



Inner South Canberra Community Council

Mr Mick Gentleman MLA
Minister for Planning and Land Management
ACT Government
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cc Mark Parton, Kurrajong and Murrumbidgee MLAs, community councils

Dear Minister,

Major concerns about ACT Government engagement with community stakeholder groups on planning issues

The Inner South Canberra Community Council (ISCCC) is very concerned about a sequence of events in the past couple of months that raises questions about the commitment of the ACT Government to genuine engagement with community stakeholder groups about planning issues.

Three specific examples illustrate the point.

1.Planning for Manuka Precinct – in 2016, the Chief Minister made an election commitment to establish a community panel to plan for the future of the Manuka Oval and surrounding precinct. Since then, the ISCCC and other relevant stakeholder groups have written to the Government, on several occasions, calling for the Government to honour its commitment.

On 6 June 2019, the Chief Minister replied to the ISCCC advising:

“I would like your input, through a half day panel session, on how precincts like Manuka can best influence district level planning and the ACT Planning Review Process in general. We want to determine the best way to engage with precincts through this process and believe that starting with Manuka will enable us to test a model for future district level planning processes.”

Accordingly, on 29th July, several stakeholder groups attended an evening workshop.

The ISCCC was hoping to contribute and build on the valuable community feedback we had already received at the ISCCC’s public forum on Planning for Manuka to the Foreshore in April 2019 (report attached). We were surprised, therefore, when we were asked what we valued about the inner south as a whole rather than the Manuka Precinct in particular. Many of the stakeholders whose attendance was needed for such a broad conversation had not been invited, including the Yarralumla Residents Association, the Red Hill Residents Group, and the Old Narrabundah Community Council. The Deakin Residents Association received an invitation, but did not attend because they had the impression that the meeting was to address Manuka-specific issues.

We were astonished to see the following stated purpose in the subsequent report on the workshop, (on the Government’s *Have Your Say* website), despite our advice to the Planning Directorate that this was an inaccurate statement of the purpose conveyed to us before the workshop:

“The purpose of the forum was two-fold:

- To gather feedback from the inner south community on their values and aspirations for the district
- To understand from the inner south community some of the best ways to engage about the ACT Planning Review”¹

The casual reader of this consultation document would think it was the outcome of a broad-ranging stakeholder engagement process in inner south Canberra. Although the workshop outcomes did provide some valuable information about major concerns, the workshop could never be described as a broad ranging engagement process.

2. No ongoing stakeholder group on community engagement on review of the Territory Plan

At workshops in May on co-designing the community engagement process for the review of the Territory Plan, stakeholder groups had requested regular meetings during the two-year Territory Plan review process. However, on 25 July 2019, the ISCCC received an email from the Planning Directorate indicating that discussions on the Review could occur through the established Environment and Planning Forum (EPF). Only two weeks later, this Forum was abolished (see below).

3. Abolition of Environment and Planning Forum (EPF)

On 6 August 2019, an email from the Chief Executive of the Planning Directorate, Ben Ponton, suggested that the Environment and Planning Forum was no longer “fit for purpose” and: “In response I have decided, in consultation with the Minister, to cancel the upcoming forum meeting scheduled for the 3rd of September 2019. I will work with the secretariat on a proposal of how we engage with stakeholders, including community councils and others, moving forward.”

At the time, the agenda for the Environment and Planning Forum scheduled for 3 September was to have included discussion on Review of the Territory Plan, deferred from the previous EPF meeting agenda. Yet, when the ISCCC contacted the planning officials responsible for the Review of the Territory Plan, the officials themselves were not aware of the abolition of the EPF.

In view of these developments, stakeholder groups may be forgiven for concluding that the Government does not want to engage with them on a regular basis on the most important review of the planning system in over a decade.

The ISCCC and member groups consider that after participating in these “engagement processes” in good faith, the processes have been either misrepresented to the broader community or not proceeded with.

In particular, we find Mr Ponton’s proposal to work with the “secretariat” in his Directorate on a future approach to engaging stakeholders, rather than engaging stakeholders including community councils in a meaningful way in this conversation, at odds with his stated commitment when he took up the Chief Executive position to genuine community engagement.

What is a way forward to re-establish confidence?

1. We call on you to work with community councils and other stakeholders to establish a replacement forum for the EPF, with a priority focus on the Review of the Territory Plan. In particular, we support the proposal by the Combined Community Councils that you agree to meet, as soon as possible, with representatives of the community councils.

¹ https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.act-yoursay.files/4115/6653/6998/Consultation_Report_-_FINAL.pdf

2. In relation to the Manuka to Foreshore Precinct, we call on you to work with the ISCCC, member groups, and other Government agencies, to flesh out an holistic approach to planning in this precinct, including by addressing issues raised by participants in the ISCCC's April 2019 public forum on Planning for Manuka to the Foreshore.

We remain extremely disappointed that the Government's 2016 pre-election commitment to form a community panel to work towards a Masterplan for the area has not been fulfilled, as we consider this essential in ensuring a cohesive, rather than ad-hoc, approach to development in the precinct.

Yours sincerely



Marea Fatseas
Chair

17 September 2019

ISCCC PUBLIC FORUM: PLANNING MANUKA TO THE FORESHORE, 9 APRIL 2019
7-9pm, Eastlake Football Club, 3 Oxley Street, Griffith

The ISCCC's public forum on 9 April was very successful, with about 60 participants providing their ideas, after discussion in breakout groups, about what they value about the area from Manuka to the Foreshore (loosely defined), and what opportunities and challenges they see ahead.

ISCCC Chair, Marea Fatseas, began with an acknowledgement to country and welcomed participants, including MLAs Rachel Stephen-Smith and Elizabeth Lee, and conveyed apologies, including from MLAs Candice Burch and Gordon Ramsay, Manuka Business Association and Kingston Traders Group. With rapid change in the area from Manuka to the Kingston Foreshore, a holistic view of what's going on is important, as is seeking community views, in line with the ISCCC's strategic priorities to:

"Engage with inner south residents (including through an online survey) to identify what they value and would like to see protected or else what they would like to change in the inner south."

It is also valuable in the context of the ACT Government's pre-election commitment in 2016 to set up a community panel to develop a master plan for the Manuka Oval precinct. It means we will be better prepared if/when that master planning process occurs.

Prior to discussion in break-out groups, three speakers addressed the meeting.

Heritage

Nick Swain, President, Canberra and District Historical Society, co-Author of *Manuka: History and People 1924-2014*, and committee member of Kingston and Barton Residents Group, spoke about the area's heritage, including:

- The broad range of heritage buildings in the area
- The street pattern based on Walter Burley Griffin's initial design
- The trees in the area planted by Charles Weston.
- The value of green heritage goes also to cooling and biodiversity
- The only houses left in the area are in heritage-protected areas. Heritage is protecting detached dwellings
- Participants were asked to think about how important heritage was to them.

Development

David Denham, a committee member of the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association, provided an update on the developments "on the boil" in the area (see separate presentation). The main areas focused on were:

- Kingston Arts Precinct on the foreshore
- Atria at Kingston
- Stuart Flats

The Territory Plan is key to the future of the area. This has been and can be changed. The trend is relentless intensification within the area.

Transport

Ben Hubbard, Senior Manager Traffic Management and Safety, Roads ACT, spoke about transport and parking issues in the area. The emphasis in Manuka is on providing parking for shopping close to the shops. Workers have to park in the fringe areas near residential areas. Development is creating parking pressure, with tradies wanting to park somewhere. The way to enforce appropriate parking

in the area is through paid parking. Data on current traffic volumes indicate no reason for major concern, with traffic totals at only about half of available capacity. However, future development will increase traffic volumes. Public transport, walking and cycling are important parts of the mix.

Following these presentations, participants broke into groups around tables to discuss:

- Things they value in the area
- Opportunities in the area
- Challenges in the area

Below are the issues raised during discussion:

THE THINGS VALUED

- Connectivity/interconnectedness-Manuka through to the Lake
- Streetscape, treescape, neighbourhoods
- Birdlife
- Environmental protection – recognition of area, including bird habitat/sanctuaries
- Green spaces-Telopea and Bowen Park, Norgrove Park, Belmore Gardens, Manuka Lawns, Green Square, Jerrabomberra Wetlands
- Sight lines/vistas to mountains, lake and lake views, lake walking track
- Heritage streetscapes, architecture and remnant heritage infrastructure, detached heritage homes, Glassworks Museum, Fitters' Workshop, Old Bus Depot Markets, Fire Station Precinct, Megalo/Artsound, Photo Access, Wesley Music Centre, Manuka churches
- Village feel of Manuka and Kingston: strip shopping rather than large malls
- Community facilities/public amenities: Manuka Pool, Manuka Oval, Kingston Oval, Tennis Courts, Kingston Library, cinema, old Canberra Services Club, Eastlake Football Club, railway
- Good food, cafes, restaurants, Kingston Hotel (Kingo)
- Accessible parking

OPPORTUNITIES

- Improve connectivity between suburbs - widen and improve footpaths, safer street crossings, shared zone between Manuka Pool and Telopea Park
- Improve water quality, appearance of creek through Telopea Park, including adapting for climate change, improved signage eg in the case of major rainfall events
- Signage through Telopea with a heritage theme eg settler's cottage site
- More bench seating
- Recreation/Wetlands/walking trails
- Improvements to existing playgrounds and new playground/s including for older children/teenagers - on Foreshore eg basketball courts
- More public toilets
- "Adopt a Tree"
- Improved landscaping Manuka Oval (the Bollards)
- Police Academy-improve appearance of fences
- Beach on the Lakeshore
- Arts Precinct to be respectful of heritage and geared to diverse population
- Refresh of (once beautiful) Bougainville Street and Flinders Way etc
- Purpose built library with meeting rooms, relocate library to larger, easily accessible site in Manuka
- Small outdoor theatre/amphitheatre
- Spontaneous cultural events and pop-ups in key spots, street art
- Community and/or native garden
- Partnerships with local commercial precincts

CHALLENGES

- How to value the unique charm and character of the area
- Emphasis on creating a strong community through developing shared values based (in part) on nationally significant heritage and unique local environment
- Identify, secure, maintain heritage values long term while enabling densification sensitively
- Recognition by politicians that one size does not fit all in planning and development
- Commercial-in-confidence should NOT apply to Freedom of Information (FOI) applications relating to government funded projects
- Professional valuation of urban forest (including in economic terms), professional pruning and replanting, “adopt a tree”, take into account climate change
- Connectivity between suburbs by all means including public transport
- Old Narrabundah request to re-instate No.5 bus service
- Broken footpaths, intruding hedges - widen footpaths
- Pedestrian access across Telopea Park, and to Kings Avenue
- Maintain/improve public amenity eg improve street lighting in dark streets
- Traffic capacity, with substantial increase in dwellings, rat-running in side streets
- Pedestrian hazards near units for children going to school, especially crossing Canberra Avenue to St Edmunds school
- Parking next to Telopea Park is a traffic hazard
- Rubbish dumping in parklands
- Water quality of “Black Spring” Creek through Telopea in particular
- Maintaining heritage including enforcing heritage laws/funding the maintenance of ageing heritage buildings
- Community land disappearing
- Need for improved library access, including size/hours of opening
- Vacant shops--- delay more shopping facilities until current ones are used
- Rents are too high
- New building quality is poor
- Foreshore almost completely lost to development at expense of environment and community
- Kingston arts precinct – ensure guiding principles for design and construction respect heritage (eg switching room), target a diversity of groups, enable access to community, embrace and celebrate inclusion
- Greed amongst developers
- “Walled” police academy

Forum participants’ additional comments on specific topics were:

PARKS, TREES AND OPEN SPACES

Opportunities:

- The parks, trees and birdlife – Telopea Park, Bowen Park, Collins Park
- Public transport to national parks please!
- Preserve all current green open spaces, maintain open space
- Water quality assessment of Telopea Park Creek
- Get ponds? as recreational hub
- Meeting places eg Lawns, lake edge

Challenges:

- Odours/smells from drains in the Kingston suburb
- More seating, and more gathering points in parks
- Broken footpaths, blocked stormwater drains, rubbish dumped in parkland areas, including Telopea Park creek

- Telopea Park – drain, water refill station
- Bikes on shared paths disregarding pedestrians
- Creating awareness amongst newcomers to the area of the heritage value and environmental benefits of native trees
- Trimming and pruning trees to maintain their health, tree replacement plans
- No further development on Foreshore

HERITAGE

Opportunities:

- Heritages houses around Manuka
- Bronze statue of Charles Cameron Kingston
- Signage to name the Telopea Park creek, and to mark original settler's cottage site
- Continuity, memories, symbols
- Preservation of all registered heritage areas. No development to be considered in areas nominated for heritage listing
- Create indigenous history trail in Kingston/Wetlands area

Challenges:

- Ensure the mature tree canopy is retained and not replaced with cement and paving
- How do developers get away with destroying, or almost destroying, heritage houses?
- Heritage list ALL buildings in the Manuka Arts precinct, and the Kingston shops
- Preserve green space and community space
- Conflict in preserving formal style of Telopea Park and modifying the creek

TRAFFIC, PARKING, TRANSPORT

Opportunities:

- Improve walkability between inner south suburbs, including to Kingston from Griffith
- Seating on streets near footpaths for tired, aged or disabled
- Safer walking at night. Lighting?!
- Make Jardine Street between Giles Street and Eyre Street into a pedestrian precinct. At present it is used as a parking street with little through traffic.

Challenges:

- Safety – lighting, footpaths, Narrabundah to Woden bus
- Pedestrian crossings from Griffith to Kingston
- Currently changing bus shelters in Griffith/Narrabundah
- No bus to Woden from Old Narrabundah. Bus to Civic takes forever!
- Uncoordinated traffic lights on Wentworth Avenue
- No seats to enable people to rest when tired from walking
- Pedestrian access to Kings Avenue Bridge – awful!!
- Current parking on roads adjacent to Telopea Park is a traffic hazard!!
- Telopea Park's swale drain – make it a creek!
- Traffic noise at night-trucks using compression brakes-Canberra & Wentworth Avenue
- Wentworth Avenue road surface from Dawes Street to Brisbane Avenue
- Rat running – count ALL cars, not just ones on main through roads
- Extreme noise from “souped up” cars and motorbikes – is there a noise limit law?
- The steel wall around the Police Academy – plant hedges!!!

MANUKA OVAL

- Opportunities: Landscape grounds around Manuka Oval

- Challenges: No further expansion of capacity of the Oval

ENTERTAINMENT AND LIVEABILITY

Opportunities:

- Good variety of restaurants and cafes
- Late night eating venues
- Close off Franklin Street to cars and make it a walk-only area
- Community use of Causeway hall
- Use small pockets of green space as community spaces focused on building social cohesion and sense of belonging to our area.

Challenges:

- Poor safety for walkers – footpaths, lighting, seating and pedestrian crossings
- Public transport to and from events at night

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS

- A plan that links the aspirational clean green Canberra with the expedient territory plan.
- Focus on building communities, not ghettos.
- What is happening with the Canberra Services Club site?
- What is happening with the switching station?
- Retaining and improving public amenity
- Meeting sites
- Highgate Lane – street art, and better rubbish management
- Funding like Braddon gets for cultural events
- Festivals and pop-ups
- What is a reasonable time for ACT Government agencies to reply to letters or emails?
- Ensuring businesses have a steady supply of customers

MOTIONS

The following motions were voted on and were supported overwhelmingly:

1. That the ACT Government honour its 2016 undertaking and commence the production of a Manuka Precinct Master Plan with inputs from a panel from the community as well as other stakeholders and experts including the Design Review Panel.
2. That the ACT Government recognise that the Manuka to the Lake area comprises a unique heritage district within the National Capital. It is much more than the sum of individual heritage places and also includes the heritage streetscape and trees.
3. That the ACT Government and successful tenderer engage, and incorporate, meaningful community consultation (with the arts, local residents and businesses) on the Kingston Arts Precinct to ensure that this unique development opportunity is world class, supports the arts, is respectful of heritage, embraces diversity and looks to the future.