

National Capital Authority cracks the whip on Manuka Oval plan

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The GWS Giants - Grocon proposal to spend up to \$800 million on a Manuka Oval redevelopment that would have included 1000 flats, hi-rise hotel and hundreds of underground car parks will likely be the first casualty of the National Capital Authority's assertion of its right to determine what happens along Canberra's major boulevards.

By flagging its intention to create overarching development controls in significant precincts that would trump the ACT Government's own, much amended and frequently ignored, Territory Plan, the NCA appears to be calling a halt to ad hoc planning decisions driven by one-off "unsolicited" offers and economic imperatives.

Last year's Manuka plan, welcomed with open arms by the Barr Government as an opportunity to fund a \$100 million stadium makeover, overturned many of the planning principles which had governed the precinct for decades.

It was bitterly opposed by many locals and members of the wider Canberra community and was dumped by the ACT Government just two months out from last October's Territory election.

While Andrew Barr wrote to Inner Canberra Community Council chair, Gary Kent, last September to assure him there was no longer any risk of a unilateral makeover of Manuka precinct planning regulations to facilitate the Giants - Grocon plan, it was still on the table.

"A re-elected Labor Government will use a community panel process to work through any planning changes in the Manuka precinct (as part of a new masterplan)," he wrote. "Government decision making should be informed by the full range of community views."

Plans for the new ACT Government Manuka Masterplan, which may still have given a modified version of the "unsolicited" GWS-Grocon proposal the green light, are now on hold pending the finalisation of the NCA's development control plan for Canberra Avenue.

As the NCA, not the ACT Government, has the final say about what happens along Canberra's main avenues, it would be foolhardy for Mr Barr's administration to press ahead until the authority's final views are known.

If the draft development control plan released earlier this week is to be taken as a reliable guide then there appears to be no room for hi-rise hotels and apartment buildings in the immediate vicinity of the oval with NCA chief planner Andrew Smith saying the main difference would likely be a "modest increase in the height permitted in and around Manuka Oval... that will allow the ACT Government to put in a broadcast box".

It is hard to disagree with Mr Kent who was one of the first people to welcome the NCA's intervention in the planning process as "long overdue".

While he is primarily concerned with what has been happening at Manuka, the growing number of Canberrans opposed to other instances, such as the West Basin development can take heart from this week's developments.

This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/ct-editorial/national-capital-authority-cracks-the-whip-on-manuka-oval-plan-20170308-gutnjf.html>