

Yarralumla development threatens grand entry to Government House: landscape architects

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The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects has blasted the planned Yarralumla extension as a threat to the nationally significant entry to Government House.



The government's plan for Yarralumla, showing the new entrance to Dunrossil Drive. *Photo: Land Development Agency*"

The Dunrossil Drive approach to Government House is one of the great pastoral character landscapes in southern Australia," president of the landscape architects ACT chapter Amanda Evans said in a submission on the plan.



The government plan for Yarralumla, showing building heights. *Photo: Land Development Agency*

The new housing "significantly reduces the ceremonial quality of the approach to Government House and alters an elm avenue that is considered internationally rare. The strategy now proposes six-storey buildings hard on the edge of the extended Dunrossil Axis, allowing for only one row of trees between the new road and the proposed building envelope."

The government wants to expand Yarralumla down Adelaide Avenue and along Cotter Road towards Government House, with 1800 new homes. The plan has attracted major opposition from Yarralumla residents and others, who complain about the high-density buildings, the grid pattern, and the destruction of ridges and forested areas behind Yarralumla.

The end of the driveway to Government House, Dunrossil Drive, is to be chopped off where it connects to Cotter Road and replaced with a new "Brickworks Road" that leads into the suburb.

Ms Evans also raised concerns about building heights of four and six stories on Cotter Road, four stories on Brickworks Road, and eight stories on Denison Street in Deakin.

The proposal would "entirely extinguish the landscape component" of the ridged buffer between the Woden Valley and Yarralumla. The buildings would be 20 metres high, and 26 metres above Adelaide Avenue, with the screening trees only growing to 14 metres after 50 years, even in optimal conditions.

The government's Cotter Road sketch was misleading, the group said, since the buildings would be significantly higher than the trees, and most obvious from the south.

The levelling of the site mooted in an engineering report would have a dramatic effect on the ability to grow street trees. The staged plantings over 10 years would mean a significantly degraded landscape for most of that time, and, given the conditions, the plantings might not mature for more than 50 years.

The Land Development Agency has sought to quell concerns about the site being levelled, saying it is unlikely to happen to the extent set out by the engineers.

The landscape architects made one of 109 submissions to the agency about its latest version of the Yarralumla expansion. The agency has not released submissions but said a summary of comments would be released once they had been analysed, probably in early May.

In its submission, the Yarralumla Residents Association said the scale of the development had increased since the 2010 version, up from 42 hectares to 49 hectares including the new Mint road interchange, with dwellings up from 900 to 1100 in 2010, to 1600 last year, and 1885 in the latest version. It pushed a more modest scale in keeping with the character of Yarralumla.

"We are appalled that the strategy will involve massive earthworks to flatten the 49 hectare site, and destroy some 2000 trees," president Marea Fatseas said, also pointing to the damage to Dunrossil Drive.

"Dunrossil Drive will be foreshortened by over 20 per cent, around 30 of the avenue's heritage-listed elms are likely to be removed, and ridges on either side will be flattened. There will be disruption for visiting dignitaries and access issues for the whole development when the access road is blocked for motorcades. It will become an overflow parking area for the development and its visitors."

Deakin Residents Association president Peter Wurfel said an interchange between Cotter Road and Adelaide Avenue was overdue, but the plan did not properly consider traffic on Strickland Crescent, and on two of the city's accident hotspots, Kent and Denison streets. Drivers already avoided Adelaide Avenue and Yarra Glen to "rat run" through Deakin and the road changes would direct still more traffic into the suburb.

The housing and interchange would replace the only "treed" area of open space in west Deakin, including an off-leash dog exercise area. The buildings could overshadow and dominate the area, including other homes in view of the "towers", he said.

The Weston Creek Community Council is also unhappy, saying the proposal had too many apartments and would have a dominant impact viewed from the south. It was a "crying shame" to cut short the grand tree-lined boulevard to Government House, chairman Tom Anderson said.