



THE DICKSON RESIDENTS GROUP

STATEMENT - 3 NOVEMBER 2017

The Future of Dickson Parklands (Section 72)

The Dickson Residents Group presents this paper to help identify and promote discussion of the issues relating to the future of Dickson Parklands (Section 72). Our position is that the Territory Plan's strategic directions requires a Master Plan that covers the whole of Dickson Parklands (Sec 72). Given the significance of this location and the importance of planning for and delivering community services for a diverse and growing catchment (53,000 persons in the 2016 Census with an average growth rate of 2.4% per annum), a master plan will save both money and time by ensuring that appropriate infrastructure is staged in a timely fashion and that vital services are capable of being co-located to maximise accessibility. A master plan will also mean that social, economic and environmental impacts can be properly identified and addressed.

The Dickson Residents Group requests that all stakeholders are brought into the tent so that a full range of issues can be scoped and addressed before the ACT Government proceeds with any changes to block zoning, relevant lease conditions, stormwater/sewerage and utilities, or commits funds to specific development options on the site or authorises estate planning.

1. Inner North Cultural Facilities – ensuring healthy communities

With increases in population density well underway across the Inner North of Canberra, and significantly more in the pipeline, the Dickson Parklands site has outstanding potential given its location, attributes, and relative underutilisation. Since the first block was developed for Dickson Pool in 1963-4 this site has been explicitly designated for community uses. The Dickson Residents Group urges the government to ensure that the burgeoning population's future needs for social, community, cultural and arts facilities are facilitated, and that this land bank is carefully managed and not squandered.

2. Green Spaces and Urban Forests – preventing future heat islands

The Dickson Parklands site hosts a variety of uses within an attractive established landscape setting, dating back to the original plantings by Dr Bertram Dickson for the CSIRO's former Experiment Station in the early 1940s, linking Downer's heritage-listed farm buildings to old Sullivans Creek. Permeating and bordering the site are a number of valuable green spaces and landscape corridors, together with shrubs and trees that contribute to the ambience of the area and its aesthetic appeal for pedestrians and visitors. Residents feel very strongly about retaining a generous proportion of the Parklands site as landscaped open space, and preserving an abundance of deep-rooted trees within and around the site for amenity, as a buffer, and for environmental benefits. Lack of children's playgrounds in Dickson is also a concern and provision for structured and unstructured play space and community gardens close to the Sullivans Creek corridor would help address identified need.

3. Special Needs Housing – supporting people with disabilities and aged women

There have been repeated suggestions that a portion of the site could be used for some form of aged care and associated housing. While the 2014 workshops and meetings noted this (see point 6), it has come to our attention that there are key groups not being adequately catered for within the Inner North. There is an urgent need for innovative and affordable housing for

people with disabilities, plus there is a widening gap in affordable housing options for aged women.

4. Common Ground project announced for Dickson

The ACT Government has suggested that following the success of Common Ground in Gungahlin, a similar project be built and potentially located on Block 25 (the old Downer Club site). The Dickson Residents Group strongly supports increased provision of low-cost housing targeting homelessness with wrap around services such as Common Ground and innovative community housing/co-housing. In fact we urge the ACT Government to be thinking bigger and to draw up options immediately to distribute facilities and services across Canberra.

5. Canberra Seniors Centre – making services for the aged more accessible

The Dickson Residents Group has been in conversations with the Canberra Seniors Centre about their strategic plans to transfer operations from their Turner site to a purpose-built facility near Dickson shopping centre, co-located with COTA. The Dickson Residents Group supports the Canberra Seniors Centre move and is working with them to identify options.

6. The 2014 Consultations – keeping faith with participants by demonstrating transparency

In 2014 a series of public workshops were hosted by ACT Government agencies (the Economic Development Directorate, LDA, and Community Services Directorate) on the future development potential of 2 or 3 blocks on the Parklands site and a revised layout for the site as a whole. Unfortunately, the resulting documentation and background reports have not been released to participants who attended in good faith and were given assurances that their input would feed in to recommendations. The Dickson Residents Group request that the full documentation and all related technical and summary reports be made public to allow for future discussions to be properly informed.

The existing documentation, research, and design and feasibility studies provide a useful starting point for a master planning process. The Dickson Residents Group believes that there is a considerable amount of background material available and that it would be misleading to launch a planning initiative and withhold that information.

7. Making best use of the whole site and creating an integrated and cohesive hub

The Dickson Residents Group believes that most if not all of the above possibilities could be catered for within Dickson Parklands alongside all of the present lessees, taking into account future needs, noise, traffic and parking, and safety concerns. A demonstration project of innovative affordable social housing and co-housing, integrated with community services and aged care, will require an effective master plan for the site as a whole. Giving effect to that master plan will require changes to the zoning, changes to lease conditions, upgraded stormwater/sewerage and utilities, and upgrades to the public realm. Heritage protection for remnant Experiment Station plantings and the Dickson Aquatic Centre's buildings is likely to also be necessary.

Conclusion: Master Plan for Dickson Parklands

Dickson Residents Group requests that the ACT Government launch a rigorous master planning process to identify and investigate not only what options could be considered for the Parklands site – but also whether there are other opportunities in surrounding areas nearby that should also be considered for provision of any of the services mentioned above. Staging, site management and implementation should be addressed in the master plan.

The final master plan should be given statutory force via a draft Territory Plan variation.