

Yarralumla plan is 'shameful and irresponsible': Walter Burley Griffin Society

Kirsten Lawson Canberra Times April 28, 2015

Plans to flatten the landscape to allow a big extension of Yarralumla to the south appear "shameful and irresponsible", the Walter Burley Griffin Society says, calling on the ACT Land Development Agency to say precisely how much land it intends to carve off the ridges near Government House.

Society spokesman Brett Odgers has written to the agency with concerns also about the "degradation" of Dunrossil Drive, the entranceway to Government House. The project will reshape the start of Dunrossil Drive so it runs off the new suburban streets, rather than directly off the Cotter Road.

"They would lose some of the drama and beauty of Dunrossil Drive by levelling it out at the entrance portal," Mr Odgers said. "When you turn into or enter Dunrossil Drive it's going to be completely reshaped."

He was "annoyed" that the government hadn't let on about the extent of earthworks contemplated for the site, and said it was clear when looking at the grid pattern of the planned streets and the density of the new estate, which will have 1800 homes, that there would be substantial flattening.

A report for the Land Development Agency from consultants SMEC envisages reducing the ground height by between two and seven metres across the Dunrossil Drive area and towards Cotter Road, using most of the soil from the ridges to fill in lower parts of the site, near the centre of the new suburb and towards Adelaide Avenue.

But the agency has said it intends to retain as much of the natural topography as possible within the constraints, and the amount of the cut and fill is "likely to be significantly less than the figure estimated in the report".

Alerted to the proposal, Mr Odgers wrote to the agency on what he said "could scarcely be a more worrying heritage and planning prospect". He requested a briefing and when none was offered, he wrote again.

"The extent of the prospective loss of the West Ridges, levelling of the buffer zone and natural topography and degradation of Dunrossil Drive appear quite shameful and irresponsible," he wrote. "The ... strategy seems plainly contrary to the National Capital Plan and to Walter Burley Griffin's vision for the nation's capital."

Mr Odgers said the earthworks threatened the integrity of Walter Burley Griffin's design, in which each of the streets radiating from Parliament House, including Adelaide Avenue, ended in a definable landscape feature - in this case the west ridges.

The ridges separated the Woden Valley from inner Canberra and because of their elevation, also contributed to an important view into the valley.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society had supported development in Yarralumla, but had grave concerns about the current proposal.

"We can't support essentially the reshaping and lowering of the two west ridges which define the break between inner Canberra and Woden and also the vista along Adelaide Avenue out to the mountains," he said, urging the government to consider a smaller development which paid more respect to the contours of the ridge and the landscape.

"This change to the topography, the change to the vistas, the accommodation of a grid street pattern is contrary to a number of principles that are enshrined in the National Capital Plan," he said.

Local and nearby residents oppose the plan. The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects has also criticised the damage it does to the Dunrossil Drive approach to Government House, which it describes as "one of the great pastoral character landscapes in southern Australia".

The National Capital Authority is in talks with the agency, seeking improvements to protect the character of the landscape near Government House.