

Tabled 8-11-1400



# Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Minister for Children, Youth and Families  
Minister for Health  
Minister for Urban Renewal  
Member for Kurrajong

19/28005

Leon Arundell  
Chairperson  
North Canberra Community Council  
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17 SEP 2019



Dear Mr ~~Arundell~~ *Leon*

I am writing to update the North Canberra Community Council (NCCC) on the next steps for the urban renewal of Section 72 Dickson, following recent announcements.

Last week Yvette Berry, the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development announced the cohort and concept designs for Common Ground Dickson. Common Ground will provide long-term housing for people facing chronic homelessness, focusing on supporting women and children, families and single parents, and older women—growing cohorts in need of assistance. Through sensitive design, which was shaped by previous Section 72 consultations, Common Ground Dickson will provide 40 social and affordable homes with a mix of one, two and three bedroom units to support the needs of a mix of tenants. In time, the tenants will be part of our inner north community, close to facilities, services and public transport at the Dickson group centre.

As announced by Minister Berry, pre-DA consultation has now begun and stakeholders, such as the North Canberra Community Council will have multiple opportunities to provide feedback. Common Ground Dickson's proposed design reflects what we have heard the community wants to see in Section 72. It comprises primarily low to medium rise elements, and will deliver a social enterprise, café, useable green space, play areas and invests in the tree canopy. The design also facilitates a safe environment for residents and visitors with passive surveillance of public spaces and better access and amenity for pedestrians and cyclists. I also note the National Capital Design Review Panel has reviewed the plans for Common Ground Dickson.

I understand representatives from the NCCC Section 72 Working group have already been briefed on Common Ground Dickson, coinciding with the launch of the pre-Development Application (DA) consultation and draft Territory Plan Variation engagement, and that officials will present at a future NCCC meeting.

During the community engagement on Section 72, we also heard that one of the community's top priorities for Section 72 Dickson is upgrades to the Dickson Pool forecourt. In response, we will be trialling a number of improvements to revamp the Dickson pool forecourt area during the coming summer. The improvements will be to landscaping, shade, seating and bicycle parking.

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During summer we will seek community feedback on the temporary upgrades to find out what is working, how people use the space and what could be improved. Following this feedback, we will work with the community in early 2020 to develop a detailed design for budget consideration for permanent works in the future.

Finally, the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) is working with Coles Property Group to ensure car parking for the Dickson Group Centre and Dickson Pool is managed appropriately during its upcoming construction. This includes investigation of land areas in Section 72 Dickson that may be suitable for short-term use as a car park for construction workers. As a condition of its development approval, Coles Property Group is responsible for managing traffic and car parking in the area and for undertaking community engagement on any temporary car parking and traffic management plans.

The ACT Government is continuing to work with the Salvation Army to resolve the future of Block 22, but no significant progress has been made to date. Once this issue is resolved, additional community engagement, including the formation of the community reference group for Section 72, can be undertaken.

In the meantime, the relevant YourSay pages have been updated to keep the community informed on developments around Section 72, and I remain happy to meet with the NCCC Section 72 Working Group if that is helpful.

Thank you again for your continued interest and contributions to the inner north.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RSS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA



**Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA**

Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Minister for Disability  
Minister for Children, Youth and Families  
Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety  
Minister for Government Services and Procurement  
Minister for Urban Renewal  
Member for Kurrajong

19/04002

Leon Arundell  
Chair, North Canberra Community Council  
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**20 FEB 2019**

Dear ~~Mr. Arundell~~ *Leon*

Thank you to North Canberra Community Council (NCCC) Section 72 Working Group members for meeting with me on 1 February 2019 to discuss the renewal of Section 72 Dickson, including your proposal for the establishment of a community reference group.

The ACT Government is committed to delivering an integrated urban renewal of Section 72 Dickson including Canberra's second Common Ground, in consultation with the community. As part of this commitment, the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) has undertaken significant community engagement through the course of 2018. As I noted in our meeting, this consultation has identified a number of matters on which there is consensus, as well as some matters on which community members have differing views.

I consider that the next stage of engagement should build on what the community has already told us with near universal agreement, including that Section 72 Dickson should:

- Contain a mix of uses, including new community facilities, in an integrated precinct that better connects and builds on existing uses and services;
- Be a safe environment – inviting and permeable with appropriate lighting, passive surveillance and improved connections, especially for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Feature attractive and useable green space, with existing trees retained to the greatest extent possible, increased overall tree canopy, and places for children and families; and
- Ensure development comprises primarily low to medium-rise buildings up to 3-4 stories.

I also acknowledge the NCCC's advocacy for the heritage of the area to be recognised in a meaningful way and note that EPSDD has expressed support for this and that we are happy to discuss how this might be incorporated into urban realm upgrades and/or future developments.

As noted in my letter of 21 December 2018 and in our subsequent meeting, I am open to establishing a community reference group as part of the next stage of engagement. Noting the Government's clear commitment to the delivery of Common Ground on Block 25, I anticipate the group will provide further guidance and advice on the overall planning for Section 72 Dickson, including in relation to Block 6, Block 22 and public realm improvements.

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In my earlier letter, I also recognised residents' views that a community needs analysis will be important to inform further engagement. We now anticipate that this analysis will be completed within the next six weeks. The other outstanding matter is the future of Block 22, which remains vacant but in private ownership.

To ensure that the reference group has clarity on these important issues, I propose that it be established once the community needs analysis is completed and when sufficient information is available regarding Block 22 for the scope of engagement to be clear. In the meantime, I am considering options regarding the most appropriate composition and model for the group (for example, how to achieve an appropriately representative group while maintaining a manageable size; and the appropriateness of using an independent facilitator and participatory processes). I would be pleased to further discuss these matters and the terms of reference for the group with the NCCC Working Group.

To deliver on the Government's commitment to Common Ground, we intend to progress with design and construction on Block 25, guided by the community engagement outcomes for Section 72 Dickson to date and by our ongoing engagement with the community. This will require a separate Territory Plan Variation and Development Application process, and I hope that the NCCC will engage positively in that process. I am confident that we can progress Common Ground in a way that delivers good urban renewal outcomes and facilitates its integration into the precinct without delaying delivery of this important social infrastructure.

I acknowledge that, at this time, I am not able to address everything the NCCC raised in past correspondence or in our meeting. However, I look forward to attending tonight's meeting to answer any questions the Council or community members might have.

I thank you for your commitment to and advocacy on behalf of North Canberra and I look forward to our ongoing conversation about the future of Section 72.

Yours sincerely

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Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA



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Obj # 18/36388

Leon Arundell  
Chair, North Canberra Community Council  
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21 DEC 2018

Dear ~~Mr Arundell~~ *Leon*

Thank you for your letter of 4 December 2018 on behalf of the North Canberra Community Council (NCCC) regarding Section 72 Dickson.

The Government agrees with the NCCC that the regeneration and revitalisation of Section 72 has the potential to deliver broad community benefit. The site's existing assets, its proximity to significant existing open spaces and to the commercial and community facilities in the Dickson Group Centre warrant a collaborative urban revitalisation process to deliver a good outcome for current and future residents of the Inner North.

I acknowledge the NCCC's proposal to establish a Community Reference Panel for Dickson Section 72. The Government is currently considering the most appropriate process for the next stage of consultation on Section 72 and will consider the establishment of a community panel or reference group in that context. I would be happy to discuss this further with the NCCC working group and reiterate my offer to meet with the group. I will be at work throughout the holiday period, with the exception of the week beginning 21 January 2019.

I also appreciate residents' views that an Inner North community needs analysis would provide useful context for residents in considering the future of Section 72. As EPSDD officials noted at the NCCC meeting in September, the ACT Government undertakes an ongoing process of assessing community needs both across the Territory as a whole and region-by-region. Work is almost complete on a specific Inner North community needs analysis and I look forward to its release in early 2019. This work will help to inform the next stage of consultation.

However, the Government does not intend to begin again on the community consultation process for Section 72. Throughout 2018, we have undertaken extensive community and stakeholder engagement on the future of Section 72 Dickson, building on the community's input received during previous engagement in 2014-15. The wide range of engagement activities undertaken has included:

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- community workshops;
- information sessions at the Dickson Shops;
- public information sessions;
- receipt of emails and written submissions;
- Social Pinpoint map comments on the YourSay project website;
- a presentation to the North Canberra Community Council;
- on-site 'walkshops' with the public, Dickson College, Lyneham High and Daramalan College;
- postcards sent to the residents of Dickson, Downer, Watson, Hackett, Ainslie and Lyneham;
- an online survey; and
- design workshops.

I am advised that this consultation process was informed by discussions with key members from the NCCC and Dickson and Downer resident groups in 2017. In line with previous consultations, it has been an open and transparent process that has experimented with new ways of presenting information, and seeking wider community input and ideas. The Section 72 team and EPSDD have welcomed feedback on the materials provided throughout the process.

The engagement reports from 2014-15 and each stage during 2018, are available online on YourSay<sup>1</sup> with further engagement information and outcomes to be added shortly. The Government is being transparent with the community about what we have heard during this significant engagement. In doing so, we understand that not all community members will agree with one another on the future and priorities for Dickson Section 72.

We have consistently addressed concerns regarding the information presented in the consultation on Dickson Section 72, including in letters to a number of active NCCC members. This includes particularly addressing the assertion that the ACT Government is focused on high density residential use as a dominant use across the site. While we have been consistent in our view that the site has potential to deliver innovative housing models, including social housing, we have also been clear that the Government envisages a mix of uses along with a significant enhancement to public open space and improved footpaths, cycle ways and road access.

Planning for the precinct, as shown in the preliminary plan available on YourSay<sup>2</sup>, does not propose a reduction in community land uses but rather identifies opportunities for additional community uses, including as part of mixed use developments. It also shows planned improvements to the quality of the existing landscape spaces that could include community gardens and play spaces, both of which have been strongly supported by the community in consultations to date.

The ACT Government absolutely agrees with the NCCC that Section 72 has the potential to be an outstanding example of a thriving, modern, well-designed and coordinated community, cultural and recreational precinct. In that context, it is important to understand that the inclusion of residential uses in Section 72 will not necessarily reduce the site's overall capacity for community uses and may indeed increase the ability of the ACT Government and community organisations to provide high quality community spaces and facilities. In addition, nothing that has been presented in the consultations to date would preclude a private or community sector organisation from expressing interest in the types of opportunities identified in the NCCC discussion paper.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.yoursay.act.gov.au/dickson-section-72](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/dickson-section-72)

<sup>2</sup> [www.yoursay.act.gov.au/dickson-section-72](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/dickson-section-72)

Finally, your letter notes that NCCC members have questioned whether the ACT Government's election commitment specified Section 72 as the site of Canberra's second Common Ground project. I can confirm that ACT Labor announced its election commitment for a Common Ground in Dickson on 7 October 2016 and identified the former Downer Club site as the proposed location, as reported in the Canberra Times.<sup>3,4</sup> The project is also included in Appendix 2 to the Parliamentary Agreement between ACT Labor and the ACT Greens.<sup>5</sup> Further detail on Common Ground in Dickson was announced on 23 October 2017.<sup>6</sup>

Common Ground Dickson will build on the success of the first Common Ground in Gungahlin, providing secure and affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness – an issue that is often raised with me by constituents in the Inner North. The consultation to date has indicated there is significant support for an initiative like this in Section 72. While the exact location of Common Ground within Section 72 was open for discussion in consultations earlier in the year, the Government has now reconfirmed that Common Ground will be located on Block 25, in line with the election commitment. The ACT Government is committed to commencing construction of Common Ground at Section 72 in this term of Government, and I hope the NCCC can continue to be a productive stakeholder in this important community initiative going forward.

Community Councils play an important role in any process like this and I recognise the longstanding interest of a number of residents in the history and renewal of Section 72. I look forward to meeting with NCCC representatives and engaging with the Council at future meetings.

Thank you for your ongoing valuable input into planning outcomes for Section 72 Dickson.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.actlabor.org.au/media/42983/social\\_housing.pdf](https://www.actlabor.org.au/media/42983/social_housing.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/labor-promises-homeless-affordable-accommodation-on-former-downer-club-site-20161006-grwc0f.html>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1053459/Documents.pdf](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1053459/Documents.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open\\_government/inform/act\\_government\\_media\\_releases/yvette-berry-mla-media-releases/2017/community-facilities-and-housing-planned-for-the-heart-of-dickson](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/yvette-berry-mla-media-releases/2017/community-facilities-and-housing-planned-for-the-heart-of-dickson)

