



Gungahlin Community Council Inc.  
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3 March 2023

## Response to ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project – Draft Territory Plan and Draft Gungahlin District Strategies

### Introduction

The Gungahlin Community Council (GCC) is a voluntary, not for profit, community-based association operating in the Gungahlin district of Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory. Our objective is to preserve and improve the social, cultural, economic, and environmental well-being of Gungahlin and the Gungahlin community<sup>1</sup>. The Gungahlin Community Council receives funding support from the ACT Government.

This submission covers both the Draft Gungahlin District Strategy, and aspects of the Draft Territory Plan relevant to Gungahlin.

### Response to Draft Gungahlin District Strategy

The GCC strongly supports the adoption of a spatial approach to planning at the district scale. We have some generic concerns and recommendations about the role of district strategies within the Reformed Planning System, and some specific concerns and recommendations regarding the Draft Gungahlin District Strategy.

#### Generic Issues

There needs to be an immediate and substantial improvement in how the District Strategies are further developed. The ACT Government must use a genuine and well-structured, rather than “rubber stamp”, community engagement and co-design approach on the district strategies, including by promoting the community engagement processes widely, at accessible times and places, with reasonable timeframes for comment, and by providing good quality, high resolution maps and data overlays and other information to support the community in providing better informed feedback. The process needs to be continuous and living – not aimed at producing a whitepaper that sits on a shelf. This is especially important in view of **current community feelings of disempowerment and the experience of not being listened to**.

The GCC has serious concerns about how effective District Strategies will be given their scope is much broader than land use planning. Section 4 (Delivering the District Strategies) identifies many implementation pathways (12) distributed across a range of directorates and legislation which will require **significant commitments by the ACT Government to cross-organisational culture change and ongoing financial investments**. The following “action items” for the ACT Government are extracted from the Draft District Strategies are specifically relevant to Gungahlin and the experiences of the GCC over the past decade:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gcc.asn.au/about-gcc/>

- “Integrating transport and land use will require **strong and ongoing collaboration between ACT Government directorates to realise the full benefits of major transport investments**” (p. 77)
- “Some of these factors are physical and can be facilitated through the planning system, such as through land use zoning, permissible uses and other planning controls. Successful innovation precincts require both physical and non-physical initiatives, including **sustained and ongoing effort and collaboration between governments and the private sector**” (p.78)
- A **program of interventions to help drive revitalisation and positive change** may include:
  - upgrades to open space
  - improvements to local traffic and transport arrangements
  - new or upgraded community facilities
  - changes to planning controls to support new investment and types of uses, including additional retailing and opportunities for employment” (p. 79)
- “Future development in some parts of Canberra needs to include **initiatives to bring amenity and density together to achieve ‘urban improvement’**” (p. 80)
- “requiring a **cohesive approach and collaboration across ACT Government to align plans for these pieces of infrastructure** with the objectives and aims of the district strategies” (p. 81)
- “**Having clear governance and agency responsibility or clarity of a body that has responsibility for being an ‘urbanising agent’** can be an important part of this” (p. 82)

The GCC strongly supports the notion of an “urbanising agent” noting that for the district strategy to be effective there must be an entity/position accountable for delivering against the strategy.

### Specific Issues

Overall, the Draft Gungahlin District Strategy lacks any true strategic vision. It does not articulate a “future state” for Gungahlin and much of it identifies work and projects that are already underway or are “business as usual”.

The introductory “Future Vision for Gungahlin” (p. 7) does not start well, stating:

- *“The district is fully developed”* – which is clearly not true; not only are some residential suburbs and local and group centres yet to be developed, the district is critically lacking a wide range of transport, community and recreations/sporting infrastructure<sup>2</sup>
- *“Trees have matured providing a good tree canopy”* – Gungahlin has the worst heat island footprint of any ACT district (a fact reflected on p. 87 of the District Strategy – “The district is an urban heat ‘hotspot’, with most suburbs hotter than the Canberra average during hot weather”)
- *“These newer northern suburbs are connected by regular public transport services to the town centre and the light rail network”* – the bus network to the outer suburbs is sparse and the bus interchange itself is not efficient
- *“The town centre is now thriving. It provides jobs closer to home for the district’s residents after a long time where it was primarily a destination for shopping. It has a diverse range of commercial uses, while still supporting the local needs of residents”* – The Gungahlin town centre is a spectacular example of the current planning system’s failing approach to mixed use development, and the governments uncoordinated/non-existent investment and business development functions (see below)
- *“Gungahlin District has a range of schools and other community facilities that serve multiple functions and cater to a diverse community and needs, including for arts, sports and activities for youth and older people”* – Gungahlin is critically lacking a wide range of transport, community, and recreations/sporting infrastructure<sup>3</sup>

Further comments are grouped under the Big Drivers below.

<sup>2</sup> [Community and Recreational Facilities Assessment—Gungahlin District](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Community and Recreational Facilities Assessment—Gungahlin District](#)

## Blue-Green Network

Overall, the GCC supports the implementation plan for the blue-green network driver. Additional emphasis needs to be placed on activating and improving the quality of “new connections in the blue-green network to address ... recreational and social values in open spaces across the district, including in new greenfield suburbs” consistent with the [Community and Recreational Facilities Assessment—Gungahlin District](#).

## Economic Access and Opportunity Across the City

The GCC strongly supports the focus on future employment opportunities in the town centre, as this has been our primary objective over multiple decades, particularly in the past 5 years. Based on that advocacy, we are concerned the proposed initiatives lack concrete action as they are mostly about “detailed analysis” and “prepare a plan”.

We also strongly disagree that this driver is solely the responsibility of EPSDD, as this driver requires genuine all-of-government coordination and investment (as outlined above), particularly around transport, roads, and economic development. Expecting land use planning to deliver the desired mixed use outcomes within the Gungahlin Town Centre by themselves is naïve.

Please also note the recommendation to produce a Mixed Use Design Guide, under Response to Territory Plan below.

## Strategic Movement to Support City Growth

The GCC strongly recommends that the Gungahlin district strategy includes an initiative to complete the Gungahlin arterial road network. This includes the complete duplication of Horse Park Drive, duplication of Clarie Hermes Drive, Gungahlin Drive, and Mirrabai Drive, and analysis and timely rectification of problematic intersections and congestion points.

The GCC welcomes the plan to investigate rapid transport between the group centres (Casey, Moncrief, Amaroo) and the town centre, particularly given the increase in density of institutions (schools, aged care) and high-rise residential in the vicinity of Casey.

Further development of the active travel network is required, and the GCC would hope that the Gungahlin Town Centre Active Travel Feasibility Study will be published, further refined, and implemented to improve active travel/micro-mobility paths into the town centre.

It is understood that TCCS has major concerns regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the Gungahlin Bus interchange. Addressing these issues needs to be included in the District Strategy given its crucial role in enabling efficient public transport within and to/from Gungahlin and its impact on the amenity of the Gungahlin Town Centre, including on active travel. These in turn need to be integrated with any remedial work to undertaken on the town centre road network and parking.

Ensuring the public transport network provides effective connections through to all employment hubs, including Belconnen, Woden and ultimately Tuggeranong, as well as Civic, is crucial to Gungahlin because of Gungahlin’s low level of employment.

## Sustainable Neighbourhoods

The GCC believes most of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods initiatives are in line with what residents expect - better lived experiences.

Further investment is needed to improve the canopy cover in Gungahlin to reduce the heat island impact.

## Inclusive Centres and Communities

The GCC is encouraged that the chronic lack of community and recreation facilities has been recognised by the ACT Government as the GCC has been highlighting this for some years. The shortfall is also supported by the Government’s [Community and Recreational Facilities Assessment—Gungahlin District](#), as illustrated in the diagram below:

Public Primary	Non-Government Primary	Public Secondary	Non-Government Secondary	Public College	Non-Government College	Early Childhood
Neighbourhood Hall	Community Centre	Hospitals	Community Health Centre	Child and Family Centre	Nursing Home/Places	Aged Day Care (Respite)
Religious Facilities	Youth Centre	Senior Citizens Club	Open Space	Libraries	Community Gardens	Aquatic Facilities
Tennis	Multipurpose Courts	Gymnastics	Skate Park/BMX Facility	Outdoor Courts	Lawn Bowls and Croquet	Sportsfields
Yes		Probably Not		Likely Sufficient		

Community facilities in Gungahlin that are not meeting demand (red) - including primary schools, health and child care, community spaces, aged care, youth services, indoor multipurpose courts and outdoor courts – probably not meeting demand (yellow), and possibly meeting demand (green) – from [Community and Recreational Facilities Assessment—Gungahlin District](#)

The initiatives under this driver are some of the most crucial in the Draft Strategy as they are crucial to the wellbeing of Gungahlin residents. The GCC is concerned this initiative needs to move quickly from strategy to implementation. Timely, significant and sustained investment is required to actually build the facilities required.

Finally, the GCC is encouraged that one of the proposed change areas (block 348, the Gungahlin Homestead site) is being considered for a large-scale retirement community and aged care facility. These are services needed in not only in Gungahlin but across northern Canberra.

Perhaps some of these "Key sites and Change Areas" could also be considered for the Northside hospital and/or a future National Convention Centre. Other creative opportunities are likely to emerge from a more substantive co-design process on the next iteration of the District Strategy.

## Response to Draft Territory Plan

The increased residential densities that have been allowed within the current Planning system to emerge in Gungahlin, particularly within the Gungahlin Town Centre, are intended to provide greater amenity for residents in the form of shops, jobs, community and recreational facilities, public transport, and high-quality public spaces within close walking distance of residences.

They have failed for several reasons, including:

1. The planning controls in the relevant Precinct Codes rarely require commercially adaptable ground floors or active retail frontages on mixed-use sites.
2. The LDA/Suburban Land Agency (SLA) have not put in place lease conditions that would require or actively encourage commercial or community use on mixed-use sites.
3. The relevant objectives for the CZ5: Mixed Use Zone in the current Territory Plan are vaguely worded and open to interpretation, to the point of being practically unenforceable.

4. An over reliance on planning and planning rules to achieve outcomes that require coordinated investments from multiple directorates to deliver incentives and facilities necessary to deliver on the mixed-use vision.

In short, the current planning system is not delivering mixed-use development which meets community expectations. The result is a loss of valuable floorspace that could be home to small businesses and sorely needed facilities that benefit the wider community. It is not apparent that this has been addressed in the Draft Territory Plan.


The GCC strongly recommends that EPSDD develop an ACT Mixed Use Design Guide (the Mixed Use Design Guide) to accompany the proposed ACT Urban Design Guide and ACT Housing Design Guide (as proposed by the Molonglo Valley Community Forum). This document should contain benchmarks and guidelines to ensure developers deliver building spaces that are attractive and useable by prospective tenants. Consultation should be undertaken with the local business community and community service providers to ensure the guide is tailored to the specific needs and commercial realities of the ACT. The Mixed Use Design Guide should also be informed by the recommendations of the consultancy report into mixed use undertaken by the Planning Directorate's as part of the reform<sup>4</sup>.

There are numerous examples of mixed use and commercial design guides in effect elsewhere in Australia. One such example is the Quality Design Guidelines for Commercial and Mixed Use Areas used by Melbourne's Glen Eira City Council<sup>5</sup>. These guides clearly describe and illustrate desired outcomes for mixed-use sites at a variety of scales, including the preferred ratio of commercial floorspace per square metre of site area for strategic development locations. They also articulate how major new mixed-use developments should be designed to deliver significant, community-wide benefits.

The overarching objective of the Mixed Use Design Guide should be to facilitate the development of sustainable and usable spaces for businesses and community service providers within mixed-use buildings and precincts. It should discourage spaces that are likely to remain vacant due their cost, size, or usability, and encourage building layouts that provide safe and comfortable separation between residential and non-residential uses. There is an opportunity for the Mixed Used Design Guide to graphically illustrate how smart building design can be employed to successfully manage the competing demands of buildings which feature a diverse range of uses.

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<sup>4</sup> [Commercial and Industrial Zones and Mixed Use Development \(SGS\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/media/3654/quality-design-guidelines-commercial-and-mixed-use-areas.pdf>



## **SUBMISSION ON DRAFT BELCONNEN DISTRICT STRATEGY**

Kuringa Woodland is a critically endangered remnant of Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum grassy woodland, recognised as meeting national criteria for environmental protection. It has more than 150 mature trees, some over 200 years old. The area contains trees of indigenous cultural significance and a variety of endemic native flowers, grasses and other plants. It provides important habitat for a diversity of birds, insects, kangaroos, reptiles, frogs, and other fauna.

Kuringa Woodland is bordered by Tillyard Drive, Kuringa Drive and Kingsford-Smith Drive in Fraser and Spence, ACT. The area runs parallel for most of its course to Hall's Creek and includes a portion of the Bicentennial Trail. Kuringa Woodland is an important site within the wider vicinity of other areas of high conservation value around the northwestern fringes of Canberra, potentially providing biodiversity linkage to areas further to the north and west of the city.

The Kuringa Woodland Landcare Group (KWLG) is a group of volunteers who aim to preserve and restore the area. The group has been active since 2020 and has had a noticeably positive impact since formed. The group operates with the support of the Ginninderra Catchment Group, and under the auspices of the ACT Government Urban Parks and Places volunteering program.


### **Submission**

The KWLG is aware of submissions on the draft Territory Plan and draft District Strategies by the Conservation Council ACT Region, Friends of Grasslands, and Ginninderra Catchment Group, and endorses these submissions.

In addition, the KWLG recommends that Kuringa Woodland receive designation within any final version of the Territory Plan and Belconnen District Strategy, as a Conservation Area (or as an area of Urban Open Space in which conservation is specifically the primary objective). This would fit within the wider concept of a Biodiversity Network as proposed by the Conservation Council, Friends of Grasslands, and other groups.

At present, the draft Belconnen District Strategy identifies Kuringa Woodland simply as Open Space. Without identification, appropriate protection, and proactive care as an area of high conservation value, the Woodland will continue to be at risk of degradation through deliberate or unintentional human incursion and damage by government agencies, local residents and the wider public, and through continuing steady infestation by invasive weed species.

Designation of the Kuringa Woodland as a Conservation Area will provide important community recognition of the high conservation value of the area, and specific delineation of the area for the purposes of active management by government agencies and volunteers. Recognising that the Woodland is on the immediate urban fringe, it is important to note that designation as a Conservation Area would not interfere with appropriate fire hazard management.

  
Co-Convenor  
3 March 2023

## **INNER NORTH AND CITY DISTRICT STRATEGY**

### **LBGG COMMENTS**

Lake Burley Griffin Guardians (the Guardians) is a non-profit community group committed to safeguarding one of Canberra's greatest treasures, the open space of Lake Burley Griffin and its lakeshore landscape setting. However, the proposed planning reforms relate to those areas that are the responsibility of the ACT Government near to, adjacent and within our areas of concern and, of course, provide the greater context for these areas, so we feel obliged to comment.

The following submission focusses on key aspects of the proposed reforms.

In summary, and overall the Guardians recommend that the draft Planning Bill and related subsidiarity documents, including the District Strategies, be withdrawn and the ACT Government appoint an independent body to review the ACT planning processes to create an improved process to:

1. Avoid one entity or body, especially the Chief Planning Officer and Planning Minister wielding too much power;
2. Help reduce mistakes and prevent improper behaviour in ACT Government entities;
3. Ensure input from all relevant entities in a timely and appropriate way;
4. Ensure adequate and timely consultation with community groups.

Additionally, the Guardians support the Canberra Planning Action Group's proposal for the establishment of an Independent Planning Commission, Local Planning Expert Panels and Rigorous Building and Construction Regime (see [PROPOSAL FOR ACT INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION \(canberraplanningactiongroup.com\)](https://canberraplanningactiongroup.com)).

### **Draft Inner North & City District Strategy**

There are many issues in this document that the Guardians could comment on but the Guardians have decided to focus on its primary objects in its comments. This means examining several matters of overall principle and matters that impact on our principal geographic area of interest, Lake Burley Griffin and foreshore surrounds.

The 'Draft Inner North & City District Strategy Plan' presented at pp10-11 in the District Strategy, like the similar plans provided in other Draft District Strategies, is insufficiently precise to allow an accurate understanding of what is proposed for the District despite requests made to the Government for more accurate plans prior to the end of the consultation period. For instance, there is no mapping of the proposals to the actual streets as is required for residents and others to properly assess the impacts of the proposals on particular properties, features or places. This is a serious issue for individuals and communities in developing comments, without this mapping the Guardians question the intent of the ACT Government in seeking comment – is this a genuine attempt at consultation?

"Heritage" is mentioned in the text a number of times including in the '5 Big Drivers', usually in the sense that it is to be protected from inappropriate planning. However, it is also mentioned in the context of further proposed investigation (suggesting a challenge to the heritage status and protection to allow development of some sort?) and areas that are heritage listed not shown on, for



instance, the potential suitability for future housing map (at Figure 19), suggesting the encouragement of adverse proposals for change to heritage areas, whether they be individual buildings, large conservation precincts or other significant heritage places, as they are shown as highly suitable for new housing. This is inexplicable and contradicts the document's textual statements.

The significant heritage **not** shown on the plans is both that identified by the ACT Government and that identified by the Australian Government (from the Commonwealth and the National Heritage Lists), particularly, of course, from the Guardians perspective, the Commonwealth List place of the Lake Burley Griffin and Adjacent Lands. Both of these latter types of heritage can be affected by adjacent developments/actions – it is clearly not just matter for Australian Government planning and actions – ACT Government planning needs to take these places into account too.

Later in the document selected heritage places are indicated (although, poorly in the way it is shown) on Figures 35 and 39. This is too late in the Strategy – heritage places need to be overlaid on the earlier Figures where relevant.

### **The 5 Big Drivers**

- **Blue-green network**  
This is supposed to support natural and cultural values, specifically ecology, and would include natural and cultural heritage. The map of the network (at Figure 13, partly corrected in Figures 35 and 39) identifies, inter alia, Lake Burley Griffin without specifically taking (albeit mentioning worthy, high order, general considerations) this into any related, detailed initiatives in the 'Objectives'. For instance, an issue of increased urbanisation or densification adjacent to the Lake would be threats to the Lake from wastewater/runoff/stormwater pollution. A relevant objective would be to ensure this does not eventuate – possibly recognised in the Water Sensitive Urban Design initiative (p102) and a bit more fully in the Supporting infrastructure required section (at p123-125).
- **Economic access and opportunity**  
From Figure 14 it does seem that the access and opportunities have inappropriately leaked from the City into residential Reid and its Conservation Precinct. This doesn't reflect its heritage status as it should.
- **Strategic movement to support city growth**  
It does seem from Figure 15 that the Inner North has relatively high, effective job density but there are significant, existing residential areas immediately outside the City Centre with distinctive, important character and identity that may be under unrecognised threat from attempts to increase this access to jobs. This threat may come from inserting more residential capacity, increasing capacity for employment floorspace, innovation projects and attractions, in these residential and heritage areas. This tension and threat does not seem to be recognised as it should be.
- **Sustainable neighbourhoods**  
A significant issue not detailed (p88 only has a few more details of this distant proposal) is the proposed high speed rail line which lies across (or under?) Mt Ainslie down Ainslie Ave (?) to Civic. The implications of this are also not clear and probably unavailable to assess at this early stage, but they are potentially serious and decidedly an unwanted intrusions into a primarily residential zone and also near



significant heritage. Sustainability means, inter alia, maintenance of local character and significant heritage present. This is insufficiently recognised here, particularly as an issue in the suitability for insertion of new housing where, as mentioned above, Figure 19, provocatively, doesn't identify the many areas of heritage in the Inner North, including the surrounds of Lake Burley Griffin, for the required protection as it should. As noted above, these are partly recognised and imprecisely presented in Figures 35 and 39 but they also need to be on other critical Figures provided, such as Figure 19, as a corrective to otherwise apparently promoted, unmediated development.

Similarly, 'Rapid Stops Connecting to Local and Group Centres' are proposed (Figure 19) as redevelopment areas irrespective of and overlaying any particular Inner North local character and heritage issues. This is inappropriate, especially given all of the statements in the text about heritage protection in the document, apart from the serious, but here ignored statutory concerns.

- Inclusive centres and communities

The objectives for the Inner North and the City are very generalised so it is difficult to comment, but it is clear in this district that there are areas of high heritage and character value and it is an area of high community facility accessibility and advantage, so the insertion of more social and affordable housing may now be a difficult and even more pressing issue, than in past years, especially as a large quantity of this housing has recently been removed to allow for new development in the district. (This is particularly the case around the City Centre and along Northbourne Avenue).

To reintroduce or attempt to change this current, new balance will apply significant pressure on the even greater, relative concentration of district advantage seen in part in the heritage housing, landscapes and accessible facilities that this has produced. This tension and its consequence, if it is to occur, are not recognised in the document.

## **INNER SOUTH DISTRICT STRATEGY**

### **LBGG COMMENTS**

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The following submission focusses on key aspects of the proposed reforms.

In summary, and overall the Guardians recommend that the draft Planning Bill and related subsidiarity documents, including the District Strategies, be withdrawn and the ACT Government appoint an independent body to review the ACT planning processes to create an improved process to:

1. Avoid one entity or body, especially the Chief Planning Officer and Planning Minister wielding too much power;
2. Help reduce mistakes and prevent improper behaviour in ACT Government entities;
3. Ensure input from all relevant entities in a timely and appropriate way;
4. Ensure adequate and timely consultation with community groups.

Additionally, the Guardians support the Canberra Planning Action Group's proposal for the establishment of an Independent Planning Commission, Local Planning Expert Panels and Rigorous Building and Construction Regime (see [PROPOSAL FOR ACT INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION \(canberraplanningactiongroup.com\)](https://canberraplanningactiongroup.com)).

#### **Draft Inner South District Strategy**

The Guardians support the detailed recommendations of the Inner South Community Council:

- There must be an evidence-based, more rigorous methodology for projecting population increases in the ACT and hence the number of additional dwellings required annually, and where.
- A clearer evidence base is needed for the proposed Transect approach to Urban Character Types (eg General Urban, Urban Centre, Urban Core), and how it informs the building heights shown in the Sustainable Neighbourhoods maps, how it would interact with the zoning provisions in the Territory Plan, and how it will ensure resilience in the face of a warming climate, including through the provision of adequate green space and tree canopy cover to prevent heat islands. A regularly updated heat-map is required to provide evidence that developments do not lead to temperatures harmful to health.
- Instead of random upzoning in a district, it is preferable to have structured community engagement to ensure co-design of precinct scale developments, and then improvement of processes between participating Government agencies, the private sector and the community to deliver the redevelopment of precincts in a timely way.
- The ACT Government must use a genuine and well-structured, rather than "rubber stamp", community engagement and co-design approach on the district strategies, including by promoting

the community engagement processes widely, at accessible times and places, with reasonable timeframes for comment, and by providing good quality, high resolution maps and other information to support the community in providing better informed feedback. This is especially important in view of current community feelings of disempowerment and the experience of not being listened to.

- The Inner South Canberra Community Council's 'Inner South Canberra District Planning Strategy - Future Directions for our District - 2021' is a thorough, locally-sensitive, attempt at a District Strategy. This should be drawn on more comprehensively in revising the Government District Strategy for the Inner South.
- The proposed District Strategy needs to better acknowledge and deal with heritage. Currently it seems to address heritage mainly under the Blue-Green Network under Conservation Connectivity. It is important to acknowledge and maintain built and cultural heritage, not just natural heritage. The Sustainable Neighbourhoods Section and map at Fig 36 need to clarify this.
- At the same time, the ISCCC supports the proposed initiative in the Blue Green network to protect and enhance the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Reserve, and the Jerrabomberra Creek corridor.
- We consider that the identified primary and secondary liveable blue-green network does not fully capture the high value biodiversity network in the inner south, and needs more work.
- The need for social housing to be included in new developments is important in the Inner South. For example, this should be included in the list of principles for planning East Lake (p121 of the draft Inner South District Strategy).
- Oaks Estate residents have asked that the suburb be included in the Inner South District Strategy, not in the East Canberra District Strategy as currently proposed.
- Greater consideration needs to be given to the future of the Canberra Railway Station.
- More work needs to be done to identify ways of improving transport access by making it easier for people to get around by car, by public transport or by active travel.

### **The Process from here**

- Once comments received have been incorporated, the next version of the Planning Act and Territory Plan and associated documents should, as a package, be released for final public comment before they are finalised.
- The process of developing the Inner South, and other, District Strategies should provide for a further period of community engagement after the Planning Act and Territory Plan are finalised.
- The ISCCC recommends that the government seek advice on the risks of moving to discretionary decision making, as inevitably there will be merits and judicial review. The likely monetary and social risks are a consideration that has not been discussed.

**Submission**  
**on the**  
**Draft East Canberra District Planning Strategy**

**on behalf of**  
**The Majura Valley Landcare Group**



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## **Executive Summary**

### **The History**

Sustainable Farming and Sustainable Native Woodland Conservation is a critical role which the farming community of the Majura Valley passionately embraces.

In 2010 a “*Caring for our Country Community Action Grant*” was sought by [REDACTED], and used to provide the funds for a feasibility study, focused on the importance of protecting the agricultural integrity, and the sensitive native woodland ecosystem in the Majura Valley, along with Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie.

### **Vision for the Majura Valley**

Each landholder in the Majura Valley was interviewed, and it became apparent the establishment of a Majura Valley Landcare Group would be vital to necessitate the planning toward a “*Vision for the Majura Valley*”.

The Vision for the Majura Valley has developed over the 13 years since its inception. Landholders have a clear focus for “*The Bush Capital*” concept to partner with “*Vision for the Majura Valley*”.

### **The Bush Capital**

Walter Burley Griffin revealed his prize-winning plan for Canberra in year 1912.

“The Age” newspaper, dated 4<sup>th</sup> November 1912, headline read:  
“*Senator’s Pride in the Bush Capital*”

The article went on to quote a NSW senator:

*“If it means a place of gum trees, then let us have the bush.”*

Continued engagement with ACT Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) is critical for the growth of the sensitive native areas, and to re-instate the areas which have been damaged.

### **Decision for Degazetting**

In December 2022, Minister Mick Gentleman confirmed in writing, a process had begun for the formal degazetting of split blocks in the Majura Valley. Majura Valley landholders are now planning for this activation. For “*The Majura Valley Bush Capital*” concept to move forward. The Majura Valley farming community is looking forward to the 25-year leases becoming a reality.

## **Business Planning**

The “*Majura Valley Bush Festival*” was held in collaboration with Heritage Month in April 2017. The Majura Valley has a rich early Settler Heritage which is strongly guarded by landholders and the 1800’s structures which are still significant in the valley and treasured along with the documented history of the individuals who once lived there. There are preserved early settler dwellings in the Valley, including the Old Post Office and Historic Majura House to name only a few of those that remain.

The day of the *Majura Valley Bush Festival* over eight thousand (8,000) people from all over Canberra and neighbouring towns attended the event. The one day presented a successful marketing strategy for what is possible in Majura Valley dependant on careful planning.

*The Majura Valley Vision* promotes a vision that incorporates ecological biodiversity, sustainable regeneration, and agricultural security of the land. The Majura Valley Vision will ensure economic and social benefits to the Canberra community while demonstrating the skills to develop commercial farming while the agricultural background survives.

The Majura Valley is a large section of land reaching from Pialligo Avenue to the Federal Highway. The valley is rich, productive, and ecologically sensitive.

This creates an exciting challenge and new planning consideration, incorporating agriculture, agritourism, environmental sustainability, along with transportation needs within our beautiful Majura Valley.

The Majura Valley has the potential to be a planning masterpiece if sculptured into a vision which all stakeholders will be proud to be associated with.

## **East Canberra District Planning Strategy**

The Majura Valley Landcare Group (MVLG) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft East Canberra District Strategy Plan.

The Majura Valley Landcare Group:

- Welcomes the first driver, the Blue-Green Network, and supports the initiatives included in that driver.
- Appreciates the need for the second driver, Economic access and opportunity across the city. We do however question some of the initiatives. Specifically, the proposed light industrial development extending north of the airport into leased agricultural and rural blocks. Heavy rail would be destructive to the ecological footprint. The Group believes agriculture, agritourism, ecotourism and biodiversity enhancement will provide a unique and significant approach into the Majura Valley rather than light industrial encroachment.



- The third driver, Strategic movement to support city growth. Specifically, the Group does not agree to the expansion of major transport routes across the leased agricultural and rural block, or for the sensitive native ecosystem woodlands to be threatened or destroyed.
- The Group welcomes the announcement of driver 4, Sustainable neighbourhoods, and specifically the reluctance to build housing within the Majura Valley area.
- The Group acknowledge the importance of driver 5 Inclusive centres and communities and welcome the availability of these existing centres and services. Queanbeyan, Sutton, Cooma, Yass, Goulburn, as outreach locations, and Pialligo, Oaks Estate, Symonston, and the Canberra community.

**The Majura Valley Landcare Group** support the opportunity to participate in this community submission.

The passion of those living in the valley is strongly driven by their desire to live productively, as caretakers of this significant and beautiful Majura Valley.

## **Driver 1 - Blue-Green Network**

*Protect, conserve, and enhance priority grassland, woodland and aquatic habitats and environmental values, including along the Molonglo River and Jerrabomberra and Woolshed creeks.*

The Majura Valley Landcare Group (MVLG) is extremely aware of the ecological diversity value of the Majura Valley and the Mt Majura area. The Group was formed with a primary purpose to nurture and protect the rich ecological diversity of the valley. The Majura Valley is host to a complex and threatened ecological collection of trees, shrubs, understory and tall grassy woodland.

There is well documented evidence on the ACT government website, of the extent of Yellow Box/White Box, and Blakely's Red Gum grassy woodlands, within both the Majura Valley area and the ridges and buffer zones surrounding the valley.

The woodlands occur through Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve, Mt Majura/Mt Ainslie reserves, the shooting range to the north of Majura Valley, the Girl Guides campsite, the Australian Federal Police site, Department of Defence land and continue further south to include other farms heading down the valley.

ACTMAPi identifies both small and large patches of box gum woodlands scattered across the full extent of the rural blocks, and subsequent leases which are in the Majura Valley. This area is listed as critically endangered under the Australian Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) and by the ACT Government's Nature Conservation Act (2014). Jurisdictions across Australia are working toward reversing the loss of this ecological biodiversity.

The *ACT Native Woodland Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2019)*, identifies how the woodland areas create habitat connectivity linkages for birds, flora and fauna. Members of the MVLG have actively supported the retention of these areas and have undertaken supplementary planting to strengthen the stands and linkages.

ACTMAPi also identifies that the Majura Valley habitat has the Striped Legless Lizard and the Golden Sun Moth. These are just two of the many native species dependent on this ecologically protected area. There is also a range of endangered native flora that are found in ACT bush land areas.

The ecological community is protected in the ACT reserves, and other conservation areas including Mt Ainslie and Mt Majura, both adjacent to the Majura Valley. This ecological footprint also extends to a number of farms across the ACT, including the farms and other rural blocks in the Majura Valley.

An ecological survey of the Innabaanya Girl Guide campsite was conducted at the request of the ACT and South East NSW Region team of Girl Guides NSW and ACT.

This is advised to be considered as part of a comprehensive environmental assessment which would also include community and economic assessments. The survey found that the campsite contains a remnant of an endangered ecological community that provides habitat in this extensively cleared landscape. This provides an opportunity for enhancement, especially when undertaken with some landscaping and warren ripping. The site also provides a range of other opportunities for greater engagement and interaction with the local and broader community. (*Innabaanya Ecological Survey undertaken by Kerle Environmental and report provided by The Girl Guide Association ACT*).

During 2014 -15, while the Majura Parkway was being constructed, the construction work involved the removal of many mature, protective wind break and habitat trees. The original planting of these trees was under the guidance of Greening Australia. The MVLG has since replanted a number of trees along the Parkway to partially compensate for the loss of these trees and has commitments to continue this project for the next two years.

During the building of the Majura Parkway, Roads ACT management welcomed 3 representatives from the Majura Valley Landcare Group to partake in activation planning along with liaison connectivity between government and landowners throughout the process.

The farmers living and working in the Majura Valley, also continue to work with the ACT Government, Greening Australia, the Molonglo Conservation Group, and other similar organisations. Their aim was to secure the ongoing protection and security of this highly sensitive area.

### **Molonglo Conservation Group (MCG) - commitment to Majura Valley**

The MCG is committed to continuing its long-standing relationship with Majura Valley farmers and other lease holders, focusing on issues that impact on the Woolshed Creek riparian corridors.

Canberra's urban growth, the Canberra International Airport precinct, and the addition of the Majura Parkway as a major transport route, is creating significant impact on the future existence of this diverse, local habitat which support biodiversity across not only Majura Valley, but also Mt Majura, and Mt Ainslie which lie adjacent.

The MCG firmly believe that increased certainty of new leases will ensure the landholder's commitment across the entire valley, while strengthening and improving the environmental condition of properties in the Majura Valley.

This is recognised by the ACT Government Environmental sector, with the Majura Valley being one of four key connectivity areas in the ACT.

## **Water Study**

The geology, soils, geomorphology and topography of the Majura Valley are complex. This has been confirmed in *Case Study 5.2: ACT Hydrogeological Framework Project (Case Study 5.2)*. There is also a major fault line running down the centre of the valley, and significantly different geological processes occurring on either side of the valley.

*“Hydrogeology is an interdisciplinary study”.*

The hydrogeology of the Majura Valley is a complex combination of surface water, aquifers, subsurface stores and flows (typically less than 450 metres beneath the land surface). When periodic excessive rain activity occurs, the result in the Majura Valley is flooding.

At times significant flooding has seen Old Majura Road flood with:

- Stranded cars caught in the unexpected deluge needing to be towed out of danger.
- Large round hay bales swept up and travelling on the rapidly flowing water, and flow for three kilometres down the Majura Valley toward the Molonglo River.
- Farm fences washed away in the swell of flood water.

In the last ten years landholders have also become aware of dams upstream on Commonwealth land being blasted open during the drought and certain other waterways being concreted over. These actions have impacted water flows through the Majura Valley, removing upstream water management measures, exacerbating flooding in the bigger rain events, and creating greater damage to the land and improvements downstream.

It is hoped that the new information about the hydrogeological landscape that underlies the Majura Valley can help identify ways to improve water management in the valley.

The MCG will continue to focus on riparian revegetation efforts to improve water quality and will also look to identify what is working in Majura Valley to support a healthy insect community. This work has continued since the MCG partnered with ACT Roads and Fulton Hogan (contractors). The work is to revegetate sections of Woolshed Creek and the Molonglo River catchment following the realignment which occurred while building the Majura Parkway.

## **Looking to the Future**

In 2022, ACT Government’s Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) together with the Department of Defence, began a process affecting certain rural leases and to formally de-gazette Defence land in the Majura Valley. The effected

landholders have welcomed this initiative and hope this process will be concluded at no cost to either the ACT or the landholders. This year, landholders may have far greater certainty about their land holdings as they move forward.

While this process continues, the Majura Valley farming community is preparing to approach the ACT government with a proposal to regenerate a tree line along the Majura Parkway.

This early landscape proposal is intended to create a new habitat corridor along the western side of the Majura Parkway, following the bicycle path which links the Majura Valley to other areas. The proposal is to plant a shade canopy, which will reinstate some of the trees removed from the Majura Valley during construction of the Majura Parkway. Importantly, this planting will assist with protecting the threatened ecological community which includes rare woodlands, native grasslands, and an understorey of shrubs.

### **Recent History of the Majura Valley**

Many of the leases in the Majura Valley were due for renewal in 2005. At that time, the ACT Government decided not to renew those leases, and to impose a 90-day withdrawal clause if land was required.

In the 18 years since 2005, this decision has caused considerable hardship and stress for resident leaseholders who continue to develop their future business plans, although left them wary to fully implement these plans, in the hope their leases will be reinstated soon.

During this extended timeframe, farmers have not been able to contribute financially toward improvement of their land or to commence new or innovative farming options in the manner they would like. Banks have been unwilling to finance projects or developments due to the lack of tenure certainty. This uncertainty is based around whether the withdrawal clause might be activated at any time, which it could have been across the last 18 year period.

The resulting outcome for cropping, other farm activities and tree planting has been limited due to the uncertainty leaseholders continually experience. If they sow a crop or buy more stock, there has been no certainty regarding harvest or investment returns for any venture undertaken by the farmer. Many farmers have been reluctant to replant as they still await a decision on their future, and the future of the land which they occupy.

**The East Canberra District Strategy ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project** does not properly clarify or address the options for the Majura Valley. What it does do is identify a 'POSSIBLE CHANGE AREA FOR EMPLOYMENT' in the Majura Valley.

Farmers from the Majura Valley, wishing to renew their leases, presented a range of individual business plans to the Chief Minister Andrew Barr and the

Minister for Planning and Land Management Minister Gentleman in  
September 2017.

This meeting was to symbolise the commitment the farmers wish to undertake in the interests of preserving the Majura Valley for agritourism, and ecotourism in the immediate future, based on the re-instatement of their leases and the commitment of the Government to the future of the Majura Valley.

## **Driver 2 - Economic Access and Opportunity across the City**

*Develop new employment precincts, capitalising on proximity to Canberra Airport, national freight routes, heavy rail, and existing employment precincts (subject to outcomes of the Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment).*

There is considerable diversity of use within the boundaries of the Eastern Broadacre area. This includes the Brindabella Precinct, a precinct that has demonstrated successful air transport linkages across Australia and the world. The ACT Government and airport business management have been instrumental in developing those linkages.

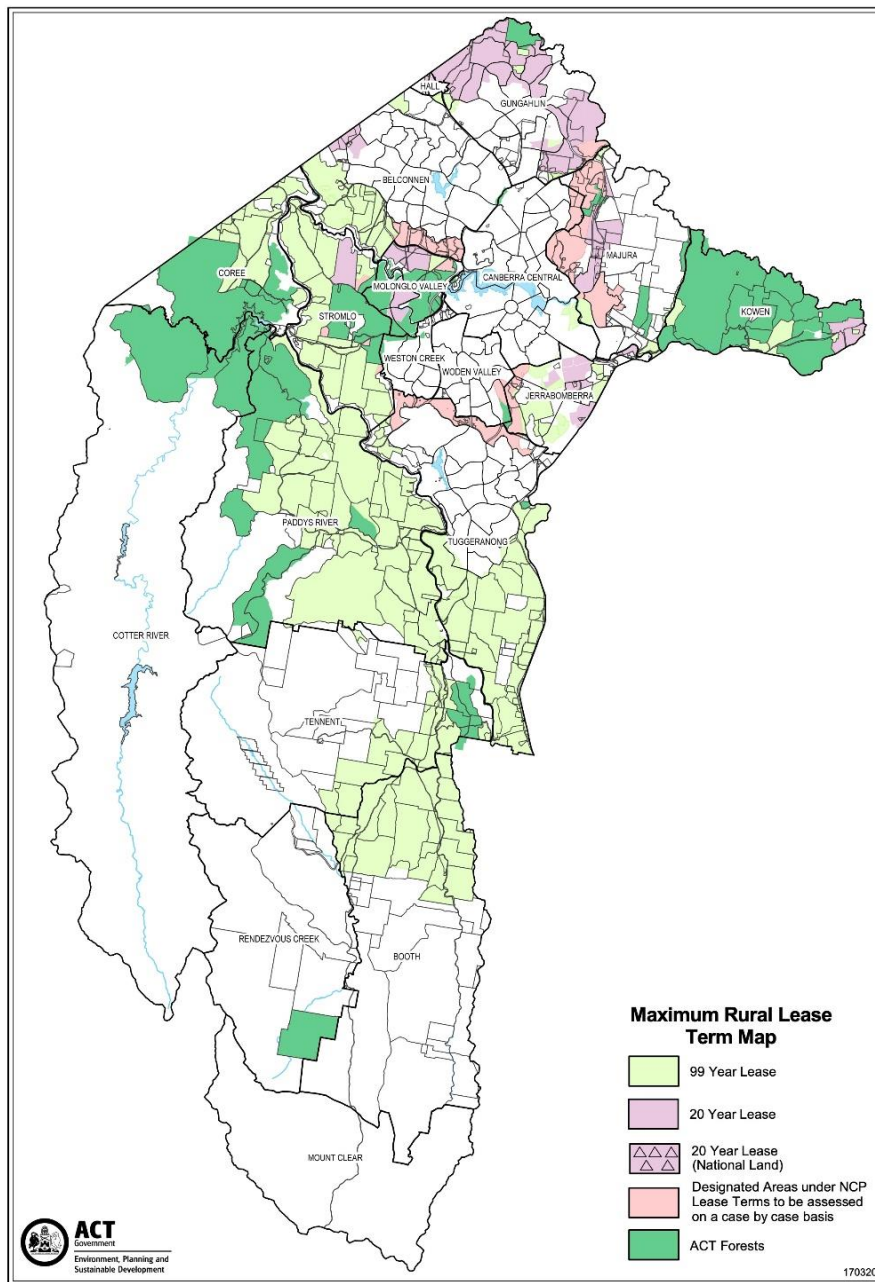
The Majura Valley farming community already provides employment opportunities within the valley through primary production and associated low environmental impact, secondary industry and tourism activities. We believe such activities should continue to grow within the Majura Valley. In doing so, it will be possible to create a unique opportunity for the “Bush Capital” to demonstrate its bush and rural connections in an economically viable way.

The success of such a proposal has been demonstrated since 2004 by Mount Majura Wines and The Truffle Farm. Both property owners successfully negotiated 99-year leases with the ACT Government at that time. The lease agreements with government have provided lessees with security of tenure, which has facilitated financial security, investment and revenue raising capacity. The lease has provided the opportunity for the lessees to launch into successful agricultural and tourism ventures which are now well known beyond the confines of the ACT border.

Security of tenure is essential for all land holders, if they are to be able to achieve this wonderful opportunity to engage in environmentally friendly rural based employment.



**SCHEDULE 2      MAXIMUM RURAL LEASE TERM MAP**



**New employment opportunity through primary production**

The prospect of new leasing agreements being discussed by ACT Government with a focus on the Majura Valley, will provide for new ventures as well as existing to develop:

- Paddock to plate food
- Community gardens
- Free range egg farming
- Sheep milk dairy
- Cheese production
- Honey production

- Expansion of cattle and sheep production
- Animal husbandry

Additional employment opportunities will evolve. The business plans developed by members of the farming community will also provide scope to engage in greater tourism activities.

### **New employment opportunities through sustainable environmental initiatives**

The prospect of new rural leasing agreements within the Majura Valley also facilitates the development of new and existing environmentally sustainable ventures. These include:

- Worm farming
- Seed banking
- Tree planting and regeneration of native protected flora
- Environmental education and research programs and activities for schools and tertiary institutions.



### **Employment through Tourism**

It is important to highlight that not all landholders wish to engage in tourism. While most have a focus on tourism, a small number are dedicated to maintaining their agricultural background to work the land, support horse agistment and take an active role in working alongside environmental organisations.

With the Canberra International Airport on the doorstep of the valley, the “*Vision for the Future of the Majura Valley*” continues to grow.

Many land holders within the Majura Valley and with farm business plans, have a focus on providing an “*Historic Australian Farming Experience*”. This will promote the “*Bush Capital* identity” and collectively provide an engaging tourism trail. This focus is also articulated within the body of individual farm business plans and includes activities such as:

- Sheep shearing demonstrations
- Whip cracking
- Horse and pony riding
- Historic horseback riding trails
- Equestrian riding centre
- Historic horse drawn coach museum (currently maintained within the Valley)
- Magnificently constructed stables (existing)
- Historic Post Office (existing)
- Historic Majura House (existing)
- Picnic basket walking tours
- Cob and Co coach rides
- Farm animal pat and feed centre
- Environmental conservation classes with Molonglo Conservation Group and individual lessees
- Indigenous walk and talk trails
- Majura Valley Tour buses will be based in the valley and will run on a regular timetable of pick up/drop off to the airport and the city.

Collectively, it is envisaged that the tourism trail will also include a coffee shop/café and country food, 'glam camping' and picnic areas.

Planning further includes the option for a monthly open gate market in Majura Valley with locally produced seasonal food.

There is a possibility that future planning for rural activity in the Majura Valley may include some "farm stay" accommodation. Under the ACT Government lease agreement process this would be determined in those agreements.



Tourism is becoming a strategic and critical means of revenue return to the community, through government commitment to tourism across Australia, and for tourism around the world.

For example, the Territory has a tourism-based strategy in place, which includes the National Arboretum. This project was a brave new concept handed to Canberra town planners in 2003. Although radical thinking at that time, the National Arboretum has grown and developed into one of Australia's significant tourist destinations.

With the National Arboretum's official opening in 2013, over 4 million visitors have visited the project. Today, the National Arboretum is an award-winning tourism attraction, offering active involvement and environmental awareness to local, national, and international tourists.

It also provides an important role in the gathering and storing of seeds from all areas of Australia, enabling endangered species to be saved.

The concept of an Australian focused, farming community venture, so close to the heart of a National Capital city, *"The Bush Capital"*, and the International Airport, is a daring plan. A plan which is worth serious consideration.

*"The Majura Valley Vision"* will provide many new employment opportunities.

Farmers in the Majura Valley are committed to a life of farming, it is their passion. While recognising their individual farming business plans, and the future of sustainability of agritourism, this farming community is centrally accessible for the community, interstate and international enjoyment and learning.

It will provide an opportunity for school education programs and indigenous education programs to be presented as part of the curriculum of the rich Australian story, past and present.

### **What is ecotourism?**

The goals of ecotourism include:

- Minimising negative impact on the natural environment
- Travelling to eco sustainable destinations
- Respecting local culture
- Building on environmental awareness
- Educating others of the importance of the ecological community.

Of central importance to the Majura Valley initiative is the opportunity to welcome and engage with the ACT education system by establishing educational farm visits and field days, and by mounting a direct marketing campaign toward the tourism industry.

A case study was undertaken by Visit Canberra on a successful marketing campaign showcasing tourism in the Majura Valley.

<https://tourism.act.gov.au/funding/tourism-cooperative-marketing-fund/>

## **Diversity in the Majura Valley**

### *Innabaanya (Girl Guide camp)*

The Girl Guides are also active in the valley and are a member of the Majura Valley Landcare Group. The Girl Guides campsite is nestled in a northwest corner of the valley with a lease that was established in 1962 and covers an area of 15.7 acres.

The Girl Guides have worked with Greening Australia, the Rural Fire Service and Environment ACT to support and enhance the environmental integrity of their site, creating programs which educate the Girl Guides.

The Girl Guides use their centre for both indoor and outdoor campsite activities and a training centre for the movement's leaders.

Other organisations including Scouts, schools, church and other community groups from the ACT and interstate, hire the site because of its natural environmental setting and opportunities.

The Girl Guides vision for Innabaanya is underpinned by the principles, values, and mission of the wider Girl Guides movement. That is to make choices for a better world and a positive difference in their communities. The Girl Guides vision for the site is to provide a quality outdoor experience for Girl Guiding in the ACT and surrounding regions.

### *The Solar Farm:*

The community owned solar farm, *Solar Share*, has worked closely with the Majura Valley Landcare Group. The group encouraged the solar business to look at the importance of the environmental issues of the valley. The solar farm had an information day when moving forward with their installation and were conscious of the importance of environmental sustainability by planting native trees and plants which enhance, restore, and link the woodland areas of the Majura Valley including Mt Majura.

The solar farm contributes to economic development in the Majura Valley and has been a generous contributor to Majura Valley Landcare Group through their grant program, by supporting additional tree plantings along the Old Majura Road alignment.

### **Driver 3 - Strategic Movement to Support City Growth**

*Protect and preserve function and capacity of key transport corridors for freight and transport, including a potential future faster and/or high-speed rail corridor.*

The Majura Valley Landcare farmers recognise the importance for key transport corridors to support the growth of the city. In 2015, the Majura Parkway was constructed along the north/south central alignment of the Majura Valley.

The Majura Parkway has opened the Majura Valley area to broad public awareness of the valuable *Bush Capital greenbelt* and farming community which straddles both sides of the Majura Parkway transport corridor. A corridor which feeds into the Brindabella Precinct, the Parliamentary Triangle, and the Canberra City precincts.

#### **Canberra - The Bush Capital**

What a wonderful tourism platform is now available to Canberra for interstate and international visitors alike, who can enjoy their first glimpse of the *‘Australian Farming Experience’* throughout the Majura Valley as they travel along the

*“Gateway to the National Capital of Australia”.*  
*“The Bush Capital”*

General transport, and public transport corridors are an essential addition to the successful growth of any significant and prosperous region. The connectivity of transport to promote city movement, community transport and domestic vehicles, is paramount to economic sustainability, as is tourism in the region.

For the Majura Valley to be in a central geographical position, provides a unique opportunity to activate both agritourism and ecotourism business plans. Cellar door sales, farming demonstrations and easy access for educational school visits.

Supporting the planned transport infrastructure will be necessary to maintain transportation and accessibility to the Majura Valley Vision and tourism interaction with commercial activities.

#### **Acknowledging The Bush Capital and Transport requirements.**

The Majura Valley is a large section of land which is capable of accommodating road and rail transport. The total area of the Majura Valley covers over 7,000 hectares.

Collaboration with all stakeholders through the next stage of the transport planning process will provide opportunity for careful and considered outcomes for all stakeholders.

## **Driver 4 - Sustainable Neighbourhoods**

### *Limit new housing development in line with Territory Plan*

Urban development and general construction have grown exponentially with more large satellite cities being created across the Territory. Since Self-Government in 1988, the ACT has experienced rapid population increase.

Communities across the ACT enjoy easy access to major shopping centres, as well as local small convenience centres in the majority of suburbs.

One precinct which is problematic for urban development is the Majura Valley.

### **Danger around urban development in the Majura Valley**

The Majura Valley runs parallel with the flight path of aircraft both landing in and leaving out of the Canberra International Airport, located at the southern end of the valley. Consideration needs to be given to the ecological biodiversity, hydrogeology, safety, noise and other development aspects which would be impacted with urban development.

The Majura Valley Landcare Group is very pleased to note that no residential development is proposed in the flight path area or in the Majura Valley as a whole.

The Majura Valley Landcare Group is however concerned about references to the possible change of use areas north of the Canberra airport.

We note Government's previous view that *"Industrial development that generates smoke or plumes, or other activities such as agriculture, wetland developments or municipal waste depots may attract wildlife that present hazards to aviation."*

We also note that to date the agricultural uses of the Valley have not compromised the airport flight path to our knowledge.

The land holders of the Majura Valley are passionate about protecting the integrity and biodiversity of the Majura Valley and many see themselves as the protective custodians of the valley for future generations. This motivation has also underpinned the business plans of the land holders as they have developed ecologically sensitive strategies that protect the Majura Valley from harm.

### **Successful agricultural activity in the Majura Valley**

Inclusive discussion between the ACT Government and landholders is essential to ensure appropriate local knowledge relating to biodiversity, land management and agricultural planting in the Majura Valley can be managed to meet the needs of all in the valley without compromising the integrity of the valley.



Landholders have already demonstrated their ability to deliver successful agricultural businesses that service both the local community and communities and markets elsewhere in Australia and overseas. These activities have included producing foods for the local markets and restaurants, crops, meats, poultry, eggs, wine, and truffles.

Valley landholders are also able to contribute their comprehensive local knowledge to inform on a range of planning matters relating to the valley including:

- Understanding the unique behaviours of the fragile, shallow water table on the limestone plain
- Advising about flooding in the valley which has a significant impact on successful cropping due to unpredictable wet conditions.
- Advising where not to plant orchards in the central valley heading southward out of the Majura Valley due to flood risks.
- Direct observations and reporting relating to reduced bird activity in the flight path corridor.
- Reporting on flooding, changes to water management, particularly upstream, and issues already known to the Valley land holders which could seriously impact future development in the area.
- Highlighting the impacts of the increased built environment, including the building of roads, warehousing and driveways, upon the valley, its water flows and integrity.

Ongoing relationships have been developed between many landholders, local organisations and institutions interested in learning more about the Valley farming, food production, soils, fossils, water management, weeds, pests, regeneration. These include the:

- Australian National University and in particular their agriculture students
- University of Canberra and in particular their science and environment students
- Regional Development Australia
- Embassy visits
- Canberra Institute of TAFE
- government departments at Commonwealth and Territory levels
- community organisations
- agencies providing specialist job ready programs to enable people to enter the workforce
- schools within the ACT and beyond.

Valley land holders have also collaborated to arrange group training for themselves on matters of concern to them such as pest eradication, soils,

weed control; and to collectively undertake projects that benefit the whole valley such as tree planting and pest eradication.

### **Majura Valley history and heritage**

The Majura Valley currently has an Interim Heritage Order over it.

Whilst many sites of cultural and historic significance are known to local landholder's care has also been taken to protect these sites from harm. In addition, some land holders have restored historical buildings, and many can attest to significant places and tress on their own leases.

The increased understanding associated with these sites has helped land holders and local residents to better understand how preserving the cultural landscape provides an opportunity to experience how previous neighbourhoods lived sustainably.

The Majura Valley Heritage Festival has also enabled the valley land holders to share and educate the wider community about the special sites of the traditional landowners and the early white settlers.

### **The social benefits of the Majura Valley**

Majura Parkway provides a viewing platform for people to experience the vista and our beautiful *Bush Capital*. Mount Ainslie and Mount Majura, two of the mountains framing the west side of the valley also offer excellent views of the valley and the region beyond the valley.

The enticing vista of the Majura Valley also provides social benefits for those residents of other neighbourhoods who are able to escape to the Valley for short periods of time. If the area is converted to employment, these opportunities will be lost forever.

## **Driver 5 - Inclusive Centres and Communities**

*Enhance accessibility of services and facilities for Oaks Estate, Pialligo, and Symonston residents.*

To the south of the Majura Valley are a broad range of services available to the community within the Brindabella Precinct, also recognised to be the second largest office precinct in Canberra.

The Brindabella Precinct is accessed by Oaks Estate, Pialligo, Symonston and Majura Valley, as well as the general community and the region.

The precinct has grown exponentially across the past eight years and offers the community a large range of amenities, convenient shopping and service outlets, including:

- The largest Woolworths in the ACT
- Chemist Warehouse
- Two service stations
- Costco
- Aldi
- Over 25 retail outlets
- NRMA Office
- Bunnings Hardware
- Medical Centre
- Childcare facilities
- Swimming pool and gymnasium
- Sports and recreational facilities
- Public transport and
- Ikea on the west side of the Precinct

The Canberra International Airport is a significant airport following its transformation from National to International status. The Canberra Airport generates a consistently large movement of aircraft. landing and taking off on an hourly basis. Services include:

- Public transport/taxi services and hire car services.
- Ample parking
- Media Centre Within the complex
- Retail outlets
- Food outlets
- Conference areas
- Public amenities.

Another significant section of the Brindabella Precinct is the Brindabella Business Park. This area accommodates approximately 7,000 workers and 46 businesses currently, with business related buildings continuing to be designed and built.

The precinct provides significant linkages across the Canberra area. It also provides benefits outside the Territory with Yass, Cooma, Queanbeyan, Goulburn and the South Coast being beneficiaries of the Brindabella Precinct facilities.

The Brindabella Precinct offers world class facilities, and has been instrumental in bringing community, tourism and agriculture into the spotlight of commercial opportunity.

### **Unique Business Opportunity**

**Note** *“There is no longer a capital city anywhere in the world which still has the unique opportunity to showcase its back story history of”*

- Historic cultural history,
- Early European history
- Early Settler history
- Agricultural history
- the natural ecological diversity of what once was, and still does exist.

Proud Canberrans now have the opportunity to make a decision of whether we introduce another light industrial concrete and asphalt suburb in the basin of Majura Valley, or we take the radical position to showcase the dot points above. We then step back to observe the outcome over the next few years. Only then will it be the time to make this critical, final decision.

*“The Majura Valley Gateway to our National Capital and Parliamentary Triangle”*

The Majura Parkway will unveil a world of farming authenticity to entice the travelling public to turn into a valley of farming experience, diversity and agricultural history including:

- Farm stay accommodation and glamping facilities.
- Indigenous stories and culture
- Organic gardens and local fresh produce
- Buggy rides across country
- Historic walking trails
- Historic Majura House
- The old Post Office
- The baby Darmody historic grave
- The Avonley early settler stone church
- The indigenous birthing tree
- Indigenous artifacts
- Woolshed Creek woolshed
- Woolshed Creek fossils still being identified.

*“This concept brings with it unexpected commercial opportunity”.*



Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

[By Online Submission]

To whom it may concern

## Missing Middle Canberra Submission on the Territory Plan

[Redacted content]

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

Co-ordinator

Missing Middle Canberra Campaign



# Statement on the Draft Territory Plan

## **Canberra is in a housing crisis.**

Over the past five years, Canberra rents have increased by 17%, faster than any other capital city besides Hobart, and Canberra is now tied with Sydney as Australia's most expensive city for renters.<sup>1</sup> Low rental vacancy rates and a persistent housing shortage have pushed up rents and housing costs, while reducing Canberrans' discretionary incomes and the competitiveness of local businesses.

These costs are heaviest for our city's most vulnerable, including younger Canberrans and families on low-incomes. 9% of Canberrans are in poverty, primarily due to the cost of housing.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this crisis, our public housing system has simply not kept up. Over 3,000 people - roughly one out of every 150 Canberrans - are now on the public housing waiting list, in need of a home.

This housing shortage has intersected with an ongoing environmental and climate crisis. Experts from multiple fields, including those on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, have found that sustainable urban design is key to achieving our climate goals.<sup>3</sup>

For the ACT to meet its targets of net zero emissions by 2045 and 70% of new housing built in existing suburbs, we must create a more compact and connected city. Allowing people to live closer to jobs, services, and community will reduce our city's environmental footprint, shorten commutes, and increase use of public and active transport.

These crises are not inevitable. Although a range of responses are needed from both the Territory and Commonwealth governments, we firmly believe that Canberra's future as a sustainable and affordable city is in our hands.

## **We urge the ACT Government to reform our planning laws to embrace missing middle housing.**

Missing middle housing refers to medium-density homes such as townhouses, duplexes, terrace houses, and small apartment buildings. These types of housing sit between the detached single family home – which makes up the vast majority of dwellings in the ACT – and large multi-story apartment buildings.

Missing middle housing is a proven way to provide more and better homes for Canberrans, while meeting our environmental and climate goals. For centuries, cities around the world have relied on medium-density housing to enliven urban areas, create stronger communities, and connect people with each other, and with great jobs, transport, and services. More recently, Auckland's reforms to allow for more medium-density housing have stabilised

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, September 2022. *Consumer Price Index*.

<sup>2</sup> ACT Council of Social Service, October 2022, *Factsheet: Poverty and Inequality in the ACT*.

<sup>3</sup> IPCC, 2022. *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*. Chapter 8.



housing costs in the face of continued growth in rents in peer cities across New Zealand and Australia.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the current Territory Plan strictly limits missing middle housing on 80% of Canberra's residential land (the RZ1 zone), making it hard to build the kinds of terrace houses and townhouses so many Australian city-dwellers say they want to live in.<sup>5</sup>

These restrictive laws are also a major handbrake on social housing. As it stands, the planning system makes it easy to build sprawling mansions, but near impossible to build modest multi-family social housing of a similar size. Plans to expand Canberra's meagre social housing stock are being hemmed in by burdensome regulations that limit the ability of public and community housing providers to build affordable medium density homes.

**The Planning System Review and Reform Project is a crucial opportunity to write missing middle housing into law.**

We call for the following practical policies to be adopted in the new Territory Plan:

- Legalise more private, public, and community-owned duplexes, terrace-houses, and townhouses by upzoning current RZ1 areas to the RZ2 standard, and allow this low-impact housing to be subject to similar streamlined development approval requirements as existing detached homes.
- Rejuvenate local centres and allow for more terrace-housing and low-rise apartment buildings, by upzoning current RZ2 areas to the RZ3 standard.
- Reform the CZ4 local centre zone to more easily allow for apartments above local shops, increasing the height limit to at least three storeys, while reserving ground floor space for commercial use.
- Enable more sustainable housing designs and reduced housing costs for the increasing number of Canberra families who don't own a car, or only own one car, by reducing mandatory parking requirements to 1 car space per home, across all residential zones.

Embracing missing middle housing would be a major step toward a Canberra where no suburb is out of reach for those on modest incomes. It would put Canberra on a firm path towards net zero carbon emissions, by reducing our city's environmental impact. And it would enliven our city and our local economy, by creating more connected local communities.

We look forward to seeing the ACT Government put missing middle homes at the heart of Canberra's bright future.

*Missing Middle Canberra is a coalition of organisations and citizens across Canberra who support sensible medium-density housing reform to make our city more affordable, liveable and sustainable.*

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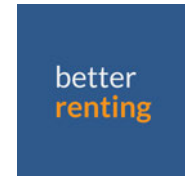
<sup>4</sup> Greenaway-McGrevy and Phillips, 2022. *The Impact of Upzoning on Housing Construction in Auckland*.

<sup>5</sup> Grattan Institute, 2011. *The Housing We'd Choose*.





**This statement is endorsed by the  
following organisations:**





## **This statement is endorsed by the following individuals:**

[REDACTED]

Director, DNA Architects

[REDACTED]

Director, Bespoke Building Services

[REDACTED]

Welfare Officer, ANU Students' Association

[REDACTED]

Director, Yellow Architecture

[REDACTED]

Postdoctoral Fellow, Australian National University

[REDACTED]

Director, AMC Architecture

[REDACTED]

University of Canberra

[REDACTED]

Architect, Light House Architecture + Science

[REDACTED]

Light House Architecture + Science

[REDACTED]

Chief Economist, Centre for Independent Studies



Missing  
Middle  
Canberra





Missing  
Middle  
Canberra





A horizontal bar chart with 18 bars. The bars are grouped by gender: the first 9 bars are for men and the next 9 bars are for women. Within each gender group, the bars are ordered by age group: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, 85+, and 90+.

Gender	Age Group	Percentage
Men	18-24	~45%
Men	25-34	~55%
Men	35-44	~65%
Men	45-54	~60%
Men	55-64	~75%
Men	65-74	~60%
Men	75-84	~65%
Men	85+	~45%
Men	90+	~60%
Women	18-24	~55%
Women	25-34	~75%
Women	35-44	~80%
Women	45-54	~70%
Women	55-64	~85%
Women	65-74	~95%
Women	75-84	~100%
Women	85+	~55%
Women	90+	~50%
Women	95+	~65%

Age Group	Percentage of Respondents
18-29	90%
30-49	85%
50-64	80%
65+	60%

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[REDACTED]



**National Parks Association of the ACT Inc.**

***conservation education protection***

## **Submission on the draft Territory Plan and draft district strategies**

The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) is a community-based conservation organisation with more than 60 years of experience in helping to protect our natural environment through an active outings and work party program; participation in Parkcare activities; an extensive publication program; public meetings and conferences; engagement with government policies and programs and the support of scientific research.

The ACT's planning framework plays an important role in the overall protection of our natural environment as urban development can be a significant threat through habitat destruction and fragmentation. The NPA ACT therefore sees the development of a new Territory Plan and draft district strategies as an opportunity for the ACT to place the protection of the environment at the forefront of its planning principles.

### **Overall Opinion**

The NPA ACT believes that the current draft Territory Plan and the draft district strategies fail to provide adequate consideration and protection to the ACT's natural environment.

### **General Comments**

The NPA ACT notes and strongly supports the Conservation Council ACT Region's submission on the draft Territory Plan and the draft district strategies. A copy of which is attached.

In particular, the NPA ACT notes:

- The draft Territory Plan lacks a strategic planning focus and is primarily concerned with day-to-day development assessment. The details in the draft district strategies lack sufficient granularity for informed community comment to be made and do not provide the opportunity to understand the proposed planning outcomes from an ACT wide perspective.
- The NPA ACT strongly believes that planning should identify and protect the ACT's environment in a comprehensive and representative manner. As such, the NPA ACT believes that all moderate to high quality examples of the ACT's ecosystems should be protected and linked through corridors of connectivity. These matters should be made prior to other planning decisions and incorporated into the draft Territory Plan. This principle is consistent with the Biodiversity Network protection as one of its key objectives proposed by environment groups in the ACT. The protection of these area should be via incorporation into formal reserves or through the creation of a biodiversity overlay which would have environmental protection as one of its key objectives.
- The ACT's reserves have long and complicated boundaries with the urban area. There are opportunities for the draft Territory Plan and the draft district strategies to

## **NPA ACT Submission on the Draft Territory Plan and Draft District Strategies**

redraw these boundaries by adding additional land to the reserves to simplify the boundaries. This will provide additional buffers to the reserves and has the potential to reduce edge effects and the extent of fencing required for the reserves. An obvious example for this would be removing the neck of land jutting into the Ginninderry Conservation Trust land.

Should you require any further information on our comments or our organisation, please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED], convener, NPA ACT Environment Sub-committee on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
President  
National Parks Association of the ACT

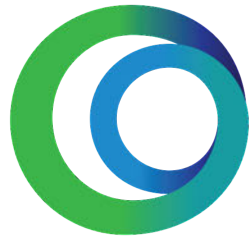
[REDACTED]  
Convener, Environment Sub-committee  
National Parks Association of the ACT

3 March 2023

### **Attachments**

Attachment A Conservation Council Submission – as supported by the National Parks Association of the ACT Provided separately.





**CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

Submission to Environment, Planning and  
Sustainable Development Directorate

## ACT Planning System Review and Reform – Draft New Territory Plan and Draft District Strategies

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March 2023

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. Since 1981, we have spoken up for a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our region. We harness the collective energy, expertise and experience of our more than 40 member groups to promote sound policy and action on the environment.

We campaign for a safe climate, to protect biodiversity in our urban and natural areas, to protect and enhance our waterways, reduce waste, and promote sustainable transport and planning for our city.

At a time when we need to reimagine a better future, we understand that the changes we need will only happen with the collective support of our community.

**For further information please contact:**

 [director@conservationcouncil.org.au](mailto:director@conservationcouncil.org.au)

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## Introduction

Canberra is fortunate to sit within a wonderful and unique natural environment. Not only is the ACT Region home to nationally significant ecosystems and species and the spectacular Namadgi National Park; but our urban landscape is uniquely embedded in the natural environment. Indeed, the urban landscape is connected by nature parks, corridors and waterways that support biodiversity and enhance community wellbeing.

However, the ACT, like many other places in Australia, faces significant environmental challenges. The impacts of climate change, including longer hotter summers, increasingly severe bushfire seasons, and extreme weather events, have already had wide ramifications for nature and the community. In addition, our growing city is putting pressure on biodiversity, through loss of habitat, the proliferation of invasive species, noise, and pollution.

Canberra can become more climate-resilient by investing in green infrastructure, managing water effectively, and ensuring new developments are environmentally-sustainable and designed for future climate conditions. Urban greenspace, supported by increased tree canopy and urban gardens, will improve livability and build resilience.

We can also support our nationally significant ecosystems and species by recognising their values, and protecting and managing them in a way that enhances biodiversity. Investing in nature means that we are nurturing the systems on which we depend for food, clean water and resources, and which hold important intrinsic value.

The following submission finds that whilst the draft Territory Plan and draft District Strategies is an improvement on previous iterations of planning documents; significant revision is required to ensure that biodiversity loss and climate change are adequately considered. The submission recommends a 'A Biodiversity Network' that could support the protection and enhancement of natural values in the ACT, by designating land uses that put conservation values at the forefront. Furthermore, this submission addresses concerns regarding the inaccessibility and disadvantage of the consultation process and documentation itself.

## The Draft Territory Plan

The principal function of the Territory Plan is to guide and where necessary control, the use and development of land in the Territory. A robust planning regime is a necessary plank of a civil society. For it to succeed in this difficult role the Territory Plan must have the confidence of the community, it must be seen as logical, reasonable, fair and as being likely to achieve the communities' strategic objectives. To do this it must be comprehensible and accessible.

The draft Territory Plan consists of a large number of separate documents with complex and opaque interrelationships. It is neither comprehensible nor accessible, especially to the general public. "Planning" is currently perceived by the Canberra community as being poorly executed, unfair, and not aligned with community aspirations. The draft Territory Plan will not improve this situation.

The poor consultation process on the documentation did not aid the community in engaging meaningfully with the material and understanding the implications for their region. While it is appreciated that community workshops were held in each region these meetings were unhelpful for parts of the community that are acutely concerned with certain issues as they were overly generalised. Furthermore, these workshops were often inaccessible for people with young families, commutes, or shift work as they were held in the early evening. Specific workshops with identified stakeholder groups would have allowed for deeper discussion and questions on detailed issues and districts. The Environment sector as a whole should be provided a specific consultation, including the opportunity to have open dialogue with experts.

Without stating clear objectives for the future of the Territory, the draft Territory Plan becomes meaningless. There needs to be a clear measure of the population Canberra is capable of holding and therefore planning to accommodate within set timeframes. Sensibly articulating this future with objectives, including meaningful population targets and research on carrying capacity will allow for a stronger framework and clear path forward.

In the absence of a robust and long term strategic plan the Conservation Council cannot express any confidence in the capacity of the Territory Plan to achieve the environmental and biodiversity outcomes that will be essential for the future of the city. Specifically, unless the plan can robustly demonstrate the capacity of the existing urban areas to absorb expected infill growth (80% or more of the total growth) then we cannot have confidence that the pressure for ever-expanding greenfields areas will not persist. **It is recommended a "green belt" that provides a buffer between ACT and NSW to define the urban edge and protect environmental values is identified.**

Currently, the draft Territory Plan seeks to promote human development for humans, rather than promote a region where humans can live sustainably, and where other species can also thrive, both in harmony with the environment. The promotion of built form for human wellbeing ignores the reality that human wellbeing is built upon a foundation of environmental wellbeing. Introducing the concept of environmental stewardship throughout the draft Territory Plan would be an important step.

**In summary the Council is pleased with the following intentions of the draft Territory Plan:**

- Wellbeing and livability intentions
- amended vehicle parking requirements to encourage and support active travel
- provision of infrastructure for EV charging facilities
- prohibition of gas connections in new residential subdivisions and redevelopments
- introduction of large battery storage as permitted use
- provision for additional housing types such as community housing and build-to-rent development, to assist housing affordability
- 70% of new growth to be within the existing urban areas. However, the Council maintains the policy priority that the ACT Government set a target of 80% of new residential development within the existing urban footprint and there is no further expansion of Canberra's urban boundary after existing identified suburbs in Molonglo, Gungahlin and West Belconnen are completed.

## What is the Territory Plan?

### Part B: The Territory Plan.

In summary this section says that the Territory Plan:

- sets out a statutory framework for the future development of the ACT.
- is a policy about how land can be used and what can be built where.
- is primarily used to decide development applications
- and to make other planning related decisions, such as decisions about the zoning and the use of land.
- may also shape public and private infrastructure investment decisions and guide the future pattern of development in the ACT.

The plan is primarily concerned with day-to-day development assessment and the like. The plan does not have a strategic planning focus. This is reinforced at part C3 of the documentation which says:

*“This Plan gives effect to the ACT Planning Strategy. The planning strategy states the long term planning policy and goals for the ACT, an overarching spatial vision, and strategic directions and desired future planning outcomes (Section 47 of the Planning Act 2023)”*

The question arises as to whether the Plan can adequately perform the functions listed above; to do so it must be, and be seen to be, closely related to the Planning Strategy with clear linkages between the provisions in the Plan and the policy framework set by the Strategy. For the plan to be effective and accepted by the community, the day to day decision making that it drives must be seen to be a logical consequence of the policy framework set by the strategy, which in turn must be derived from a broad community consensus on the future direction of the Territory.

The ACT Planning Strategy was last refreshed in 2018 and it is appropriate that it should be open for review now, as by the time the new Territory Plan is in place (2023 or 2024), five years will have elapsed since the last review. The new Planning Bill (s41) requires that a review be considered every 5 years.

The planning Strategy (according to the Planning Bill S36) is supposed to prescribe:

- (a) the long-term planning policy and goals for the ACT, consistent with the object of this Act; and*
- (b) an overarching spatial vision; and*
- (c) strategic directions and desired future planning outcomes.*

Unfortunately,

- The Strategy only looks forward to 2041, 18 years hence. This is not “long-term”.
- The “spatial vision” only extends to 2041, this is not visionary as it is inevitable that pressure for growth will continue beyond that date and no clue is provided as to where, if or how this pressure will be managed.
- It does suggest future planning outcomes largely and laudably focused on more compact development but does not provide strategic directions to achieve this in a socially and ecologically sustainable manner.

The Territory Plan must operate against this background which will be problematic.

The essential role of a statutory planning instrument such as the Territory Plan is to provide a framework for the resolution of conflicts between land uses and users. A common example in Canberra is the conflict that arises when residential intensification developments are proposed (dual occupancies, apartment complexes) in “leafy” suburbs characterised by large block single residential housing. The existing residents ask the legitimate question “why does this have to happen here?” and “is this the thin end of the wedge, will it go on forever?”. The response “because the Territory Plan says so” is insufficient. The Territory Plan provides the rules (or “outcomes”) it does not provide the justification for them. This justification should be able to be found in the Planning Strategy, but it is not there. In order to provide the necessary backup and logic for the Territory Plan, the Planning Strategy must be amended to include:

- Set a target of 80% of new residential development within the existing urban footprint and for no further expansion of Canberra’s urban boundary after existing identified suburbs in Molonglo, Gungahlin and West Belconnen are completed.
- An estimation of the maximum population potential of the region, based on a development capacity analysis of available land and infill opportunities
- An estimation of the likely ultimate population of the region to a genuine long term planning horizon (perhaps the year 2100).
- Strategies for accommodating the future population within the available land; inevitably this will involve increased densities and must include prescription as to the logical and equitable distribution of densification within existing suburbs. This should feed directly into District Strategies.

The question “what is the Territory Plan” must be seen against this larger context of its role under the overarching framework set by the Planning Strategy. Without support from the Planning Strategy the Territory Plan cannot function properly. The decisions that will be made under its provisions will be unsupportable. Contentious decisions will be necessary if we are to achieve real progress and change from past development patterns; but these will be challenged,

and in the absence of robust policy support from the Planning Strategy, the challengers will win. This poor outcome will be greatly exacerbated in a jurisdictional environment where the scope for very low cost third party appeals is very wide.

The Conservation Council takes a long term view and considers that the planning horizon set by the Planning Strategy of 19 years is grossly inadequate. While the Territory Plan is required to be flexible enough to adapt to challenges and changes as they arise, the environmental and biodiversity impacts of urban growth extend across time frames of far longer than 19 years. The provisions in the Territory Plan, which control day to day decisions that will have impacts over these long timeframes must be underpinned by strategic planning that takes these timeframes into account.

The District Strategies actually take some steps towards resolving the issues identified above – they do include population projections over a longer timeframe (to 2063) and propose housing and employment targets (for each district) for this timeframe, and also propose a diversity of high density housing options. However, The projections are based on assumed population trend growth. **It is recommended projections be based on the population Canberra is capable of holding and therefore planning to accommodate within set timeframes. Research needs to be undertaken on the carrying capacity of the ACT to inform the draft Territory Plan and thus set meaningful population targets to live within our region's means.**

The district Strategies adopt the proposed population growth allocated to them and assume that the growth can be accommodated; a note on Figure 10 in the District Strategies documents says: *“More detailed planning will determine where future development will be allocated. This is likely to depart from the future dwelling distributions shown here”*. Site analysis to determine if and where the growth can actually be accommodated with acceptable urban design outcomes is lacking. This is unfortunate because this is a key question that should be resolved by the District Plans (indeed probably the key question as far as local residents are concerned).

In the absence of a robust and long term strategic plan the Conservation Council cannot express any confidence in the capacity of the Territory Plan to achieve the environmental and biodiversity outcomes that will be essential for the future of the city. Specifically, unless the plan can robustly demonstrate the capacity of the existing urban areas to absorb expected infill growth (80% or more of the total growth) then we cannot have confidence that the pressure for ever-expanding greenfields areas will not persist.

## State of the Environment Report

The ACT's 4-yearly State of the Environment reporting is a requirement of the *Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act* 1993.<sup>1</sup> It is prepared by the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The most recent report was produced in 2019.<sup>2</sup> The report provides the ACT community and Government with commentary and analysis about the condition of the environment and progress towards sustainability.

It is astounding that the SOE report does not appear to be referenced in any of the various draft Territory Plan documents. The environment as a whole should be a principal reference point for a revision of the Territory Plan, utilising the SOE. It provides detailed recommendations for action and specifies a set of indicators conditions and trends which provide a template for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/1993-37/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://envcomm.act.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SOEFull.pdf>



Government action. **The Territory Plan should be a principal instrument for the achievement of the actions recommended by the SOE report.**

The draft Territory Plan documentation should be revised to reference all the recommendations of the SOE report to ensure that all are being addressed adequately and to allow future measurement against the indicators provided in the SOE report.

## Critical interconnection with the Planning Bill 2022

The present consultation is in relation to the draft Territory Plan and draft District Strategies. However, the ACT Government has positioned the Territory Plan and District Strategies together with the Planning Bill 2022 as interconnected parts comprising the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project<sup>3</sup>. The draft Territory Plan and District Strategies are specifically drafted to reference the (presumed) Planning Act 2023 as the authorising legislation.

A previous consultation process on the Planning Bill 2022 closed in June 2022<sup>4</sup>. The ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services Report on the Inquiry into the Planning Bill 2022 on 22 December 2022<sup>5</sup>.

The Conservation Council and a number of Member Groups such as Friends of Grasslands and Canberra Ornithologists Group made detailed submissions to the initial consultation and the Standing Committee inquiry. The Environment Defenders Office (EDO) also made detailed submissions on legislative intent and detail at these stages. All of these submissions raise a range of significant concerns in relation to both the in-principle prioritisation and the detailed provisions of the Bill so far as it relates to environmental matters including climate change and biodiversity conservation.

The Standing Committee Report made 49 separate recommendations in relation to the Planning Bill. A significant number of these relate to improvements to the Bill in relation to environmental matters<sup>6</sup>, and specifically reference and ratify the recommendations put forward in Conservation Council, EDO and related submissions. The ACT Government is yet to provide a response to the Standing Committee recommendations.

The Council continues to strongly urge that the Planning Bill 2022 should not be enacted in its current form, and that the recommendations to amend the Bill in a way which elevates the protection and restoration of nature to being a fundamental objective of the Bill and a clear duty of those who administer it should be progressed before enactment.

There is a clear and urgent imperative to protect and restore the environment, including to protect and restore biodiversity, prevent habitat destruction and species extinctions, and address climate change. The environment cannot advocate for itself in planning decisions. In practical terms, despite specific environmental laws, the package of planning legislation, policies

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.planning.act.gov.au/planning-our-city/act-planning-system-review-and-reform>

<sup>4</sup> <https://yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/act-planning-review/planning-bill>

<sup>5</sup>

[https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/2156792/PTCS-Report-12-Inquiry-into-Planning-Bill-2022-Final-Report-SIGNED.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2156792/PTCS-Report-12-Inquiry-into-Planning-Bill-2022-Final-Report-SIGNED.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Recommendations 38 to 46, covered in detail on pages 81 to 91 of the Standing Committee report.

and plans currently in development will be the main day to day way that environmental interests are managed and protected in the ACT.

The Bill in its current form will not match the expectations and aspirations we have when committing in the ACT to legislate for a human right to a healthy and sustainable environment, when committing federally to national environmental laws including demanding national environmental standards, and when committing internationally to far reaching climate and biodiversity objectives as a responsible international actor.

The unresolved status of the Planning Bill 2022 is critically relevant in current consultations on the Territory Plan and District Strategies. It is fundamentally important to have clarity on the detail of the primary legislation under which these subordinate planning instruments will be made and will operate, in order to be assured of the principles and processes, including relevant safeguards, which will protect and enhance the environment within this overall package. It will only be possible to give full feedback on the Territory Plan and District Strategies once the outstanding uncertainty around the Planning Bill 2022 is resolved, including the Government's responses to the Standing Committee recommendations and the final form in which a revised Bill will be introduced and enacted in the Legislative Assembly.

**Accordingly, the Conservation Council strongly urges that the draft Territory Plan and District Strategies are not finalised until these matters concerning the Planning Bill 2022 are clarified and finalised. Further, the opportunity for further submissions should be considered once the Bill has progressed through the legislative process.**

## Part A: Administration and Governance

### A.1 Name of plan and authority

This section says that the plan is prepared as required by Section 45 of the Planning Act 2023, and in accordance with Chapter 5 (of the Act).

S47 of the Act says that

*“Territory Plan to give effect to strategic planning outcomes*

*The Territory Plan—*

*(a) **must** promote principles of good planning; and*

*(b) **must** give effect to the planning strategy and district strategies; and*

*(c) **may** (my emphasis) give effect to relevant outcomes related to planning contained in other government strategies and policies.”*

“other Government strategies and policies” would include, for example “The ACT Climate Change Strategy”, “the ACT Circular Economy Strategy”. Aspects of these policies will conflict with some of the practices of, for example, infrastructure agencies which have evolved historically, based on priorities and costings that are no longer relevant and without consideration of holistic costs. For example, TCCS requirements for street trees place limitations on tree sizes that reduce canopy cover. The tree standards are derived from cost and other practical considerations which should be reviewed to consider the holistic costs and benefits of larger trees and alternative engineering solutions. This could allow larger street trees and better canopy cover outcomes.

Use of the word “may” in item (c) means that these legacy arrangements (policies, standards, guidelines and the like) will be able to remain in place indefinitely. The Territory Plan should be an instrument of proactive change (and must be so if it is to give effect to items (a) & (b)). The word “may” should be replaced with “shall” or “must” to ensure that legacy arrangements are reviewed and revised to align with the objects of the Plan.

## Part C: Planning Principles and Strategic Links

### C.1 Object of Plan

It is acknowledged that the wording in the “Object of the Plan” section is taken from the Bill and that the Bill is moving towards final approval. Nevertheless, the opportunity still exists for an amendment to bring the “object” statement (which dates from 1988) into line with 21<sup>st</sup> century awareness of the environmental and biodiversity pressures that must be urgently addressed.

The “object” statement is as follows:

*“The object of the Territory Plan (the Plan) is to ensure, in a manner not inconsistent with the National Capital Plan, that the planning and development of the Australian Capital Territory (the ACT) provides the people of the ACT with an attractive, safe and efficient environment in which to live, work and have their recreation. (Section 46 of the Act)”*

This has been modified from the equivalent statement in the previous (pre 2007) iteration of the Plan which was:

*“The Object of the Territory Plan is to ensure, in a manner not inconsistent with the National Capital Plan, that the planning and development of the Territory provides the people of the Territory with an **ecologically sustainable, healthy, attractive, safe and efficient environment in which to live, work and have their recreation**”. (our emphasis)*

The deletion of the reference to ecological sustainability was a seriously retrograde step and should be reversed. Similarly the reference to a healthy city.

## **C.2 Statement of principles of good planning**

The statement of principles of good planning fall under 9 headings, of which the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> relate to the natural environment and sustainability.

Whilst it is acknowledged that, on the face of it, no priority is assigned to any of the principles over and above the others there will nevertheless be a perception that those higher on the list may be more significant. In this regard it is instructive to note that in the pre 2007 iteration of the Territory Plan “Sustainability” was the first of a list of 5 goals or outcomes specified in part 2 of the plan. It is also noted that in the current version of the Plan in Part 2.1 the Statement of Strategic Directions, “Principles for sustainable development” are listed first, and under this heading, immediately following “general principles”, “Environmental sustainability” is the next item on the list. The 2018 planning Strategy lists 5 items under the “Vision” heading, the third of which is “sustainable and resilient”.

The Conservation Council believes that a sustainable and resilient environment is essential, so much so that without this, none of the other aspirations can be achieved. Activation and liveability, cultural heritage, quality design, integrated delivery, investment facilitation, long term focus and urban regeneration are all listed as principles of good planning, but none of these can be contemplated without a sustainable and resilient environment within which they can take place. The two other principles: natural environmental conservation and sustainability and resilience, should be moved to the top of the principles of good planning list.

## **C.3 Strategic framework/ context**

### **3.1 Effect of planning strategy**

The text here says “...the planning strategy gives effect to the long term planning policy and goals for the ACT...”. As discussed above this is incorrect.

Because it looks ahead only 19 years the planning Strategy cannot be a “long-term” plan. Consequently, as also discussed above, the Territory Plan will be ineffective because it is not supported by and derived from a properly prepared strategic plan.

The statement that the “.....Planning Strategy is not a relevant consideration for any decision by the Territory Planning Authority, the Minister or another entity made under this Plan in relation to a development proposal,.....” is incongruous and should be deleted. It implies the potential for a conflict to exist between the provisions of the plan and the strategy. If any such conflict exists then it should be fixed, not resolved by simply setting aside the strategy to enable a particular proposal to proceed.

### 3.2 Effect of district strategies

The district strategies are intended to be consistent with the ACT Planning Strategy. Apart from this their role is not defined and their actual relationship with the ACT strategy is unresolved. They have no reason for existence unless they are performing a function that is not already being performed by the ACT strategy, and vice versa. If they are merely required to be “consistent with” then we have two planning documents, potentially covering the same subject matter, sitting side by side. This is illogical.

If district level planning is to be introduced (and this is generally thought to be desirable) then the roles and functions of both the district strategies and the ACT strategy must be defined.

The ACT Strategy (with community input at an ACT wide level) should deal with matters of a metropolitan scale and, most importantly, it must define the districts and set out their respective roles within the metropolitan context. This for example would include the levels of population that each district would be expected to absorb over time in greenfield and infill areas. It would also include metropolitan scale road and public transport planning, open space and wildlife corridors and the like.

This would then provide the basis for district level planning (with community input at the district level) which, for example, would set out the distribution and types of growth and development within the district that would be necessary for it to be consistent with the ACT Strategy objectives.

It is noted that about the first 80 pages of all the district strategy documents are identical. This material should be incorporated in the ACT Strategy.

## Part D: District Policies

As an overarching comment it is unclear why the District policies are separated from the District Strategies. It seems obvious that the two documents should be combined for each district.

### 1.3 Policy Outcomes

Each of the 8 District Policy documents include lists headed: “The desired policy outcomes to be achieved for (name of district) include:”. The use of the word “include” is confusing as it leaves open the possibility that other outcomes may exist but are not listed.

It is also unclear whether all outcomes must be achieved and if not, what is the relative priority?

The Planning Bill (s183(a)) requires that development proposals be assessed against “any applicable desired outcomes in the Territory Plan;” The wording of the outcomes is generally aspirational rather than prescriptive leaving wide scope for interpretation and consequently also for dispute. For example item 3 in the Gungahlin list says “deliver new schools” without specifying where, how many or what type. This is effectively meaningless. Item 4 on the list says “enhance connectivity corridors” between several nominated nature reserves. It does not say how this is to be achieved and the connectivity corridors (which are not interconnected) on Figure 32 in the Gungahlin District Strategy (the Blue-green network plan) do not show these proposed connections.

The policy outcomes seem to closely mirror the “key directions” listed in the District Strategies. This seems to be confusing and unnecessary duplication and a further argument for combining the Policy and Strategy documents for each District.

## 1.4 Assessment requirements

These are highly specific mandatory provisions carried over from the current plan – no comment other than that they should all be reviewed to see if they are really necessary as they add inordinate complexity.

## 1.5 Assessment outcomes

It is hard to fathom why these need to be separated from the Policy outcomes discussed above, item 1 on the list of “assessment outcomes” is, after all, the “stated policy outcomes”.

The assessment outcomes consist of a list of 13 (or in the case of Tuggeranong and Weston Creek, 15) items, against which development proposals will be assessed. None of the items refer to protection of the natural environment, sustainability or ecological integrity. This is completely unacceptable. A list which includes such prosaic items as “suitability of any advertising sign” must surely also include some reference to the protection and enhancement of the natural environment?

Curiously, the majority of the assessment outcomes for all 8 Districts are identical except for Tuggeranong and Weston Creek, both of which include two additional items:

*6. development does not adversely affect the overall function of the commercial centres in terms of economic, social, traffic and parking and urban design impacts*

*7. buildings with frontages to main pedestrian areas and routes within commercial areas incorporate uses on the ground floor that generate activity in the public space*

It's not clear why these outcomes are relevant to these districts and not to others.

Assessment outcomes for specific localities within districts do differ. These seem to be carried over from the “criteria” elements of the current plan.

## Part E: Zone policies

### 1.3 policy outcomes

These sections of the Zone policy documents contain numerous “policy outcomes” and “assessment requirements” specific to each zone, to be read and presumably applied in parallel with the outcomes and assessment requirements in the district policies.

If the zoning provisions are to be uniform across the city then one wonders why there is a need for separate districts, as the planning provisions in each will be indistinguishable from each other. This approach denies the possibility of different districts evolving planning provisions to suit their own needs and community aspirations.

To take a simple example: the assessment requirement for site coverage for single dwellings in the residential code is:

*Site coverage is a maximum of:*

- a) For large blocks: 40% of the block area*
- b) For mid-sized blocks: 60% of the block area*
- c) For compact blocks: 70% of the block area*

The real possibility exists that the citizens of Belconnen may have different views to the citizens of the Inner South as to the suitability of these figures. They may prefer them to be higher or lower or a different mix. The community choice may be influenced by demographic and community attitudes to density and change, and, more practically by block sizes which on average are much larger in the Inner South than in Belconnen - this will result in different overall outcomes with the same percentage site coverage prescription. Presumably this is what district planning is all about – allowing the district community to make its own choices as to exactly how it meets the metropolitan strategic planning objectives.

Additionally, it is simply too confusing to have the outcomes and assessment requirements against which a particular development proposal will be judged spread across two (or several) documents or parts of the plan.

The result is likely to be that the political process will result in the “lowest common denominator” position being adopted and imposed on all districts. This denies the opportunity for one or more districts whose populations may be more progressive or environmentally conscious adopting more environmentally friendly policy positions that may be unacceptable in more conservative districts.

An alternative approach would be to prepare “generic” zone policies which could be written into District Policies with adaptations to suit local circumstances.

#### 1.4 Assessment requirements and 1.5 Assessment outcomes

Similarly to the equivalent section in the District Policies the distinction between “assessment requirements” and “assessment outcomes” is incomprehensible. They should be combined.

### Part F1: Subdivision policy & F2 lease variation policy

The same comments under Part E Zone policies 1.3 policy outcomes apply to these two policy documents – the policies should be written into the District Policies.



## Climate Change

Climate change is the most significant threat to the survival of all life on earth, and requires immediate and significant global action. The impacts of a changing climate are well upon us; increasingly severe fires, storms, floods and droughts are forcing societies and natural ecosystems to transform the way they function. Responding to climate change requires both adaptation (actions to adjust to changes that have happened and are predicted) and mitigation (actions to avoid and minimise further emissions).

The ACT has demonstrated leadership by setting a target of net-zero emissions by 2045, but this is insufficient—we must do more. The science demands that the ACT should aim for net-zero emissions by 2030 regardless of how politically uncomfortable this might appear. This would bring the ACT in line with other leading cities, such as Bristol, Glasgow and Copenhagen who all have zero emissions targets of 2030 or earlier.

The following climate mitigation measures must be provided for under legislation:

- Construction of the residential development should be undertaken in an environmentally sensitive way. The dwellings should be of high quality and energy efficient.
- All new construction should have pale roofs.
- All new construction should have a minimum rating of 8 stars.
- All construction must optimise solar access in winter and shade in summer.
- All new construction should not connect to the gas network, including multi unit developments and aged care facilities.
- EV charging stations available to the community including in all multi-unit developments.
- Set planning rules that reduce house size as a percentage of block size.
- Utilise a variety of native plantings including shrubs and grasses to reach the tree canopy target.
- Set a permeable surfaces target for public space that aligns with the city-wide 30% permeable surfaces target.
- Mandate community infrastructure.

Urban greenspace will help to build resilience against the impacts of climate change, enhance connectivity across the urban landscape, and deliver quality-of-life benefits to the community. Green space, trees and shrubs offer physical and mental well being benefits for our community. Importantly they also cool the urban environment, slow urban water flows and provide vital refuge for wildlife and pollinators across the urban landscape.



## Biodiversity

The community requires assurance that the government via the Planning system is looking after the environment for its intrinsic value. In order to achieve this the draft Territory Plan and draft District Strategies must move away from a human centred approach.

The 2019 United Nations report on biodiversity identified that up to one million species globally face extinction in the coming decades. Australia is not immune, with approximately 100 native species having become extinct since European settlement and a further 1,600 species that are currently threatened. Urban development, invasive species and climate change pose the largest threats to biodiversity, including in the ACT.

Urban development on the lower lying areas of the ACT has had a significant impact on two critically-endangered ecological communities - Natural Temperate Grasslands and Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands. These ecological communities include 52 threatened species, and their protection going forward is especially important given their national significance, as well as their intrinsic value and the amenity they bring to our city. Given the pressure on biodiversity from development across the ACT, all areas of moderate to high conservation value should now be appropriately protected and managed for effective conservation outcomes. This protection can be delivered either through the planning system or via the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* - while there may be a preference for it to occur via the latter, the mechanism is secondary to the outcome that is required.

As the 'bush capital', Canberra is fortunate to host a mosaic of natural areas in and around the city. Many of these natural areas are protected under the ACT's extensive reserve system. But, despite its large size, the ACT Reserve system does not adequately cover all of the Territory's natural values leaving many unprotected and mismanaged.

Notably, the reserve system is biased against low lying ecosystems and small areas of natural land. Indeed, 67% of the ACT's Natural Temperate Grassland remnants occur outside the reserve system despite their status as critically endangered<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, many threatened woodland remnants also occur outside of the reserve system, including 80% of Box-Gum Woodland.<sup>8</sup> Many small but significant areas outside the reserve system occur along roadsides, in urban open space, in green corridors between houses, or in rural or urban leases. While they may be small in size, these sites can have environmental significance as they support threatened ecosystems, provide habitat for native species, and/or facilitate connectivity across the landscape. However, areas with conservation value that occur on tenures outside of the reserve system are not primarily maintained for their natural values, which can put those values at risk.

The length of the interface between the ACT's reserves and urban areas is significant and the Draft Territory Plan provides an opportunity to rationalise reserve boundaries to reduce the extent of this interface and improve the buffer for reserved areas. A reduced interface also means potential savings in reserve management with reduced fencing requirements. It is recommended that the boundaries of reserves are simplified to reduce the urban interface impacts.

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<sup>7</sup> ACT Government, *ACT Native Grassland Conservation Strategy and Action Plans*, p21.

<sup>8</sup> Calculations from ACT Government, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan*, 2021.

## A Biodiversity Network for the ACT

Areas with high conservation value that occur on tenures outside of the reserve system are not primarily maintained for their natural values. In order to facilitate adequate protection of natural resources, a strategic system that facilitates conservation on and off reserves is required to ensure that all remaining threatened species and communities in the ACT are properly managed and protected in perpetuity. 'A Biodiversity Network' could support the protection and enhancement of natural values in the ACT, by designating land uses that put conservation values at the forefront. The Territory Plan is a substantial opportunity to reallocate both urban and non-urban land use zones to reflect this, consistent with IUCN guidelines, ensuring certainty of management and protection over the long term. By prioritising conservation outcomes whilst allowing for other compatible land uses, the ACT can ensure the protection of environmental values into the future.

A Biodiversity Network would be designed to protect remnants of natural value that are not reserved, whereby these remnants, together with those in reserve, will be unified into a single management and (or) legal framework for protection and implementation of ecological management.

While nature reserves and national parks are important in that they provide a high level of protection against damage and loss, conservation (protection and management) can be achieved across other land tenures, without compromising the land uses that may exist in those places.

The aims of the Biodiversity Network are to formalise conservation and management of biodiversity outcomes on multiple types of public and leased land by identifying them as Conservation Areas, through a combination of protection, restoration and reconnection compatible with other land management objectives. A Biodiversity Network would achieve this by:

- Providing legislative protection to Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) and ACT threatened species and ecosystems that are not held in reserve;<sup>9</sup>
- Protecting other natural attributes so that they do not become threatened;
- Supporting representation of all ACT ecosystems in our conservation areas to achieve a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) outcome;
- Increasing landscape habitat, biodiversity and connectivity;
- Implementing consistent and best practice ecological management coordinated across land tenures; and
- Better engaging, cooperating with and supporting land managers, community, special interest groups and associated management and research professions.

In addition, downstream benefits include climate resilience, increased human health and wellbeing, greater opportunities for fostering identity and connection to the natural landscape, improved natural functionality of the environment, and a basis for planning to prevent continuous loss of biodiversity.

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<sup>9</sup> Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth), Part 3 Div 1.

The proposed new Territory Plan for the ACT, in the context of the 2022 Planning Review, is a substantial opportunity to identify Conservation Areas on unleased and leased urban and non-urban land, and ensure they are exempt from development; this would not preclude them from being used for other compatible land uses. Incorporating the Biodiversity Network on rural and urban leases can achieve major conservation gains for protection of woodlands, grasslands, and other MNES through cooperative management agreements facilitated by enhanced support including the provision of resources and advice. The establishment of the Biodiversity Network to protect Conservation Areas across all tenures will ensure a certainty of management and protection over the long term.

### *Biodiversity protection is failing across tenures*

Despite the ACT Government's extensive commitment to biodiversity conservation, the current regulatory scheme is incompatible with the way that nature occurs as a mosaic across the landscape. As such, sites of natural significance occur in reserves as well as on public and leased land.

There are limited requirements for conservation to be considered as a primary objective in land use areas outside the reserve system, making them prone to ecological mismanagement. Existing land use areas are incompatible with the protection of natural values in four primary ways:

1. The reserve system does not protect all conservation areas of importance;
2. Areas of conservation value outside reserves are being lost through expansion of the city and associated infrastructure;
3. Natural resources outside reserves are not consistently managed for conservation values;
4. Areas of biodiversity are fragmented across the ACT.

These are considered in greater detail in attachment 1.

### *Aims of the Biodiversity Network*

The Territory Plan is a substantial opportunity to identify Conservation Areas on unleased and leased urban and non-urban land, and ensure they are exempt from development; this would not preclude them from being used for other compatible land uses.

The aims of the Biodiversity Network are to formalise conservation and management of biodiversity outcomes across tenure on multiple types of public and leased land by identifying them as Conservation Areas, through a combination of protection, restoration and reconnection compatible with other land management objectives. A Biodiversity Network would achieve this by:

- Providing legislative protection to Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) and ACT threatened species and ecosystems that are not held in reserve;
- Protecting other natural attributes so that they do not become threatened;
- Increasing landscape habitat, biodiversity and connectivity;
- Implementing consistent and best practice ecological management coordinated across land tenures; and

- Better engaging, cooperating with and supporting land managers, community, special interest groups and associated management and research professions.

*For further information see Attachment 1: Biodiversity Network Paper.*

## **Mature Native Trees**

**Clear Guidelines on the protection of mature native trees are required** for the whole of the Territory especially for developers and homeowners with mature native trees on private land. **It needs to be made clear** how the draft Territory Plan is correlating with *the draft Action Plan to prevent the loss of mature native trees* and *the Urban Forest bill*.

The following objectives should be regulated to ensure protection of mature trees in new urban areas:

- Early identification and mapping of mature native trees in new development areas, prior to estate planning commencing.
- Requirements to retain mature native trees in new development areas, and only remove trees as a last resort.
- Tree retention and recruitment plans for new development areas prior to submitting the development application (as flagged in the Urban Forest Bill) - including the use of urban reserves to provide connectivity and ecological protection for mature native trees.
- Mandatory percentage targets for the retention of trees in greenfield developments.
- DV369 needs to be fully implemented
- Mandatory buffer zones around Mature Native Trees both to maintain them and to protect and thus recruit trees to become mature in the near future.

See attachment 1 for a framework to manage areas of high conservation value, across all tenures in the ACT, for their environmental value. It considers Mature Native Trees throughout and iterates their essential value to connecting biodiversity across the landscape.

## **Plantings**

Current planting programs across the city often result in the incorrect species in the incorrect place, especially the Urban Forest Strategy, Tree Planting program. Plantings need to be ecologically based plantings using endemic species. **It is recommended the approved species list for planting in urban settings is reviewed and certain species are removed. Planting must be ecologically appropriate. Furthermore, training and professional development for TCCS staff in ecological management will increase the skills in managing, restoring and maintaining plantings.**

## Draft District Strategies

Australia is leading the world on mammal extinctions, with urban development a leading cause of habitat loss in Australia and globally. We need to strengthen our commitment to urban infill to reduce pressure on natural ecosystems. High quality urban development must be accompanied by a commitment to diversifying medium density housing options to provide better choices for the community. Urban greenspace will help to build resilience against the impacts of climate change, enhance connectivity across the urban landscape, and deliver quality-of-life benefits for the community. Green space, trees and shrubs offer physical and mental well being benefits for our community. Importantly they provide vital refuge for wildlife and pollinators across the urban landscape, cool the urban environment, and slow urban water flows. The Council is supportive of a commitment to more single residential homes built within our existing suburbs through increasing dual occupancy developments, high density housing along transport corridors and connecting town centre into the light rail network.

Increasing urban density is about clever design using a smaller footprint, such as houses going up instead of out. The Council recommends that there are opportunities to increase urban density in environmentally sensitive ways and supports it as long the housing is good quality and energy efficient, mature trees are maintained as much as possible, and there is space available to plant new trees. Creative small house design should be utilised to build energy efficient and pleasant houses for people as urban infill. Successfully increasing urban infill is about clever design not bigger design. The Council recommends an investment in higher density housing that takes up a smaller footprint per person, with shared green space – connecting community whilst also being energy efficient and livable.

Currently, the draft District Strategies seek to promote human development for humans, rather than promote a region where humans can live sustainably, and where other species can also thrive, both in harmony with the environment. The promotion of built form for human wellbeing ignores the reality that human wellbeing is built upon a foundation of environmental wellbeing. This interrelationship of improved physical and mental wellbeing from access to green spaces has been acknowledged by the ACT Government in its commitment to the Human Right to a Healthy Environment.

The lack of detail in the maps and the poor consultation process on the documentation did not aid the community in engaging meaningfully with the material and understanding the implications for their region. **It is recommended there is cohesive environmental stakeholder input.** The Environment sector as a whole should be provided a specific consultation, including the opportunity to have open dialogue with experts. Furthermore, the draft District Strategy maps lack detail. **It is recommended the maps be implemented to ACTmap<sup>10</sup> and the maps are detailed at a neighbourhood level.**

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.actmap.act.gov.au/>

In summary the Council is pleased with the following intentions of the draft District Strategies:

- Intention for The Blue Green Network
- Identification and expansion of active travel paths

### **Comments common to all district strategies**

- The first 80 pages of each district strategy should be moved into the ACT Planning Strategy
- The District Strategies should be combined with the District Policy documents. If necessary as a two-part document: Part A covering the strategic planning analysis, supporting material and the planning strategy; Part B the prescriptive policy that implements the strategy.
- Consultation on the district strategies has been ineffective. While it is appreciated that a significant investment in consultation was made, the method of hosting stand-alone events and workshops is inaccessible for many community members as it creates an additional burden on people to pursue input. It would have been preferable and more effective if community engagement was channelled through existing pathways such as community councils and community groups to minimise consultation fatigue. Furthermore, we have significant concerns that the consultation that did occur was tokenistic owing to the fact that the project timeline does not allow for ample revision of the strategies and the Territory Plan according to the outcomes of community consultation. Indeed, elected representatives have expressed to the Council that its community-led policy, the Biodiversity Network, is unable to be implemented owing to the timescale the Government has committed to. It is our position that the timeline of the project should shift to accommodate community input, as opposed to community input being sidelined to accommodate political timeframes. This is particularly poignant in the matter of the Biodiversity Network owing to its strong community support.

### **District Strategies pages 1 – 80**

As noted elsewhere in this submission, the great bulk of the material in these sections of the District Strategy documents is repeated in all the strategies. It would be much more appropriately located in the ACT Planning Strategy.

The function of the District Strategies should be to implement the “big picture” metropolitan scale planning set by the ACT Strategy, with variations between districts to suit local district circumstances but nevertheless remaining within the broader parameters set by the overarching ACT Strategy.

### **Five big drivers**

There should be no need to re-interpret the provisions of the ACT Strategy as seems to be the case with the specification of the “five big drivers”. The relationship between these and the five “themes” set out in the strategy is obscure. Both are set out on pages 37 and 38 of each District strategy. “Themes” or “Drivers” may be useful but we certainly don’t need both. The confusion is

exacerbated on (for example) page 43 of each District Strategy where there is an attempt to reference district planning “objectives” for a “key driver” back to the ACT Strategy themes.

So, we have gone through a process as follows:

ACT Planning Strategy themes >>>

District Strategy Key Drivers >>>

District Strategy key driver objectives >>>

ACT Planning Strategy themes.

It would be simpler to adopt the district planning objectives into the ACT strategy. Given that they seem to be repeated for all District Strategies this is the logical approach in any case.

## Implementation pathways

There are also 12 “Implementation pathways” on page 9 of each strategy and expanded on in section 4 (page 74). The meaning and purpose of these is obscure. The first, “Blue green network conservation and expansion” does not provide any specific “pathway” or other mechanism for implementation of anything. It cites existing legislation related to environmental protection and makes the vague statement:

*The ACT Government is also delivering initiatives to support and expand the blue-green network, including working with Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians to care for Country. Blue-green network matters are also considered through the assessment and referral process for new developments.*

Whilst the reference to traditional custodians is recognised (albeit some may say that it is tokenistic) this paragraph does not inspire any confidence and could not be considered to be an “implementation pathway”; rather, it is simply stating that as far as matters related to conservation are concerned, we will continue with business as usual.

In a context where “business as usual” has led us to a situation where the environment is rapidly deteriorating this is clearly unacceptable and indeed highly incongruous in what purports to be a forward looking planning document.

## Planning for population and Jobs (pages 32 – 35 District Strategies)

The following statement, referring to future population, is on page 32 of the District Strategies:

*This overall dwelling growth has been allocated into the ACT’s districts in alignment with the population in ACT Treasury’s projections (note – this is not necessarily where new housing should go). The resulting dwelling targets for the longer-term (2063) horizon for each district are shown in Figure 10.*

This paragraph is amazing. It says that the population projections on which district planning is based are not what they should be if proper planning and analysis had been undertaken, they are simply extrapolations of past trends. The purpose of a planning document is to determine what the projections should be. In the absence of this we are not planning anything, we are just accepting that past practice, business as usual, will go on indefinitely.



Just as population growth and its distribution is critical for future planning, so is the growth and distribution of employment. On page 34, with reference to employment, the following appears:

*The projection of additional jobs in each district is shown in Figure 11. The allocation is influenced by the existing distribution and location of jobs between centres and other employment areas within the ACT.*

As with the population projections, this simply accepts that the future will be a continuation of the past. This is the opposite of a sound town planning approach.

### **The Blue Green Network (page 40 District Strategies)**

The Blue Green network plan (page 41 of the District Policies) is simply a representation of the existing ACT conservation lands and corridors. It does not seem to propose anything new or any mechanisms for protecting or improving the existing situation. As such its effect will be limited to a continuation of the status quo – again, simply business as usual which negates the purpose of having a plan.

None of the listed objectives for The Blue Green network (page 43) give any substantial (or even cursory) prominence to the biodiversity values of the conservation lands. The fourth objective refers to “protect nature reserves.....” but only in the context of expanding opportunities for human movement and the “urban experience”. It is clearly all about people, not nature.

**It is recommended the Biodiversity Network be implemented (attachment 1) to appropriately identify, conserve and manage biodiversity values.** Areas with high conservation value that occur on tenures outside of the reserve system are not primarily maintained for their natural values. In order to facilitate adequate protection of natural resources, a strategic system that facilitates conservation on and off reserves is required to ensure that all remaining threatened species and communities in the ACT are properly managed and protected in perpetuity. ‘A Biodiversity Network’ could support the protection and enhancement of natural values in the ACT, by designating land uses that put conservation values at the forefront.

### **The reserve system does not protect all conservation areas of importance**

Under the current regulation system, only Public Land is capable of being declared as a reserve,<sup>11</sup> whereas land with high quality natural values occurs across all tenures in the ACT. The reserve system in the ACT has historically protected bushland above 700 m and therefore failed to protect ecological communities and associated species whose habitat is within lower-lying parts of the ACT. These include lowland natural grasslands, a range of grassy woodland associations, and lowland wetlands.

Table 1 is an extract from the Canberra Nature Park (CNP) Reserve Management Plan,<sup>12</sup> and demonstrates the lack of reservation of key lowland vegetation communities. The table shows that only 20% of the combined total of all existing areas of the lowland woodland community are in CNP reserves and only 26% of Natural Temperate Grasslands are in CNP reserves.

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<sup>11</sup> Nature Conservation Act 2019 (ACT), s169, 170.

<sup>12</sup> Calculations from ACT Government, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan*, 2021.



Moreover, of the 36 mapped lowland native grassland sites on Territory land containing critically endangered Natural Temperate Grassland and/or associated threatened species, only 11 are in nature reserves and a further two are proposed for reservation. Of the remaining grassland sites, 23 remnants (64%) occur outside the reserve system, with six of these being on leased land. A further 12 native grassland sites, on Commonwealth land, are managed by various Commonwealth agencies and lack reservation.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, over 40% of the critically endangered Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland (Box Gum Grassy Woodland) occurs on rural land.<sup>14</sup>

<b>Table 1: Reserve status of key lowland vegetation communities<sup>15</sup></b>					
	<b>ACT total (ha)</b>	<b>Reserved or managed by PCCS (ha)</b>	<b>In reserve (ha)</b>	<b>% of total hectares reserved or managed by PCCS</b>	<b>% of total hectares reserved</b>
Yellow Box–Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland	21,975	6,490	4,366	30%	<b>20%</b>
Drooping She-oak Lowland Woodland to Open Forest	670	478	236	71%	<b>35%</b>
Red Box–Tall Grass–Shrub Woodland to Open Forest	1,779	368	270	21%	<b>15%</b>
Snow Gum Grassy Woodland	90	21	21	23%	<b>23%</b>
<b>Total (woodlands above)</b>	<b>24,514</b>	<b>7,357</b>	<b>4,893</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Natural Temperate Grassland</b>	<b>1,158</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>26%</b>

<sup>13</sup> Calculations based on ACT Government, *ACT Native Grassland Conservation Strategy and Action Plans 2017*.

<sup>14</sup> n 2. Table 1, *ACT Native Woodland Strategy and Action Plan 2019*, p. 19

<sup>15</sup> ACT Government, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan*, 2021.

## Areas of conservation value outside reserves are being destroyed

One of the biggest threats to our natural environment in the ACT is the loss of habitat due to urban expansion. The undulating Natural Temperate Grasslands and Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Woodlands that previously existed across this landscape have taken a significant hit as the city's urban form has been extended. Added to this, we are already witnessing the impacts of global climate change – higher temperatures, more extreme rainfall events, storms and bushfires. Now more than ever we need to lift the profile of the environment we live in and rely on for our welfare.

An expanding urban footprint reduces biodiversity, through destruction of habitat, fragmentation, introduction of plant and animal pests and the inability of many native fauna species to survive against predatory or competitive native and introduced fauna or human impacts such as lighting, noise and traffic. Additionally, carbon emissions are increased by the higher private vehicle use resulting from uneconomic or poorly planned public transport infrastructure.

Central to the retention of much of the biodiversity outside the reserve system is the retention of mature native trees, as identified in the Action Plan to Prevent the Loss of Mature Native Trees 2022. Indicative of the loss of habitat, are data on the loss of mature native trees: the majority of mature tree loss in Canberra from 2015 - 2020 occurred at greenfield sites: Coombs (22%), Denman Prospect (12.5%), Throsby (35%), Taylor (31%), Wright (42%) and Whitlam (23%).<sup>16</sup>

To counter the impacts of greenfield development, the 2018 ACT Planning Strategy identifies the objective of ensuring 70% of new housing is within the existing urban footprint. The rate of infill urban development has continued to increase since 2013 and by 2017-18 infill made up 77% of the ACT's urban development. Current greenfield development sites are predicted to be developed by 2031 at which point the city footprint should not be extended and no further greenfield should be pursued. The significant trajectory of loss of grassy woodlands and native grasslands must be curtailed and the remainder conserved.

While supporting the policy of infill rather than greenfield development, significant further pressure on existing conservation areas within the urban footprint is likely as a result of development, disturbance or over-use. To ensure such areas are maintained for their conservation values, these remnants and corridors need to be identified up front and protected. The current maps identifying the 'blue green network' in the draft District Strategies need to be partnered with data, detailed on a neighbourhood level and overlaid with ACTimap. **It is recommended further research is undertaken to identify and protect remnants and corridors.**

## Natural resources outside reserves are not consistently managed for conservation values

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<sup>16</sup> ACT Government, *Action Plan to Prevent the Loss of Mature Native Trees 2022*.

In the face of the dual extinction and climate crises, natural remnants are increasingly important, whether or not they happen to fall within a reserve. Natural remnants provide habitat for threatened and rare species, store carbon,<sup>17</sup> increase soil, air, and water quality,<sup>18</sup> support pollination,<sup>19</sup> control diseases,<sup>20</sup> and increase the liveability of the city.<sup>21</sup> Considering this, best practice ecological management needs to be consistently applied to all areas in the ACT with high natural values; not only areas that contain threatened species and communities, but also areas of other communities and species native to the ACT, to prevent them from becoming threatened.

Management applying the adaptive management approach for the retention and restoration of conservation values should - and can - occur both on and off reserve. There are considerable benefits to applying consistent ecological management, as it can link and coordinate efforts by land managers and volunteers, for improved conservation outcomes and more efficient use of resources.

Three major impediments to achieving more compatible ecological management across all tenures are:

- Private and Government land managers and on-ground staff may have little experience, knowledge or support to apply ecologically based management;
- Management advice provided for ecological outcomes is inconsistent or non-existent; and/or;
- Management for conservation outcomes is frequently viewed as incompatible with the primary land uses (for example, where less frequent mowing in spring would encourage regeneration of native herbaceous species on a site that is usually mown more frequently for recreational purposes).

As a result, many areas are subject to inappropriate or inconsistent management, leaving them vulnerable to damage, loss or disturbance. A review undertaken by the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment in 2009 identified that land management actions in many lowland native grassland sites were not being undertaken and more than 50% of the grasslands were in or approaching critical condition.<sup>22</sup> Even within the reserve system, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment found that a better management framework was required to improve the condition and resilience of nature reserves.<sup>23</sup>

To adequately protect all biodiversity appropriate and consistent management of natural values must be undertaken across all land, regardless of tenure. Arrangements have been established to implement conservation management in some areas without compromising existing land uses. Kinlyside Nature Reserve in Hall is managed under a leasehold agreement to achieve conservation outcomes. Other areas are managed similarly with leases over parts of

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<sup>17</sup> Lindenmayer and Vardon, *Ecosystem accounts in box gum grassy woodlands*, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Smith et al, *The role of ecosystems and their management in regulating climate, and soil, water and air quality*, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Vanbergen *Threats to an ecosystem service: pressures on pollinators*, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Zimmer, *Deforestation is leading to more infectious diseases in humans*, 2019

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs et al. *Livability: Natural environment*, 2014

<sup>22</sup> Cooper, 2009, *Report on ACT Lowland Native Grassland Investigation*, Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

<sup>23</sup> Cooper, 2011. *Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves)*, recommendations 2, 3.

the CNP<sup>24</sup>. **It is recommended the District Strategies identify off-reserve conservation land uses that can ensure consistent conservation management is applied across tenure.** This could include a stewardship program and incentives for landholders to protect biodiversity. Existing programs can be used to improve and enhance ecological conditions of areas (the Connecting Nature Connecting People program, for example).

Applied research, trials and monitoring to measure, quantitatively and comparatively, changes in condition of the natural features and populations of both desirable and undesirable species<sup>25</sup> are required to guide 'best practice' management. Considerable data already exists on long-term monitoring programs run including Government initiatives and community monitoring programs including Canberra Ornithologist Group programs, Frogwatch, Waterwatch and Vegwatch. At regular intervals metadata needs to be analysed to identify patterns in condition and information about management treatments.

### Biodiversity is impacted by fragmentation and edge effects

Fragmentation has been identified as a key threat to the recovery of the critically endangered Natural Temperate Grassland and Box-Gum Grassy Woodland ecological communities.<sup>26</sup>

Connectivity recognises that biodiversity is more resilient to disturbances and adapts better when it forms part of a continuous landscape.<sup>27</sup> Fragmentation through clearing, cropping, damage and disturbance, urbanisation and establishment of infrastructure results in isolation of patches of native vegetation. Modified landscape surrounding these patches act as impediments to species movements, reduce available habitat, enhance the spread of pest plants and animals and modify the climate. Fragmentation also leads to increased edge effects, augmenting exotic plant and animal infestations, noise and light pollution, and increasing bushfire risk.

To mitigate these issues, remnants outside the reserve system can form important links that support corridors for biodiversity to move across the landscape and/or increase the areas already within the reserve system. For example, mature native trees that occur as scattered elements within the urban area, and in higher densities along roadsides and within the rural fabric, as well as within currently conserved areas, provide a significant support base for connectivity. In many cases important biodiversity corridors are degraded or not managed to retain or enhance ecological values. Inherent within this, therefore, is that ecological management of these areas is required to better support biodiversity values. **It is recommended the Biodiversity Network is implemented and appropriately managed to better support biodiversity including through adequate financial resourcing.**

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<sup>24</sup> ACT Government, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan*, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Sharp, *Vegwatch Monitoring Program: Practice and Findings 2011 to 2018: Report to the Molonglo Catchment Group*, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> ACT Government, *ACT Native Grassland Conservation Strategy and Action Plans 2017*; ACT Government, *Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan*, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, Smith, *Urban edge effects in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales: implications for design of buffers to protect significant habitats*, 2010.

## Sustainable neighbourhoods (page 57 Districts strategies)

Future investigation areas (for residential development) are discussed on page 60, reference is made to suitability mapping having been conducted to identify areas in each district that could accommodate further and presumably denser residential development. However also on page 60 the strategy says as follows:

*The locations that are currently shown as future investigation areas may not ultimately be required to meet projected housing demand in each district.*

And then....

*The urban character types are not the same as and are not intended to replace the land use zones in the Territory Plan. Their application in each district and how they would inform changes to zoning requires further analysis, including established character, heritage sites and values, environmentally sensitive areas and natural hazards such as bushfire risk.*

These statements mean that no decisions have been made and all the work is still to be done. The plan is not a plan for the future, again, it is a statement of the status quo and will not achieve any outcomes that differ from the current position.

## Targets (District Strategies page 73)

It is incomprehensible that this section is not keyed into the State of the Environment Report, especially the indicators listed in that report.

This section (Targets), which focuses on Table 8: ACT-Wide targets for Planning, should be relocated into the ACT Planning Strategy, where it clearly belongs.

Alternatively, it should be deleted as it has very little meaning. As illustrated by this curious paragraph, quoted in italics with commentary inserted in plain text:

*The targets for 'more nature and retaining water in the city' in the table rely on achieving existing ACT Government plans and strategies. (The plan should be leading, not following, existing outdated government policies) The remaining targets will – once identified – (if they are not identified now when will they be?) represent meaningful aspirations (what is a "meaningful aspiration?) given current performance against the suggested metric (what does this mean?) and the amount of projected future development (where or what development has been projected, this has no meaning?) . Other targets not mentioned here also remain relevant (if they are relevant why are they not here?), including net zero carbon and the 70% urban infill target.*

## District Specific

### Gungahlin

In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is concerned with the following specific matters in Gungahlin:

- Work collaboratively with and fund catchment and community groups to restore, revegate and continue managing Kambri/ Sullivans Creek.
- Fund park care groups and research on grassy ecosystems at Budjan Galindji Grasslands Nature Reserve.
- Incorporation of Harcourt Hill reserve into CNP to avoid the need for a separate plan of management and consistency of treatment with other grassland reserves.
- Crace Nature Reserve has an overlay of future urban area. The Council assumes this is an error in the documentation.
- Commit to and ensure Jacka and Kenny are zero emissions suburbs:
  - Construction of the residential development should be undertaken in an environmentally sensitive way. The dwellings should be of high quality and energy efficient.
  - All dwellings should have a minimum rating of 8 stars.
  - All dwellings should not connect to the gas network.
  - EV charging stations available to the community and in all multi-unit developments.
  - Utilise a variety of native plantings including shrubs and grasses to reach the tree canopy target
  - Retain mature native trees in the development area, and only remove trees as a last resort.
  - Where trees are unable to be retained, it is recommended that the contributions of new canopy cover are in excess of the loss.
  - Plant new native trees, shrubs, and ground cover that supports connectivity and habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and reduces the need for mowing as part of the residential development.
  - The top soil is not scraped.

The Council supports the intention to restore waterways and riparian corridors including along Ginninderra Creek and around Yerrabi and Gungahlin ponds to enhance water quality, aquatic and terrestrial riparian habitat and recreational values.

## **Belconnen**

In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is concerned with the following specific matters in Belconnen:

- The Gundaroo Drive duplication and protection of Ginninderra Creek. It recommended the restoration of Ginninderra creek including revegetation is adequately funded and the process continues to be done in collaboration with Catchment Groups and the wider community.
- The management of waterways, including Halls Creek, Gooromon Ponds and Ginninderra Creek. Improved regulation and compliance with sediment and runoff controls on building sites is needed to mitigate stormwater contamination.
- Lawson North identified as possible future urban development. The area is identified as residential as per the proposed but not yet agreed boundaries. Lawson Grasslands, in Belconnen, have extraordinary natural significance. It contains large areas of Natural

Temperate Grasslands and Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands; both nationally listed critically endangered ecological communities. These habitats are home to many unique and significant animals, including, the Gang-gang Cockatoo, Superb Parrot, Golden Sun Moth, Striped Legless Lizard, Perunga Grasshopper and Key's Matchstick Grasshopper. The Council recommends EPSDD to advocate for the protection of Lawson's Grasslands through raising the matter with Defence Housing Australia, the National Capital Authority and Minister for the Environment and Water the Hon Tanya Plibersek.

## **Inner North and City**

The Council supports the expansion of Mount Majura Nature Reserve to include Hackett Horse Paddock.

In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is concerned with the following specific matters in the Inner North and City:

- Impacts to Kambri/ Sullivans Creek and its tributary waterways. While it is noted there is intention to restore the creek "where possible" there are benefits to biodiversity, community physical and mental health, climate mitigation amongst others and should therefore the whole waterway should be restored. It recommended the restoration of Kambri Creek including revegetation and emulating Banksia Street and Lyneham wetlands, is adequately funded and done in collaboration with SEE Change, Catchment Groups and the wider community.
- The lack of canopy in the city and Russel. The 30% canopy target can be reached through a diversity of plantings including ground cover and shrubs.

## **Inner South**

The Council recommends the following in the Inner South:

- Increased native plantings along the lake Burley Griffin foreshore including a diversity of native trees, shrubs, and ground cover that supports connectivity and habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and reduces the need for mowing.
- A buffer for Jerrabombra wetland of an appropriate size and managed effectively in order to mitigate direct and indirect impacts on the high quality, threatened ecological communities within the wetland. This includes diverting the active travel path around the wetland to limit the disturbance impacts on sites ecological values.
- If Dairy Road is to have increased traffic, ensure there are appropriate mitigation measures in place to protect the wetland including a 40km per hour speed limit, speed bumps and signage to indicate to be aware of wildlife crossing the road such as eastern long-necked turtles.

## **Molonglo Valley**

As recognised in the District Strategy, Molonglo is a region that is fortunate to host many significant natural values. Despite recognising these values, the District Strategy does not adequately protect them. In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is concerned with the following specific matters in Molonglo:



- Western Edge Investigation Area - The Council does not support any expansion of Canberra's urban footprint, including the Western Edge. Expanding Canberra's urban footprint to the west of the city is not sustainable development. Any development that takes place must not happen at the expense of natural values; and must only occur after identification and protection of all areas of moderate to high natural values and the incorporation of sustainable lines of connectivity.
- Protection of Bluetts Block - Piney Ridge - Stromlo Blocks 402 and 403, and Denman Prospect Section 1 Block 12 (the "deferred area") are identified in the Draft Strategy as "open space" and "future areas" respectively. As outlined in previous representations to the Government this area is home to a remarkable diversity of plants and animals and plays an essential role in facilitating ecological connectivity across the landscape. Considering this, Bluetts Block-Piney Ridge should be designated as a Nature Reserve.
- Protection of the Molonglo River Corridor, notably the risk posed by habitat fragmentation from the proposed roads that cross the river. An appropriate buffer zone along the river corridor is required.
- Management of bushfire risk from Canberra's western edge.

## **Tuggeranong**

In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is particularly concerned with the proposed road in Bonython. The road in question is likely to negatively impact Stranger Pond, the Murrumbidgee River, and Pine Island Reserve - all ecosystems with significant natural values that should be protected.

Protection of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor is essential, due notably to the risk posed by habitat fragmentation, urban fringe and pollution. An appropriate buffer zone along the river corridor is required.

## **Weston Creek**

In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is concerned with the following specific matters in Weston Creek:

- Western Edge Investigation Area - The Council does not support any expansion of Canberra's urban footprint, including the Western Edge. Expanding Canberra's urban footprint to the west of the city is not sustainable development. Any development that takes place must not happen at the expense of natural values; and must only occur after identification and protection of all areas of moderate to high natural values and the incorporation of sustainable lines of connectivity.
- Management of bushfire risk from Canberra's western edge.
- Recruitment of mature trees - As recognised in the Draft Strategy, Weston Creek has one of the highest shares of tree canopy across the districts, sitting at 25%. In order to maintain and protect this tree canopy a strategy recruitment of mature trees across the district should be considered in the Draft Strategy.
- Active transport infrastructure and availability of public transport.



## East Canberra

In addition to the comments made above in reference to district strategies generally, the Council is concerned with the following specific matters in East Canberra:

- The integration of The Capital Food and Fibre Strategy and Circular Economy Strategy with the East Canberra District Strategy.
- Management of bushfire risk.
- How priority grassland, woodland and aquatic habitats and environmental values are determined. Adequately funded and publicly available research is required to justify.
- Airport North Road. The Council recommends EPSDD raise this matter with the Canberra Airport Group and the Federal Environment Minister asking to suspend the approval for this road and protect the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon from extinction.
- It is recommended Jerrabomberra East reserve is incorporated into the Canberra Nature Park to avoid the need for a separate plan of management and consistency of treatment with other grassland reserves.

## Summary

In summary the following submission finds that whilst the draft Territory Plan and draft District Strategies is an improvement on previous iterations of planning documents; significant revision is required to ensure that biodiversity loss and climate change are adequately considered. The submission recommends a 'A Biodiversity Network' that could support the protection and enhancement of natural values in the ACT, by designating land uses that put conservation values at the forefront. The Council cannot have confidence that the pressure for ever-expanding greenfields areas will not persist. Furthermore, this submission addresses concerns regarding the inaccessibility and disadvantage of the consultation process and documentation itself.

The Planning System Review and Reform necessitates community and tri-partisan support. The current documentation is not fit for purpose, as outlined in this submission. The Council recommends the process be stalled to allow substantial community engagement and feedback; allow for ample revision of the strategies drafts to be appropriately reviewed and edited; and for matters concerning the Planning Bill 2022 be clarified and finalised.

### In Summary the Council Recommends:

- The Biodiversity Network be implemented to appropriately identify, conserve and manage biodiversity values.
- Further research is undertaken to identify remnants and corridors.
- District Strategies identify off-reserve conservation land uses that can ensure consistent conservation management is applied across tenure.
- Clear Guidelines on the protection of mature native trees.
- Bluetts Block-Piney Ridge should be designated as a Nature Reserve.

- A “green belt” that provides a buffer between ACT and NSW to define the urban edge and protect environmental values is identified.
- No expansion of Canberra’s urban footprint, including the Western Edge.
- Strengthen commitment to urban infill to reduce pressure on natural ecosystems. Set a target of 80% of new residential development within the existing urban footprint and there is no further expansion of Canberra’s urban boundary after existing identified suburbs in Molonglo, Gungahlin and West Belconnen are completed.
- Population projections be based on the population Canberra is capable of holding and therefore planning to accommodate within set timeframes. Research needs to be undertaken on projected rainfall amounts and the carrying capacity of the ACT to inform the draft Territory Plan and thus set meaningful population targets to live within our region’s means.
- The approved species list for planting in urban settings is reviewed and certain species are removed. Planting must be ecologically appropriate. Furthermore, training and professional development for TCCS staff in ecological management will increase the skills in managing, restoring and maintaining plantings.
- There is cohesive environmental stakeholder input.
- District Strategy maps be implemented to ACTmap<sup>28</sup> and the maps are detailed at a neighbourhood level.
- The Territory Plan should be a principal instrument for the achievement of the actions recommended by the SOE report.
- Provide for climate mitigation measures in legislation.
- Halt the Planning System Review and Reform process.
  - Ensure community and tripartisan confidence and support.
  - Produce adequate documentation that is readable, accessible and fit for purpose.
  - Allow for adequate feedback and redrafting.
  - Until matters concerning the Planning Bill 2022 are clarified and finalised.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.actmap.act.gov.au/>

03 March 2023

## **Ngambri People Dismiss the Australian Capital Territory Government**

Correspondence with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II indicates that the Crown has no title to land in Canberra.

**The United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** Article 2 (c) **The Elements** describes genocide as:

*“Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.”*

The Crown has no beneficial title to the land, therefore the ACT Government has nothing to govern, let alone plan.

- The Australian Constitution Seat of Government Act is void ab initio
- The National Capital Authority is void ab initio

### **Reparation Starts immediately**

As the Crown has no beneficial (Allodial) title to land in the Australian Capital Territory, the ACT Government has no land on which to plan.

The ACT Government and their partners in *“the crime of genocide”* are hereby dismissed, having destroyed the native habitat of the landscape. All development on Ngambri land is to cease immediately.

The Crown has failed to produce evidence of having acquired the land from the Ngambri People and the conversation now rests between the Ngambri People and King Charles III since the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Her Majesty The Queen has written to the Governor General of Australia on the 28<sup>th</sup> July and provided the Governor General a copy of our correspondence, so that the points raised can be given further consideration.

The Ngambri People will appoint a new deliberative government.

## **ACT PLANNING REVIEW: MARCH 2023: WODEN DISTRICT**

**PEDAL POWER ACT Inc (this version is submitted to meet the deadline. Pedal Power will follow up with a formal version.)**

### **Key Site for Change: Curtin Edge north and south**

Pedal Power ACT Inc (Pedal Power) objects to the proposal for two new streets through the Yarralumla Creek corridor: one on the north-east and one of the south-east side of Curtin.

The planning review states these new streets are intended to 'clarify the urban edge (of Curtin) to Yarra Glen'.

### **Background**

The area is a pleasant and expansive open space with mature trees. It forms the Yarralumla Creek corridor. It contains a well-connected shared path which is classified as a Principal Route (C4 in the southern section). It is highly valued by citizens as a nature reserve and attracts many people walking and cycling; not only locals using it for short strolls and rides but others using it as an inter-city/suburb cycling route.

### **Pedal Power's Reasons for Objecting to the Roads**

The roads would introduce traffic into what is now an important off-road cycle route. The amenity of safely riding through this green belt without traffic and road crossings cannot be over-stated. This amenity would be lost if this proposal goes ahead. It would be inconsistent with the Government's policies of encouraging cycling through the provision of traffic-free paths.

The justification (defining the edge) for the new roads is questionable. The edge of this part of Curtin is already clearly defined by the Yarralumla Creek and the corridor.

If the reason is to enhance development opportunities by providing vehicular access to the residential blocks along the edge of Curtin, it is unnecessary. The residential blocks along the edge all have existing access via cul-de-sacs or, in the case of battle-axe blocks, wide driveways. Paired battle-axe blocks have double width driveways.

The roads would be contrary to the planning review's designation of the Yarralumla Creek corridor as a primary connection in Canberra's Blue-Green network. Introducing roads and traffic would not be conducive to encouraging wild-life along the corridor.

### **Other Matters**

Pedal Power supports the proposal to naturalise the Yarralumla Creek including the provisions of diversions into settlement ponds. Pedal Power also supports the proposal for a pedestrian/bike bridge over Yarralumla Creek to link Curtin to the new residential areas on the other side.

Pedal Power ACT Inc

3 March 2023

Contact: [REDACTED]



Please find attached a submission from the Pialligo Residents Association (PRA) in relation to the draft *East Canberra District Strategy Plan*

The PRA is an unincorporated association. Membership of the PRA is open to any leaseholders of the Pialligo community.

The response has addressed the proposed *East Canberra District Strategy plan* and highlights the issues the PRA wishes to discuss further with the ACT government as it progresses in finalising both the Territory Plan and the individual district strategy plans as well as the development of supporting planning principles.

The PRA also notes that the outcomes of the review of the *Eastern Broad Acre strategy* are yet to be finalised and may potentially impact both the Pialligo precinct and Majura valley and ask that there is early engagement with the PRA on both the outcomes of this review and the outcomes of the revised territory planning framework currently being undertaken.

We look forward to further consultation by the planning authority as part of finalising both the Territory plan and the supporting district plans and planning principles.

Regards

[REDACTED]  
President Pialligo Residents Association

[REDACTED] Pialligo  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## **REPRESENTATION BY THE PIALLIGO RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION IN RELATION TO – DRAFT EAST CANBERRA DISTRICT STRATEGY PLAN**

This representation is made by the Pialligo Residents Association in relation to the *Draft East Canberra District Strategy 2022* (the Strategy). This addresses the proposed strategy and includes comments on the impact of proposed development, public transport (including new light rail and fast train) and the planned airport, employment & retail precincts development.

Comments provided address proposals to the *East Canberra Strategy Plan* and have touched on changes to the *Draft Territory Plan* but do not address changes that may result from the outcomes of the review of the *Eastern Broad Acre Strategy*.

The Residents association asks that ACT Government ensure that the PRA be consulted on all issues that may impact the precinct going forward on the outcomes of the *Draft Territory Plan and associated guiding principles*, the *Draft East Canberra strategy plan* and the outcomes of the *Eastern broadacre Strategy*.

**The Pialligo Residents Association (the PRA) includes a response to the *Draft East Canberra Strategy District Plan* ( this also includes comments on the *Draft Territory plan* and links to the existing *Pialligo Master plan* and *Pialligo Precinct plan* both embedded in the current Territory Master plan.**

1. The PRA is an unincorporated association. Membership of the PRA is open to any leaseholder of a lease in Sections 2, 7 and 31 of Pialligo, as well as any resident(s) who reside on one of those leases and have the formally delegated responsibility to make decisions on behalf of the lease holder.
2. Consistent with its objectives of representing the interests of lessees and residents of Pialligo and promoting the Pialligo precinct, the PRA has previously been an active participant in contributing to inform Government decisions as they impact the local community. This has included working with various agencies on environment

and emergency services issues, road developments such as the Majura Parkway, and notably, the development of the *Pialligo Master Plan* and the subsequently the *Pialligo Precinct Code*

3. The PRA is wanting to work with businesses to contribute to the ongoing development of agriculture, sustainable farming and related farm tourism activities as the current Pialligo master plan and precinct code provides. It also recognises that the current profile of business, rural and residential activities that occur in the precinct is what provides a special place for residents of Canberra and visitors to Canberra to explore.
4. Note the PRA recognises the key objectives of the *Draft Territory plan* and supporting *District Strategy plans* have been developed to assist in defining the future growth of Canberra. The PRA wants to contribute to the decisions that Government make to ensure activities in the Pialligo precinct and associated areas such as Oaks estate and Majura Valley support the key initiatives. However the PRA will want to actively engage with ACT Government on the development and finalisation of each of the initiatives outlined in the *Draft Territory Plan*, the *Draft District Strategy Plan for East Canberra* and the review of the *Eastern Broad acre plan* as appropriate and as soon as practicable.
5. Historically the Association has worked closely with ACT government to develop the *Pialligo Master Plan* and the subsequently the *Pialligo Precinct Code* to ensure the precinct reflects a balance of agriculture, residential and commercial use within the precinct that remains attractive to visitors, businesses and local residents and is inline with both the *Pialligo Master Plan* and *Pialligo Precinct Code*
6. The PRA would want to continue this relationship with Government to influence the development of the *precinct design plans* going forward. The Association expects this can be achieved through early consultation by ACT Government by early consultation and a willingness to engage with the PRA on issues identified that may impact the precinct going forward prior to finalisation.

#### Initiatives for East Canberra.

A range of initiatives will be needed over time to guide change in the district. Initially this will focus on more detailed planning and analysis, including the following of which the PRA seek to contribute to:

- Outcomes of consultation undertaken by ACT Government on the *Draft District Strategy for East Canberra* along with the proposed *Draft Territory Plan amendments* and the outcomes from the review of the *Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment*.
- Along side this is consideration of the *National Airports Safeguarding Framework (NASF)* to make sure that land uses and other activities protect the current and future operations of Canberra Airport and its flight paths and minimise the impact of these operations on the Pialligo precinct. The PRA expect the completion of the *Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment* will provide greater certainty regarding the future of this area going forward and seek early consultation on the review.
- PRA expect to be consulted in the planning stages of the identification of a program of forward actions arising from the *Eastern Broadacre Strategic Assessment*, this includes any changes to planning policies or zoning, development that may impact the Pialligo precinct.
- PRA expect to be consulted ( as a key stakeholder) in the deliberations with the NSW Government and Queanbeyan–Palerang Regional Council (as relevant) to investigate infrastructure provision and transport connection opportunities between the ACT and NSW; if determined feasible, appropriate delivery to support employment and housing in South Jerrabomberra including the South Jerrabomberra Regional Jobs Precinct.

#### 1. Blue-Green Network.

We understand this driver pertains to Canberra's landscape, waterways, and the preservation of the environment. It also addressed environmental impact.

Reference: [Draft District Strategy East Canberra 2022](#) page 95.

Initiatives	Timeframe	PRA Response
1.1 Enhance, restore and connect priority areas of grassland, particularly north of Canberra Airport and in the south around existing	Ongoing	PRA supports initiative 1.1, noting that the East Canberra Broadacre Strategy is still to be finalised.

Initiatives	Timeframe	PRA Response
grassland reserves and adjacent in NSW. Enhance, restore and re-connect priority areas of grassland, particularly through the Majura Valley and Jerrabomberra around existing grassland reserves, and with linkages to reserves in other districts and native grasslands in NSW.		The PRA considers that this initiative and the Strategy must be closely linked.
1.2 Enhance, restore and re-connect priority areas of woodland, particularly around Mount Ainslie and Mount Majura and habitat connections into Inner north and city district, as well as between Callum Brae, Isaacs Ridge and West Jerrabomberra nature reserves and their connections into the Inner south and Tuggeranong districts.	Ongoing	PRA supports initiative 1.2.
1.3 Protect and restore areas of Woolshed Creek, Jerrabomberra Creek, Woden Creek, and Scrivener Creek and their tributaries as riparian corridors, and linkages to the Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Narrabundah Wetlands.	Short term	PRA supports initiative 1.3, noting that the Pialligo Brook needs to be considered, as this is one of the main stormwater accesses for the Canberra Airport.  Future development of rapid transport needs to give consideration to this initiative.
1.4 Explore wildlife crossing opportunities for the Majura Parkway, Canberra Avenue and Monaro Highway to re-establish connectivity between the important woodland and grassland habitat in and around Mount Majura and Mount Ainslie in the west, and Commonwealth land in the east.	Medium term	PRA supports initiative 1.4.
1.5 Consider opportunities to enhance the primary blue-green network for recreation benefits in highly used recreational tracks and linkages at Mount Ainslie and Mount Majura, around Pialligo and along the Molonglo River, and through enhancing recreational and educational engagement at Callum Brae Nature Reserve.	Medium term	PRA support initiative 1.5.  Taking note of the emphasis of creating attractive places, Pialligo is a place where people travel to because of its unique rural/agricultural character.

## 2. Economic access and opportunity across the city.

Reference: [Draft District Strategy East Canberra 2022](#) page 98.

Initiatives	Timeframe	PRA Response
2.1 Consider opportunities for parts of the Eastern Broadacre to be developed for industrial and related uses, given proximity to national freight routes, Canberra Airport and existing industrial areas at Fyshwick, Symonston and Hume.	Short term	PRA does not support this initiative currently as it may result in the diminution of the rural landscape and in particular impact the Pialligo precinct. Giving consideration to the outcomes of the Eastern Broadacre Strategy the PRA requests the opportunity to be consulted on these outcomes.



Initiatives	Timeframe	PRA Response
2.2 Partner and collaborate with the NSW Government and Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council to investigate a coordinated, strategic approach to cross-border infrastructure and road connectivity to accommodate anticipated employment and housing growth in South Jerrabomberra (NSW) including the South Jerrabomberra Regional Jobs Precinct.	Short term	PRA supports initiative 2.2 and cross-border infrastructure and road connectivity. The PRA requests the opportunity to contribute and be consulted on the proposed outcomes of this strategy in the planning stages.
2.3 Plan for economic diversity, growth and innovation, using the planning system to (where possible) support a range of employment uses including innovative clean waste industries, industrial ecology, airport-supportive uses, agribusiness and tourism, and other emerging sectors.	Medium term	In principle PRA supports initiative 2.3 and the plan for economic diversity, growth & innovation, Without greater clarification the PRA does not support this initiative currently as it may result in the diminution of the rural landscape and in particular impact the Pialligo precinct.
2.4 Identify and provide buffers to key and sensitive land uses which have special needs (such as corrective and emergency services sites, and Commonwealth uses).	Short term	PRA supports initiative 2.4.
2.5 Retain capacity within the district for agriculture and food production in the district.	Short term	PRA strongly supports initiative 2.5. This will be achieved by ensuring that the requirements of the Pialligo Master plan and Pialligo precinct code are maintained in legislation and not moved into a policy document.

### 3. Strategic movement to support city growth.

Reference: [Draft District Strategy East Canberra 2022](#) page 101.

Initiatives	Timeframe	PRA Response
3.1 Identify and protect major transport corridors – both rail and road – and planning for surrounding land uses and planning controls which benefit these assets and support their function.	Short term	PRA supports initiative 3.1, however, seeks <u>early</u> consultation as part of development.
3.2 Continued planning for a future expansion of the light rail network and associated operational facilities (such as sub-stations, depots and layovers).	Medium term	PRA supports initiative 3.2, however, seeks <u>early</u> consultation as part of development.
3.3 Investigate improvements to public transport access to the rest of Canberra for residents of Oaks Estate, Pialligo and Symonston, including via a strategic investigation corridor connecting through the Inner South and between Hume and the Tuggeranong district.	Medium term	PRA supports initiative 3.3, however, seeks <u>early</u> consultation as part of development

Initiatives	Timeframe	PRA Response
3.4 Partner and collaborate with the NSW Government and Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council to investigate a coordinated, strategic approach to cross-border infrastructure and road connectivity to accommodate anticipated employment and housing growth in South Jerrabomberra (NSW) including the South Jerrabomberra Regional Jobs Precinct	Short term	PRA supports initiative 3.4.
3.5 Support the functions of Canberra Airport by considering and implementing (where relevant) the National Airports Safeguarding Framework (NASF).	Ongoing	PRA supports initiative 3.5.
3.6 Investigate the potential for a high speed rail connection through the district (over the longer-term) including the best means of protecting the corridor through leasing arrangements and planning provisions.	Longer term	PRA supports initiative 3.6, however, seeks <u>early</u> consultation as part of the development / changes to leasing arrangements and planning provisions.

#### 4. Sustainable neighbourhoods.

Reference: [Draft District Strategy East Canberra 2022](#) pages 105, 106 and 107.

Initiative	Timeframe	PRA Response
4.1 The presence of critically endangered flora and fauna in the district, as well as the impacts of aircraft noise and operations from Canberra Airport, mean that new residential uses are not suited to the district. However, existing residential communities at Pialligo and Oaks Estate have master plans that uphold the character of each place while providing for limited growth and change.  The key initiatives of the <i>Pialligo Master Plan</i> and the <i>Oaks Estate Master Plan</i> were incorporated into the <i>Territory Plan</i> in 2015 and September 2022 respectively. The <i>Territory Plan</i> determines the types of land uses that may occur in the district, including any future low-scaled residential uses.	Not noted	PRA strongly supports initiative 4.1 and will work closely with the ACT Government in the development of planning principles that support District strategies.
4.2 Pialligo is positioned to champion sustainability principles by promoting and demonstrating sustainable land use practices. Farm tourism and rural produce activities are key opportunities for the precinct, with consideration of public access to the river corridor.	Not applicable	PRA agrees in principle but are keen to ensure that that any such activities do not result in the inappropriate commercialisation of Pialligo such as to undermine existing and planned planning values embodied in the current Pialligo Precinct plan.  The expansion of farm tourism and the consideration of public access to the river corridor may impact adversely on the Pialligo

Initiative	Timeframe	PRA Response
		precinct therefore the PRA request ACT Government liaise with the PRA in the early stages of planning.
<p>4.3 Pialligo is the only area in the ACT with a mix of agricultural and residential blocks in a semi-rural landscape setting. The landscape character and heritage are key attractors for businesses, residents and tourists. Land uses include nurseries, agriculture, cafes, art and craft shops, galleries, landscape supplies, orchards and animal husbandry.</p> <p>The <i>Pialligo Master Plan</i> (2013) outlined a vision and planning framework for the area, the key aspects of which were implemented through changes to the <i>Territory Plan</i>.</p>	Not applicable	PRA strongly supports initiative 4.3 and will work closely with the ACT Government in the development of planning principles that support District strategies.

## 5. Inclusive centres and communities.

Reference: [Draft District Strategy East Canberra 2022](#) page 105.

Initiative	Timeframe	PRA Response
<p>5.1 Alongside the services provided in the district (such as at Majura Park), Oaks Estate and Pialligo residents will continue to rely on services in other areas within the ACT such as Inner South District and over the border in NSW. This is particularly the case for business services, health, retail and community and recreation services including schools and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC – including child care). This needs to be factored into planning for facilities and transport accessibility to these areas and, more broadly, as part of metropolitan planning.</p>	Not noted	PRA strongly supports initiative 5.1 and will work closely with the ACT Government in the development of planning principles that support District strategies.



**PT CBR**

**SUBMISSION ON THE  
DISTRICT STRATEGIES**

**MARCH 2023**

## Introduction

The Public Transport Association of Canberra (PTCBB) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the *ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project*. This submission provides the views of our association on integrating planning and residential zoning, with a focus on transport-oriented development (TOD) and public transport access.

As the Canberra region's leading advocacy group for public transport users, PTCBB supports the ACT Government's ongoing investment in expanding the bus and light rail network, the ongoing effort to reduce transport emissions by moving to a zero-emissions vehicle (ZEV) bus fleet, and its active travel and public transport programs.

PTCBB's submission has been considered in the context of the well-recognised benefits of TOD and active and public transport, as well as the ACT Government's recently adopted *ACT Transport Recovery Plan*, the *Zero-Emission Transition Plan* and the *ACT Transport Strategy 2020*. Our recommendations are consistent with the priorities outlined in these key documents.

We are pleased that the ACT Government shares our view that:

*Light rail and rapid public transport connections have been critical to the transformation of the town and group centres. As well as better integrating the district into the central Canberra economy, these connections have provided a focus for sustainable renewal and better located new dwellings.*

The success of light rail stage one and the associated increase in medium and high-density housing options adjacent to light rail stations between the City and Gungahlin are an excellent model to apply to the rest of Canberra. We encourage this approach for all future extensions of our city's light rail network.

Instead of addressing each district strategy, this submission will look at the common elements of each strategy, primarily the '5 big drivers' and '12 Implementation pathways'. We will provide only a small number of recommendations targeted to specific districts.

Of greater concern to PTCBB is the need for increased project delivery capability in ACT Government directorates. Without a corresponding increase in resourcing to match the ambitions of the district strategies, it will be difficult to deliver high quality integrated transport and land use outcomes.

## The Five Big Drivers

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) has a good understanding of Canberra's future urban challenges, as highlighted by the five big drivers identified in the draft district strategies. However, the aims of reducing car



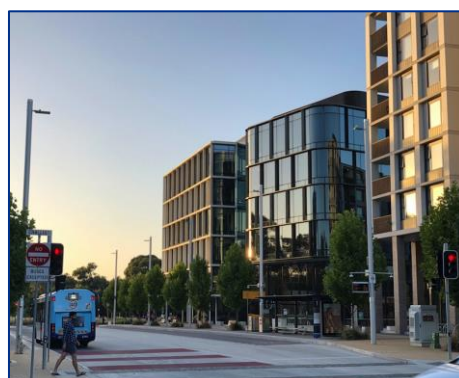
dependence and increasing active transport require integration across and between districts. This is not an issue which can be tackled on a suburb-by-suburb basis.

Increasing public transport usage requires an integrated, cross-directorate approach, so that current and future suburbs have the necessary infrastructure planned and delivered before residents arrive, which can then be scaled to satisfy and grow demand as the population increases.

PTCBB want a future Canberra where urban infill along our transport corridors is genuinely transport oriented. It should act as the key driver of, and a major factor in, the delivery of commercial and mixed-use developments in our city's key employment centres.

The development of greenfield suburbs and economic areas (such as those identified in East Canberra) must be accompanied by investment in public transport connections and infrastructure. This investment must be factored into the cost of preparing blocks for sale to the market by the Suburban Land Agency (SLA) and should be delivered alongside roads, sewage and power infrastructure.

Sustainable neighbourhoods and employment centres must encourage zero emission travel options such as light rail, ZEV buses and active transport options. Provisions for the one-for-one replacement of internal combustion engine (ICE) cars with electric cars are not going to increase active and public transport usage and will embed future car dependency.



## Implementation Pathways

PTCBB see these pathways as crucial to delivering the positive outcomes articulated in the district strategies. It is important that appropriate resources are allocated across the relevant directorates to ensure the benefits arising from this planning system reform are able to be implemented by the ACT Government.

### *1. Blue-green network preservation and expansion*

PTCBB support this proposed implementation pathway, but would add that the connections between shared paths and public transport, including end of trip facilities and signage, need to be improved and brought into compliance with the relevant accessibility provisions of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.



## *2. Detailed planning for future housing and employment*

It is vital that Canberra's future housing development is compact and sustainable, with a mix of options provided within our city's existing urban footprint. This encourages public and active transport use by proximity to existing services. Future employment accommodation is ever evolving, but must be supported by public transport services.

Light rail has been a catalyst for new commercial investment along Northbourne Avenue and Mitchell, where businesses outside the usual light industrial have been attracted by the proximity of high-quality public transport. This phenomenon can and should be replicated in other planned commercial areas.

EPSDD and Transport Canberra should continue to develop and refine the recent demographic analysis work released by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) to ensure decision makers have clear guidance on priority areas for future public transport investment.

## *3. Territory Plan – applying urban character and design principles*

Under **no circumstances** should the “preservation of urban character” be accepted as a valid reason to block the delivery of public transport infrastructure or new housing adjacent to high quality public transport. Transport and land use objectives must take precedence over individual aesthetic preferences. Design principles, such as those developed for the delivery of light rail stage one, can be used to ensure compatibility of new development with any relevant registered heritage places.

Any rezoning or implementation by district policies or zone policies must consider active and public transport access, with a focus on TOD for significant residential or commercial proposals.

## *4. Transport and land use integration*

The ongoing integration of transport and land use is vital for delivering a more sustainable Canberra. Planning decisions must consider the transport options available to support them. Decisions on development applications for large and small proposals should have public and active transport access variables clearly identified, and account for current and future demand.

Significant development proposals should also be required to indicate how they will improve and encourage use of public transport. The Riverview Group's provision of leased buses to Transport Canberra for operation in Ginninderry and Capital Estate Developments' construction of high quality bus shelters in Denman Prospect are current best practice examples and should be encouraged.

While there are often initial grand ambitions for integrating public transport and active travel, PTCBR's experience to date has been that they are not sufficiently considered by ACT Government agencies responsible for planning (EPSDD), delivering

(SLA) and approving (ACTPLA) new developments. Rather, they are treated as afterthoughts, with the main planning focus still heavily biased in favour of accommodating private vehicle movements to the effective exclusion of other road users. A new approach is needed, which centres the safe movement of people as the primary consideration.

#### *5. Employment and economic focus areas*

PTCBBR want to see more information from the ACT Government on how public and active transport infrastructure and access will be prioritised in these areas. Car dependent cul-de-sacs such as Hume, Majura Park and Brindabella Business Park are undesirable precedents that must not be replicated. These existing, poor-quality examples should be incentivised to add higher quality public transport infrastructure and improved active travel connections.

#### *6. Establish new innovation precincts*

PTCBBR support these implementation aims, with the expectation that public and active transport infrastructure and access will be prioritised in these areas.

#### *7. Group and local centres initiatives*

Any initiatives must include appropriate rezoning to deliver a higher residential population at the centre. Active and public transport use should be encouraged by delivering public and private infrastructure improvements such as covered bus shelters, end of trip facilities for cyclists and safe connections to the existing path network.

#### *8. City making and 'urban improvement'*

Urban improvements to our city's major centres should deliver better public transport access and shared zones to encourage active travel. Parking should be appropriately priced and managed to prioritise short visits. Surface car parks should be redeveloped to provide more employment and housing opportunities close to shops, public transport and community facilities.



#### *9. Facilitate the zero carbon transition*

PTCBBR fully support the ACT's transition to a zero-emission transport fleet. However, this does not extend to the prioritisation of infrastructure which delivers a one-for-one replacement of ICE vehicles with electric vehicles over broader improvements to public and active transport infrastructure.



### *10. Integrated infrastructure planning*

Transport and land use planning are inextricably linked, yet many key decisions appear to be made without proper consideration of how one affects the other. PTCBR urge an integrated approach across all levels of government, to ensure major decisions in this space deliver better and more holistic outcomes.

### *11. Governance for comprehensive redevelopment*

PTCBR support the concept of 'urbanising agents' and new governance models to facilitate significant redevelopment and urban improvement. These new approaches should place a greater emphasis on integrating public and active transport access to new and redeveloping areas of our city.

### *12. Social and affordable housing contributions*

PTCBR support future initiatives for increased social and affordable housing. We note that access to public transport is particularly important for many vulnerable cohorts. Delivering new housing near public transport and improving public transport services across the city can reduce individual transport costs and increase access to critical services, education and employment opportunities.



## Specific areas of interest to PTCBR

### 1. *Shared Zones*

Shared zones can help reduce the amount of public space that is dedicated entirely for use by private motor vehicles in areas of high pedestrian activity, such as near public transport interchanges. Successful examples in Canberra, including Hibberson Street in Gungahlin and Bunda Street in the City, are worthy of replication in other town and group centres across Canberra.

### 2. *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (Stage 2)*

PTCBR recommends that sufficient cross-directorate coordination be undertaken to ensure that all future bus and light rail stations comply with the proposed *Stage 2 reforms to the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*.

### 3. *Future Light Rail Change Areas*

PTCBR broadly support the key principles intended to guide future planning for change areas adjacent to current and future stages of light rail, including:

- Tuggeranong Town Centre
- Wanniassa Group Centre
- Belconnen Town Centre (west)
- Belconnen Town Centre (east)
- Woden Town Centre
- Woden North
- Phillip and Athllon Drive
- Mawson and Farrer North
- Mawson and Farrer South
- Curtin edge north and south
- Former Curtin horse paddocks
- Deakin local centre
- West Deakin
- East Lake
- Thoroughbred Park

To ensure light rail stations are successfully integrated with proposed new active travel connections and public activity hubs, we would like to see significantly more detailed plans for these change areas included in the final district strategies.

### 4. *Change areas not associated with light rail*

Several of the draft district strategies identify future locations for urban infill that are poorly served by public transport, including:

- Lake Ginninderra (east)
- CSIRO Ginninderra

- Numerous rural blocks in Gungahlin

Improved public transport access must be a feature of any future master plans, territory plan variation and significant development proposals associated with these change areas.

#### 5. *Public transport access to commercial areas in East Canberra (Majura Valley)*

The locations of future commercial areas identified in the draft district strategies appear to be based on proposed and existing B-double routes. However, these areas are inevitably visited by employees and customers using private vehicles. Existing commercial and industrial areas like Majura Park, Fyshwick and Hume continue to be poorly served by active and public transport.

Improved public transport access must be a feature of any future master plans, territory plan variation and significant development proposals associated with these commercial areas.

#### 6. *Consistency with the ACT Light Rail Network Plan*

PTCBB are encouraged by EPSDD's bold vision for change areas adjacent to current and future light rail routes. Transport oriented infill development at these locations will be critical to meeting Canberra's future housing needs and encouraging greater use of public transport and active travel.

PTCBB would like to see all future light rail lines shown in the final district strategies, including the extension to the Kippax Group Centre featured in the 2015 *ACT Light Rail Network Plan*. This could also include any possible future extensions that could be considered, subject to more detailed investigation.

To ensure EPSDD is making land use decisions based off the latest available information, we also recommend that the final district strategies incorporate updates to the *ACT Light Rail Network Plan* which is currently being refreshed by Transport Canberra. This is likely to involve significantly greater clarity around the future alignment for the third stage of light rail from Belconnen to the Airport via the City.

# **Submission to the ACT Government on the Planning System and District Strategies**

**Regional Development Australia (ACT)**

***The Canberra Region Food Collaborative***

***2 March 2023***

This submission should be read together with our original submission of June 2022 on the food aspects of planning in the ACT.

Regional Development Australia (RDA) ACT is an independent NFP with a Board/Committee of nine local leaders, focused on economic development. We are part of a national network of 52 Regional Development Australia organisations, largely funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities. Our charter is to secure more investment and jobs for our region aligning our work with the ACT Government priorities. Our industry focus is on the agrifood industry.

We have launched a new initiative called the Canberra Region Food Collaborative (CRFC) <https://www.agrifood-hub.com/>. The CRFC will be an independent information broker and coordinating body responsible for helping establish an integrated, sustainable, inclusive local food system. We also have developed the highly successful Food in the Capital Event Program – now Australia’s only national event focusing City-Region food systems. The CRFC is mentioned in the current Government Agreement for action this parliamentary term subject to funding.

RDA (ACT) welcomes the ACT Government’s decision to reform and improve the ACT Planning System and its work in consulting with all stakeholders relative to the various district strategies. The reflections and suggestion below apply to all districts, although the East Canberra Plan is given specific reference as it presents the area of most fertility and promise for boosting the Territory’s local food supply.

Apart food production requirements detailed below, the heritage value of areas such as Majura Valley and surrounding districts are significant along with valuable plant and animal life adding to our local biodiversity. Moreover, our own district hosted the trials to breed better higher yielding grain varieties which ultimately helped solve the food crisis of the 1970s. Unbalanced development could severely degrade these important domains which make our territory such and interesting, historical, and captivating place in which to live.

RDA ACT is suggesting a major shakeup of the ACT’s approach to the local food system. Drawing attention to serious and growing threats to food supply chains we are suggesting a range of key measures the ACT government needs to initiate. These include allocating at least 5 large spaces/areas in and near the City to food production, agritourism, training, community education and retail sales. In addition, hundreds of smaller plots need to be identified for small scale and collateralised production of food stuffs. Food must be a specific government food procurement priority along with direct support for sustainable food projects. Urban Agtech, water systems integration and incentives for integrating food into the built environment are all part of the formula. The Canberra Region Food Collaborative provides the framework and operational mechanism to make sense of the complexity and diversity the food system – and can help operationalize the Governments strategic objectives once they are settled upon.

The clear message is that, to cope with shocks such as COVID-19, cities with suitable socio-economic and agroclimatic conditions should adopt policies and programs to empower local producers to grow food and promote short food chains to enable urban citizens to access food products.... Cities have to diversify their food supplies and food sources, reinforcing local sources where possible, but without shutting off national and global supplies. (FAO - September 2020)

### **Food Security**

While recognising the need to build more housing for our growing population there are other 'balancing items' on how far this should go. Key among these issues is the need to shore up our city's food security. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN has called for creation of city food buffers. There are a range of threats to global and national supply chains, which are expected to continue and increase in coming decades. We are already seeing these in the shape of disruptions to supply from shipping container shortages; shortages of fuel inputs, lack of labour, climate change driven natural disasters, failure of transport companies (e.g. Scott's Transport a key national food transport provider), various disease threats (human and animal) and various strategic disruptions including war. The Federal Government is looking to support more value-add and more sustainable systems across our food producing regions.

Canberra is particularly vulnerable as most of our food comes from much further afield. Our only milk processor is closing. We need to secure substantial scale opportunities to allow farmers to build and encourage them to innovate and even serve a local food manufacturing and research capability. This means quarantining sufficient land to facilitate food production and food innovation as well providing the dignity of secure tenure for farmers on whom we will depend much more in coming decades.

The vagueness of references to food in the East Canberra Plan are particularly concerning in this respect, reflecting a lack of recognition of the changed national and international food situation and our geographic vulnerabilities.

### **Economic Opportunity**

Taken together, the value of the various projects in the ACT assessed by Food Innovation Australia could be worth nearly A\$545 million in the ACT by 2030, in terms of value-added. In perspective, this is over four times the current value-added by the food and agribusiness sector in the ACT. These opportunities could also create over 2,000 jobs – nearly a third higher than the territory's food and agribusiness workforce today. Post-farm gate opportunities constitute 96 per cent of potential value-added and potential jobs created. 85 per cent of these opportunities are geared towards improving production standards and supply chain capacity domestically.

### **Social Inclusion and Wellbeing**

Farm experiences, food bowls and novel food production approaches have been shown to improve mental health outcomes and nutrition benefits across the world. They are a source of new career paths ways for people who are not attracted to office jobs and more traditional jobs and career choices. Where these are close to or inside a city they provide access to schools, researchers, community and welfare groups which would otherwise be much more difficult to achieve without long trips outside our jurisdiction. We are demonstrating various programs which will help various disadvantaged groups, such as the disabled and long-term job seekers, engage more with food and secure employment through it. We need farms and urban farming precincts and food business incubators to do this.

### **Integrated development**

We would suggest that new developments, where they need to occur, favour mixed-use developments. This means avoiding blanketed concrete – but incentivising or requiring developers to deliver locations in which food can be grown in, around, underneath and on top of buildings. There are a range of Agtech and food tech solutions which can be integrated in this way- such as Vertical Farms, urban farms and garden commons which lend themselves to this approach. This would mitigate the negative effects of productive farmland being eaten up and provide new sources of income and fresher more abundant food to Canberrans.