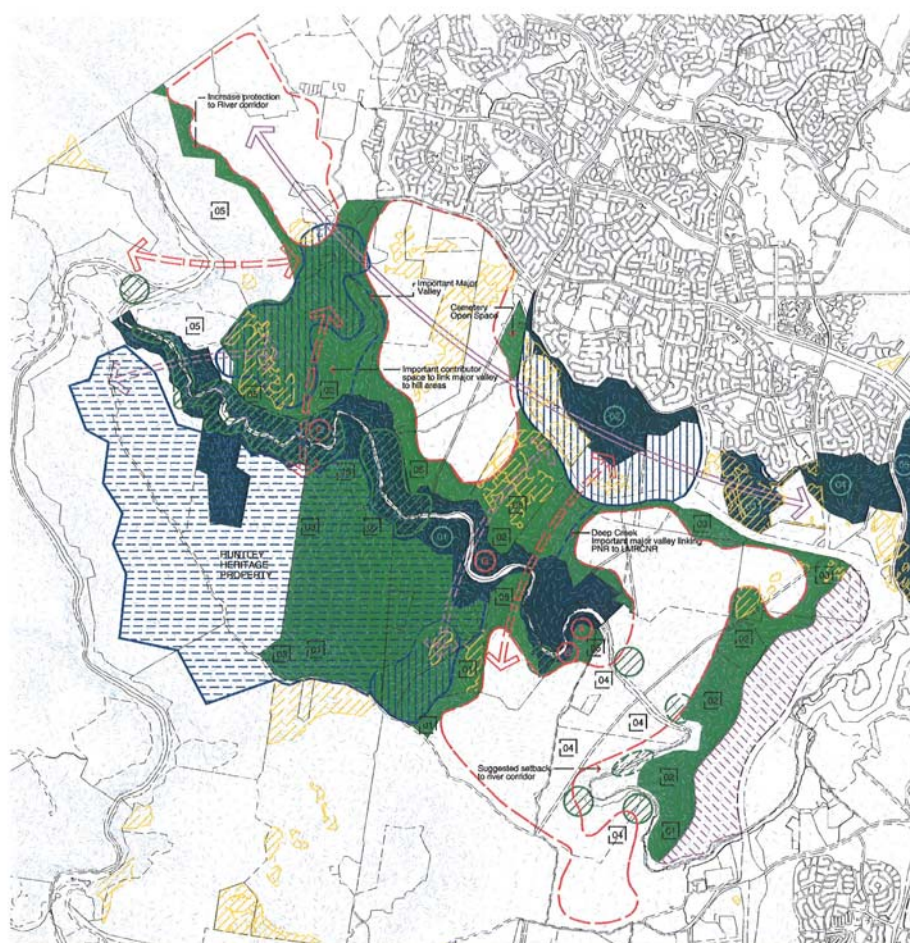
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LEGEND

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| Important Rural Landscape (Seddon) | Gazetted Nature Parks | Areas of Geological Interest (Molonglo River Ecological Study) |
| Hill Areas (Seddon) | Lower Molonglo River Corridor Nature Reserve | Areas of Aboriginal Interest (Molonglo River Ecological Study) |
| Significant Landscape Features (Molonglo River Ecological Study) | The Pinnacle Nature Reserve | Habitat connectivity for wildlife movement (ACT Lowlands Woodlands Conservation Strategy) |
| Major visual feature & screen to western areas from CNA | Mount Painter Nature Reserve | Alternate and/or additional Habitat connection |
| | Aranda Bushland Nature Reserve | Yellow Box Red Gum Vegetation Community (ACT LWCS) |
| | Black Mountain Nature Reserve | |
| | Additional areas for consideration as landscape priority zones | |
| | Suggested boundary of landscape priority areas (non urban landuse) | |

KEY TO LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

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|---|--|--|
| Significant visual exposure to valley & Weston Creek & main roads | Prominent landform / location that helps 'define' landscape setting | Landscape Zones contiguous with River Corridor |
| Significant visual exposure to valley | Policy Area beyond suggested setback. Not contiguous with River Corridor | |

SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE COMPONENTS & SUGGESTED LANDSCAPE PRIORITY ZONES

MOLOGLO VALLEY PLANNING STUDY

FIGURE 16: LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PLAN

COX
OCTOBER 2004

Attachment 4: Aerial photo of the CIT School of Horticulture and Australian Federal Police sites at Weston. Source: Google, 2007 Digital Globe

