

Heritage ignored in one of Canberra's oldest villages

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Residents of Oak Estate community are appalled at plans to build medium-density units in their village.



ACT Minister for Planning Mick Gentleman said he had not had a chance to visit Oaks Estate since taking on the portfolio last July. *Photo: Jamila Toderas*

Residents of one of Canberra's most historic villages have blasted the ACT government for drafting plans which radically alter their suburb.

Oaks Estate community leaders have responded in disbelief to a plan that would load up their village with swaths of medium-density unit developments.

The precinct code for the Oaks Estate master plan received 31 of 32 submissions from residents, who condemned the document.

Karen Williams, an award-winning historian and long-term resident, said the process was flawed and in some cases community members had to "hijack" ACT government drop-in sessions to hear other residents' views.

"You had to struggle to find out about what other people were saying," she said.

"That is not good consultation, that is almost divide and conquer.

"You have to have a conversation across the room and that hasn't been allowed to happen."

Dr Williams said the government promised a heritage-inspired development but failed by not completing its heritage process before laying down the precinct code.

Oaks Estate Progress Association president Michel Starling said there was no other village or area of significant heritage value in the ACT that would cop the kind of proposal planned for Oaks Estate.

"The master plan and the precinct code bear no resemblance to any of the other village spaces – they are fundamentally different" he said.

Town planning expert Jane Goffman, who was commissioned to provide advice about the plans, described the precinct code as a "very unfortunate document".

"It is really ignoring the social problems that are out there," she said.

"It is not good enough to use Oaks Estate as a dumping ground and then not even accompany it with the kinds of services needed."

ACT Minister for Planning Mick Gentleman said he had not had a chance to visit Oaks Estate since taking on the portfolio last July.

"I have met with the [Oaks Estate] Progress Association to discuss their concerns as part of a whole-of-government approach to the area," he said.

"I and other ministers including the Chief Minister are working through the identified issues following my meeting with the progress association and will meet to discuss issues from a whole-of-government perspective in coming weeks."

He said government plans allowed for a "very modest development of predominantly two storeys and up to three storeys" along a couple of streets.