

From: Justine Morisset
Sent: Monday, 21 January 2008 6:57 PM
To: GENTLEMAN
Subject: Submission to WCA

Good afternoon Mick

I understand that you are the chair of the review committee for Draft Variation 261 concerning the rezoning and redevelopment of the Australian Heritage Village site in Watson.

I attach a copy of our submission to Minister Barr from November last year for your consideration.

I have a number of concerns about the content of this proposal and how it has been notified to the community. It should be first considered through a Preliminary Environment Assessment before any change in land use is even considered. This has not occurred to date.

I look forward to your response on this issue.

Regards

Nick Covey
Watson ACT 2602

Mr Nicholas and Mrs Justine Covey

Watson ACT 2602

The Minister for Planning
Mr Andrew Barr
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Minister,

We are writing to object to the proposed variation to the Territory Plan No 261 to allow residential development at Watson.

We have provided detailed comment on each chapter/clause as it appears in the draft variation to the Territory Plan document dated October 2007. We have the following summary comments.

General comment

- Development of the site as proposed will have a significant impact on the visual amenity of the site and surrounds particularly given its profile as the foothill to Mt Majura. The area north of Antill St should not be developed further but retained for low-profile uses in keeping with the existing development. Antill St should be retained as a buffer zone between the reserve and any future development to the south of Antill St.
- Development of the site will have a significant impact on surrounding wildlife in Canberra Nature Reserve from the many domestic pets/animals that may be permitted in the development and that will frequent the reserve.
- The site as proposed is not suitable for such a large number of dwellings. The existing site uses are low profile and appropriate given the amenity of the surrounding area. Three hundred residences will makes this site comparable to the existing North Watson development.
- Insufficient time for public comment. It is apparent that the ACT Government has known of the Village Building Companies plans for some time and yet has only given the public six weeks to comment on the proposal and try to understand the development. The public consultation period should be extended and further information about the Village Building Companies Plans made public before any decision to approve the variation is made.
- The decision to gift public land (Part Block 2) to a private developer lacks transparency and should be reviewed in the context of the disposal of public land to single party - as opposed to a public notification of a proposal to dispose of Government land and comments on alternative uses sought .

- The developer has stated that the site may contain affordable housing. The Government has not mandated an affordable housing requirement component to any development in this area and affordable housing should not be considered in any way as suitable justification for this development.

We have the following specific objections to the draft variation as per the Variation Report No 261 (Oct 2007).

1.1 Summary of the proposal

We strongly object to the Government's approval to grant part of the site (unleased public land) to a developer for private profit-generating purposes. This appears to be an exercise in the developer convincing the Government of its proposal without public input. If Part Block 2 is surplus to ACT Government requirements (and it deems the land suitable for housing) at the very least it should have been made available to the open market and the highest bidder purchasing the land and developing it in accordance with Government requirements - instead of a gifting to a private interest.

2.1 Background

Scale and Nature of Development

The scale of the development is not appropriate for the site. There is no residential development to the north of Antill St at present and it should be kept that way with Antill St retained as a buffer between the mountain and the suburbs.

The variation plan document refers to the Spatial Plan policy of residential intensification. We do not believe this site is appropriate for residential intensification. It should be retained as a green zone and buffer to Mt Majura. We do however applaud the proposal to zone Block 5 Section 75 as open space.

Environmental impacts

While we applaud closer settlement and use of existing transport and other infrastructure to reduce environmental impacts development must not occur at the expense of community amenity and natural assets.

Impact on Endangered Yellow Box Red Gum Grassy Woodland

The site is known to contain nesting Silver Owls which will be affected by the development. This development will also bring many (hundreds?) of domestic animals as pets to the border of Canberra Nature Park. Domestic cats in particular have a

significant impact on all wildlife and should not be permitted in any development on or near the site. Domestic cats should not be permitted in new developments adjacent to Canberra Nature Reserve.

Each clean up Australia Day we assist with the clean up of this area and were keen to see the recovery and rehabilitation of the site following destocking. Part Block 2 should not be gifted to a developer but rehabilitated and incorporated into the adjoining nature park area – not turned over to housing.

Traffic Impacts

The suburb of **Watson is already experiencing significant development activity and the pressure on infrastructure/amenity that it brings.** The ongoing and increasing development of North Watson is having significant flow-on impacts for all residents in Watson particularly with traffic using local streets. This development will lead to further traffic on Antill St, Northbourne Ave and Majura Ave – and the many small residential streets which are experiencing the rat-run effect of traffic bypassing main routes to use quiet local streets. This issue needs to be considered holistically and the issue studied prior to any approval.

The subject area should be retained for low-profile recreation/open spaces for existing and future residents of Watson.

Precedent

Development of this site sets a precedent for further changes in land use and development along the footslopes of Mt Majura north of Antill St. Other leaseholders on the footslopes on Mt Majura could argue that this development means that further development is possible and bring pressure to bear on planning authorities accordingly. This issue has not been considered in the variation document.

Social Impacts

The draft variation plan does not address social impacts arising from this development (both good or bad). Pedestrian requirements relating to footpaths and any improvements required should be considered as a minimum along with social impacts on surrounding residents from more traffic. The document also does not state what impacts the development will have on existing services in the community and if they are capable of absorbing the 1000 + persons that may live on the site.

Sustainable transport/living

The project documentation appears to make no reference to the provision of suitable public transport and bicycle access. This should be a key consideration in any proposal for development of the site (commercial or otherwise). We will shortly face considerable oil shortages and the use of

the bicycle will become commonplace. Planning for its use should be commonplace in project documentation.

The draft variation makes no mention of how the developments as proposed will minimise environmental impacts through water recycling or storage, energy efficiency of fittings, design etc. This should be addressed as a matter of course when considering land use policy and planning changes.

2.5 Reasons for the Proposed Variation

The government's decision to approve the direct grant of the land Block 2 Section 75 prior to completion of the plan variation process was inappropriate and would intimate that approval for the plan variation was a forgone conclusion. This area should be retained in public ownership or at the very least sold through a public auction process (under certain permissible uses) to maximise the return to the taxpayer.

2.6.3 The National Capital Plan

The development as proposed does not reflect the principles of DCP No 171/99/0003 which aims to ensure a high level of visual amenity is maintained. This area is important for retaining a visual buffer for Mt Majura and green belt around Watson. Watson is already growing rapidly and continues to grow apace with more residential apartments in the North with more planned.

In summary we strongly argue that:

- the nature and scale of the development is inappropriate to the site and the proposed variation to the plan should not be approved in its current form;
- further studies on the site environmental, traffic and social impacts should be made available to the public and a proper consultation process initiated with the Village Building Companies plans made available to the public prior to any approvals being given.

We look forward to a response to our comments and confirmation that you will consider them through the planning process.

Regards

Nicholas and Justine Covey
26/11/2007