

John Bell, President of the Deakin Residents' Association – speaking notes

My comments this evening are going to focus on Deakin. Of course, much of what has already been said is relevant to both Yarralumla and Deakin. That makes my task a little easier.

Back in September last year we hosted a meeting here and I spoke about urban intensification on the City to Woden corridor. At that time, I addressed my criticisms to a report commissioned by the ACT Government from consultants. We had to obtain this report through Freedom of Information. I refer to it as the Mecone report. The DRA provided public access to this report via its website.

I am not going to revisit my October talk except to point out that the Mecone report failed to make a case for increased densification in Inner South Canberra.

Indeed, Mecone said that “there is no need for catalytic changes to the existing planning framework when purely considering the capacity for growth that already exists” (page 3). The only other reason I can think of is the need to pay for the tram.

I argued, back in my October talk, that much of the literature on intensification is based on concerns about greenhouse gas emissions from cars. However these are becoming increasingly irrelevant as we move to electric vehicles.

The downside of densification includes increased heat island effects as a result of reduced tree cover. In addition, apartment buildings are less likely to install rooftop solar and solar hot water, and use more energy for heating, cooling and clothes drying. The literature shows that intensification leads to more disputation between neighbors. Body corporate problems and poor quality construction are also a source of problems arising from densification.

Not only is densification not needed in Deakin and Yarralumla, but it is incompatible with the Garden City concept, which underpins the Burley Griffin design. Intensification almost always involves the removal of all existing trees on blocks being redeveloped. You can see examples of this in our suburbs.

The ACT Government has now incorporated its intensification plans in its draft District Strategy for the Inner South. I am going to focus my comments on this document and its implications for Deakin.

Like the Mecone report, the draft District Strategy lack precision and detail. For example, maps have been marked up with a felt tip pen without regard to the location of existing streets. It is hard to determine the boundaries to some of the areas that they are proposing to change. Equally, much of Deakin is described as “an investigation area”. However the draft Strategy leaves little room for doubt – the Government sees Deakin as a zone to be targeted for increased density.

The investigation zone appears to extend to the area of Deakin between Macgregor Street and Adelaide Avenue. On the Kent Street side of this area, buildings up to six storeys could be possible. On the other side of Kent Street, greater heights are envisaged. The draft Strategy states on Page 60 that “Investigation zones will provide opportunities for additional development and density”.

There are also plans to convert Adelaide Avenue into another Northbourne Avenue. The sides of Adelaide Avenue seen as providing “one of the greatest opportunities for new housing” (page 88). The draft District Strategy states that Adelaide Avenue “is a wide roadway which is challenging for pedestrians to cross”. This suggests that the authors of the draft Strategy don't know the area.. It goes on to tell us that the new Strategy will fix this perceived problem:

In future, Adelaide Avenue could be a vibrant, multimodal corridor that better connects into local neighbourhoods in Yarralumla and Deakin.

The draft Strategy doesn't recognize that Adelaide Avenue was designed to ensure efficient travel between the City and Woden. The provision of such inter-town transit corridors has been a fundamental part of Canberra planning since the days of the NCDC. Among other things, it helps to keep traffic out of the residential areas.

The draft Strategy provides for buildings up to six storeys on park frontages. Presumably this includes La Trobe and Rosemary Dobson Park.

The Deakin shops (called Deakin local centre) and the area around them is to be redeveloped. Parking provision is to be reduced, with ninety degree parking introduced on "edge streets" (page 138). I can't see this sort of approach working in Hopetoun Crescent.

The white zone of Figure 38 appears to include an area between Hopetoun Crescent and Robe Street identified as a "change area" (page 119). This area extends up one side of Hopetoun and include the area across Macgregor from the IGA. In these areas the Strategy proposes to "create blocks of one hectare (or less) to provide more walkable access". Those of us who live there would mostly agree that we already have walkable access.

The height limits in the change area are not explicitly stated but, by inference from the rest of the document, they could be up to six storeys.

Finally, the maps in the draft Strategic Plan do not recognize the presence of embassies and other areas which are the responsibility of the National Capital Authority, and outside the control of the ACT Government.

Conclusion

My conclusion is that, for Deakin and Yarralumla, the draft District Strategy for Inner South Canberra:

- Lacks a rationale
- In planning terms, it has not been thoroughly thought through
- It abandons the garden city concept which underpinned Burley Griffin's design
- It proposes densification which runs contrary to the wishes of residents
- It will result in poor redevelopment outcomes
- Heat island effects will increase
- There will be net negative impacts on the environment

The material which has been presented tonight will be placed on the YRA and DRA websites. I urge you to draw on it and put in submissions to the consultation process. We need to send a clear message to the Government that this so called "planning reform" is a backwards step.

Thankyou for your attention.