

Andrew Barr backs down on Manuka land swap

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Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury flexed his political muscle to deliver a win to Telopea Park School over its tennis courts on Wednesday, warning Chief Minister Andrew Barr to consult the community on controversial decisions.

Mr Barr had canned his unpopular land swap which would have seen Telopea lose its tennis courts to make way for the Manuka Occasional Child Care Centre Association, which in turn would make way for a rebuilt Canberra Services Club and housing development.

The deal met months of community opposition and was an ongoing political problem for Mr Barr, becoming untenable when Mr Rattenbury [intervened in June, asking Mr Barr to find an alternative site for the childcare.](#)

that would have required the tennis courts to be returned to the school, and allowed the childcare centre to stay put in Manuka.

In the end, Mr Rattenbury agreed to a watered-down version put by Mr Barr. While Mr Barr will return the tennis courts to the school, he insists on allowing the community to use the courts as well, and still plans to move the childcare centre.

It also emerged this week that Mr Barr made the decision to bulldoze the tennis courts; it was not a cabinet decision.

After the vote, Mr Rattenbury said the issue should have been better handled and warned Mr Barr on the need for better consultation.

"I think a lot of people were surprised when this proposal came out – the great Manuka land swap," he said. "It probably looked good on paper but didn't really match community expectations.

"The government can always do well by taking community consultation and doing it early, before you make a decision, testing ideas and harvesting solutions."

The services club, which was destroyed by fire in 2011, has remained silent on the deal, but this week Defence Housing Australia revealed its deal with the services club had been made when the club planned to rebuild on its original site next to Manuka Oval. Defence Housing managing director Peter Howman said he was sorry the community had been upset about the disruption to the childcare centre and the school.

"DHA is for families and communities," Mr Howman said.

The organisation would "adapt our plans to suit whatever location we receive" and was willing to work with the childcare centre if it stayed on site and was incorporated into the new club development.

It is understood this option has been rejected by the government which does not want a services club in close proximity to a childcare centre.

Mr Barr told the Assembly the childcare centre would remain on its current site near the Manuka shops until a new facility was built, likely about

2020. The government is still considering moving it to a site near the Griffith shops.

The government is currently assessing a site behind the Griffith Shops for MOCCA, raising concerns among local residents about the impact it would have.

In 2010, both ACT Education Minister Joy Burch and Mr Barr said the site was unsuitable for use as a preschool when they considered relocating the French Australian Preschool.

In a joint-statement they said it would be prohibitively expensive to establish the preschool there.

"These issues include: the size of the site being too small for a single storey building, the number of significant trees that would need to be retained and would restrain development, overhead power that would need to be moved, as well as other services crossing the site, a waste transfer station in the middle of the site, insufficient area for pick up and drop off, and other issues. "