

Variation No. 224 to the Territory Plan

Commentary by the ACT Rural Landholders Association

This commentary is provided in respect of the proposals for the Stromlo Forestry Settlement to be expanded to a rural village of 40 houses and attendant services.

In principle this Association agrees the proposals in respect of the expansion proposed but considers additional detail is necessary in relation to the social issues involved. In addition we believe that the Standing Committee should be provided with cost estimates for:

- the provision of services
- the unit cost of public housing
- recreation facilities
- total estimated cost package.

It is our view that a plan of this magnitude cannot be considered in isolation from the costs involved. A proper function of elected members of the Legislative Assembly is cost scrutiny.

Social Issues

The plan as developed is based on the premise that the former occupants of the 20 settlement houses all wish to be re-housed at Stromlo. (Similar assumptions are made in respect of the Pierces Creek and Uriarra settlements.)

Apart from not knowing how many former tenants wish to return, they certainly do know how much they will be required to pay for their new houses and whether this rent will be an economic rent, i.e. will the ACT Government have to subsidise these rents, and are the former tenants prepared to pay higher rents?

Related to this question of the number of government houses to be built is the possibility that some of the former residents from Pierces Creek or Uriarra may wish to move to Mt Stromlo. In this regard the Mt Stromlo Settlement is much closer to employment opportunities, shopping centres and public transport than Pierces Creek and Uriarra. If, for instance, those tenants who chose a village life can be housed in the Mt Stromlo Village, it may not be necessary to re-develop Pierces Creek, with significant savings to the Government.

Our Association considers that these social issues need to be resolved before the final dimensions of the Mt Stromlo Settlement can be determined. A modest increase in the size of this settlement may well obviate the need to proceed with the rehabilitation and expansion of Pierces Creek and Uriarra. (In this regard it is appropriate to point out that while Mt Stromlo lies comfortably within the 15 km consolidation boundary of the Spatial Plan, both Pierces Creek and Uriarra do not conform with Spatial Plan principles.)

Planning Principles

This Association considers that the general regulations proposed for the expansion of this settlement to a 40-dwelling village have been adequately identified, including bushfire management. Noting the exposure of the village to the dangerous NW winds, consideration should be given to requiring all houses to be fitted with external sprinklers.

No consideration has been given to stabling horses as part of the overall recreation facilities. Trail bikes and mountain bikes need to be considered as part of the village recreation package, i.e. will provision be made in adjoining areas for these popular recreational activities?

Summary

While the proposal to expand the Mt Stromlo Settlement to a village of 40 houses is agreed, there are wider social issues involving the interrelationship with the Pierces Creek and Uriarra Settlements which impact on this plan. These issues as explained above need to be identified and resolved.

Also there is the question of cost estimates which is an important consideration in developing the Mt Stromlo plan. For instance the cost of providing public housing at Mt Stromlo, where water, electricity and sewerage are connected to the ACT main services, compared with the likely cost of public housing at Pierces Creek and Uriarra is an important consideration.

30 March 2005