



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, PUBLIC WORKS AND
TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Draft variation No 298—Holt
\(Belconnen golf course\)](#))

Members:

MS M PORTER (The Chair)
MS C LE COUTEUR (The Deputy Chair)
MR A COE

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2010

Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 6205 0435)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 1.34 pm.

BARR, MR ANDREW, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Minister for Gaming and Racing

CALNAN, MR GARRICK, Manager, Development Policy, Planning Services Branch, ACT Planning and Land Authority

MOSER, MS SONYA, Team Leader, Development Policy, Planning Services Branch, ACT Planning and Land Authority

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, minister and officials. I would like to welcome you to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services inquiry into draft variation No 298, Holt—or, as it is also known, the Belconnen golf course. I presume that you are very familiar with the privilege card and its contents.

Mr Barr: Yes, Madam Chair.

THE CHAIR: Could you all confirm that for me; thank you very much. At every hearing on this matter, I have to make a declaration that Madison made a contribution to my campaign at the last election, which is on the public record and in no way, obviously, influences my position as chair of the committee inquiring into this matter. Do you want to make some opening remarks, minister?

Mr Barr: No thank you, Madam Chair. I am happy to go to questions.

THE CHAIR: We will go straight to questions. Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. My first question partly relates to your other portfolio, Mr Barr. It is a golf course, and I am sure all of us here would be aware that a number of golf courses seem to have plans to no longer be golf courses. My question is: how do we work out that this is the right bit of golf course to no longer be a golf course? There are at least three others that are expressing a desire to change their use or part of their use.

Mr Barr: There are, I suppose, a number of elements in response to that question. First and foremost is the issue of golf's popularity as a sport relative to other sports. As I understand it, there is a nationwide trend that is reflected also in the ACT towards a slightly reduced amount of participation in golf as a sport. That can be partially offset, in terms of the total numbers of people participating, by a growing population. But I think it is fair to say that, in a competitive sporting environment, in terms of the choices people make about how they will spend their leisure time, it would appear that golf is less popular than it perhaps once was in Australia and that people are pursuing other recreational activities. So there is a broader issue around golf club membership and relative questions about the expense of participating in that sport against some others.

That is a background from a sport and recreation perspective as to why, particularly in the context of the ACT, there are issues in relation to golf clubs. When you add in the element of water costs rising considerably and, until recently—apart from days like today—a scarcity of water available, that, too, has impacted on the operating model

for a number of golf courses.

I know there is a view around the golfing industry in the ACT and from a sport and recreation perspective that we are fairly well catered for in terms of golf courses per head of population. I am not aware of anyone demanding any more golf courses in the territory. Clearly, there are a number of courses for a variety of different reasons that have been experiencing financial difficulty, declining memberships and a range of challenges in order to remain viable operations.

That is the background to golf generally. In relation to the specifics around this draft variation, I will invite Mr Calnan, who has been working on these sorts of issues for many years, to provide us with the benefit of his experience in this area.

Mr Calnan: The site in question is occupied by an additional nine holes that were added to the Belconnen golf course in the early 1990s. It was at a time when golf was much more popular than it is now. In fact, golf was experiencing a bit of a boom in the late 80s and 90s. Sometimes people associate that with the success of Greg Norman and his high international profile. There were probably other reasons as well.

At that time there were a number of new golf courses developed in the ACT. There were two golf courses developed in Gungahlin, an additional nine holes were added to this course in Belconnen, an additional nine holes were added to the Royal Canberra golf course, and the Murrumbidgee golf course was developed in Tuggeranong, all during the 1990s. So there was a rapid expansion in the supply of golfing options during the 1990s. As the minister mentioned, since then there has been a decline in the demand for that type of recreational activity. There has also been an association with climate change and the concerns associated with increasing water costs which have made it much more expensive.

In 2003, the Belconnen club took a decision to cease the operation of the additional nine holes. The advice we have had is that it did not have the demand to support the ongoing operation of 27 holes of golf, with all the other competition that existed within the territory. Since that time that area has been essentially left. It has not been irrigated or maintained as a golf course. On the aerial photograph that I have provided to you, you can see how the site in question has essentially just returned to being dryland grass, with the remnants of the landscaping that had been planted in association with the original development of the course. But it has not operated as a golf course since 2003.

An arrangement has been entered into, in that the ownership of the golf club changed. Magpies became involved and there is an arrangement between Magpies and Madison developments. We were approached by Madison with this proposal to develop this part of the course for housing. It has been the subject of quite detailed consideration. The proposal raised a number of issues which needed careful consideration—potential vulnerability of the site to bushfire attack, the location in relation to the surrounding development and all of those sorts of things.

We have worked through all of those issues very carefully, I think, and in the end concluded that this proposal could be supported. As a result of that we requested that

Madison prepare a detailed planning report to address all of the issues that were raised by the proposal. We looked at that very carefully. We consulted with all of the relevant agencies within the ACT government. When we were satisfied that those issues had been addressed reasonably, we then agreed to the proposal being released as a draft variation to the territory plan. That occurred back in March this year. It was released for public comment. We had 22 submissions, some of which raised issues that we were already aware of. Many of them actually expressed support for the proposal. We have subsequently worked through that and we have now put forward a recommended final variation for approval. That is what is currently before you now. Probably the best thing for us to do is to answer any questions that you might have.

MR COE: Will you please expand upon what consultation has taken place since 2004-05 on this? I think it is important that it be on the record at this public hearing.

Mr Calnan: What—

MR COE: What consultation has taken place over the last five or six years on this issue in general?

Mr Calnan: The consultation that has occurred to date has really been undertaken this year through the public consultation process associated with the territory plan. We also asked the proponent to undertake consultation as part of the preparation of the planning report, and that was undertaken. The proponent undertook meetings at the golf club and prior to the submission of the planning report. The detailed proposals were released as part of the territory plan variation. There was a public meeting held on 27 April. It was not a meeting; it was more of a drop-in session where people were able to come in, ask questions and get clarification of the issues. That was really about trying to make sure that people had the necessary information about the proposal so that they could make their public submissions, if they were interested in doing so, in relation to the draft variation.

MR COE: Are you or the minister able to expand on some of the consultation that has taken place over the last few years in response to one submission or another with regard to the development?

Mr Barr: Obviously, the issues around development in this area have been truly canvassed over a number of years—certainly well prior to my time in the planning portfolio and as minister for sport and recreation. I am aware that there has been a long history. Obviously, some development has occurred within the golf course precinct since my junior golf-playing days when I used to play at this golf course. So it is not an unusual issue. As I have outlined in response to Ms Le Couteur's opening question, it is not at all unusual in the context of other golf courses around the city. One has only to think of the developments that are adjacent to Yowani and to some of the other courses around Canberra—Capital at Narrabundah, clearly, at the top of the hill there.

So these are not new issues. I recognise that from time to time there is controversy in relation to these sorts of proposals. But I do not think anyone could say that we have not as a community grappled with this particular issue before, and undoubtedly we will continue to do so on a number of sites.

Clearly, one of the ways to ensure the long-term viability of such facilities is to have residential development close by. Not only does it provide a different sort of living opportunity for people who might be particularly attracted to having a golf course just outside their front door, but clearly it provides an opportunity for those golf clubs to grow their memberships, and in the current environment for golf club membership I think that is important.

MR COE: Regarding this specific variation, as opposed to earlier iterations in whatever form they might have been, when did ACTPLA pretty much start this process of consulting with the developer and other stakeholders and put together the variation?

Mr Calnan: This has been going on for some time. There have been discussions going on for some time. Getting to a position of the Planning Authority being able to support a draft variation has really only happened in the last 12 months or so. That was after the proponent had done this initial round of consultation as part of the preparation of the planning report and after we had consulted with various agencies around some of the issues that the proposal raised, to make sure that there was a level of support for it. But the discussions with the proponent go back a number of years. I could not tell you; it was probably in about 2004-05 when the initial discussion commenced. I do not have all of that documentation with me, but it has been going on for quite a long time.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned, Mr Calnan, that the nine holes were actually introduced at a certain point. Before that, what was the name designated for that particular piece of land? Do we know? If you do not know, take it on notice. Obviously, it was something else before it was designated—

Mr Calnan: There was a plan variation in the 1990s. It was originally an 18-hole course. There was a housing development proposed and there was a land acquisition undertaken at that time when this additional land was acquired to modify the layout of the 18-hole course and then to add an additional nine holes. So there was additional land acquired at that time. To be honest, I cannot recall; it is going back probably 15 years or so. The urban boundary, as defined by the national capital plan, actually follows the boundary of this area. So it has always been regarded as part of the urban area. Whether it was previously—I would need to go back and check, to be honest.

THE CHAIR: I think the minister was saying before that when this decision was made golf was quite popular as a sport?

Mr Calnan: Yes, there was a lot of demand. There had been a golf course planned for Gungahlin, which is now the Gungahlin Lakes course. There was a proposal for an additional course—the Gold Creek course at Harcourt Hill. That was developed as a golf course housing estate in the early 1990s. Perhaps their timing was bad in the sense that their expansion coincided with these other courses coming on stream, and with golf not really following the trajectory that it had been until that point in time.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have a question about transport for the residents here. My understanding is that it is largely going to be focusing towards aged care—not a hostel

or nursing home, but that is the market there. It is a distance from any facilities, as far as I am aware. I imagine that if it is focusing on aged care they will not be the longest walkers or bike riders. How are you going to make the transport work for these people in a way that is not entirely car dependent? Particularly given that the government is about to sign on to a 40 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas targets, how will that address this?

Mr Calnan: It is correct to say that it is not immediately adjacent to local facilities and services. However, there are other areas of Canberra that have similar distances from housing at the edge of suburbs to the local centre and schools as this area has. It is not particularly unusual in terms of the distance from the site. There is a bus stop located at the corner of Spofforth Street and Drake Brockman Drive.

THE CHAIR: So the bus stop is—

Mr Calnan: That is an existing bus stop. It is ultimately up to ACTION, I guess, as to whether they choose to serve this area with public transport. There has been some talk of possible community buses being provided. As I said, it is not unusual in terms of the distance from the development to the local facilities. There are other areas in Canberra that have similar separations.

Ms Moser: Could I just add to that. In the concept plan we have actually got a requirement to incorporate a continuous pathway which provides a slope which allows access for people with disabilities between the estate and the location of the closest bus stop as well. Any development on the site would have to take that into account and meet that criterion within the concept plan.

MS LE COUTEUR: And would all the streets have footpaths?

Ms Moser: That will be determined by the subdivision code and the requirements of the subdivision code or the ED—estate development—guide at the time. Generally there are requirements for footpaths. However, it would depend on the length of the road and how many houses as to whether it was on both sides or not.

Mr Calnan: This is an indicative plan that has been provided by the proponent and it does identify an accessible path of travel up to the facilities that are proposed. But as Sonya has mentioned, there is also a requirement for them to provide a connection to the nearest bus stop as part of the development.

MS LE COUTEUR: Talking about the facilities that are proposed, what level of assurance is there that they will exist and that they will exist in a way where in 10 years time they will still exist as viable small shops, as medical facilities? I am not quite sure how viable this is and what level of commitment there is from anybody.

Mr Calnan: It is not really possible for us to ensure the viability of facilities. The proponents have talked to us. They are quite enthusiastic about providing a level of facilities in this community precinct that is identified in the variation. We have made provision for that, but we do recognise that it may be difficult to support the level of services and facilities that has been identified.

I guess all we can do is make provision for that to occur. We think it would be desirable in terms of supporting the local community. There has been talk about this being developed as a community title scheme where there will be some collective management of the way those facilities operate. It is not proposed as a commercial centre in the same way as a local centre or a local shopping centre that might be planned as part of a new estate is. It is really some local-level facilities to service this community.

Mr Barr: And presumably its success or otherwise will depend on the level of community support from the residents within the area. If they value the facility and choose to utilise it, it will thrive; if they do not, it will not.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. What level of commitment is there to actually construct it in the first place? You said that all you could do was zone. Is that the only level of commitment there is—that you will zone, and if the proponent decides to build it, it is great; if the proponent does not, then that is how it is?

Mr Calnan: Yes. It is not mandatory that they construct it. It was really presented to us by the proponents—that they wanted to do it. We were concerned about giving an indication that this was going to be a commercial centre, because we did not think that it would be viable—

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes; it is quite small for a commercial centre.

Mr Calnan: if it had to be self-sustaining.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Mr Calnan: But we can see that, as part of a bigger collective, in the same way as large multi-unit developments can support facilities that perhaps cannot be supported in other circumstances, this could work. We were quite happy to make provision for it, but, as I said, we are not in a position to guarantee either its delivery or its viability.

Ms Moser: It also may be a possibility that in a community activity centre, if something was done such as a healthcare facility—it may be that a doctor comes there once or twice a week if there is demand for that. We have made provision in the concept plan about the community precinct. If it is proposed, then it has to be managed as part of the community title scheme. That is a mandatory rule in the plan as proposed.

It may be that there ends up not being something there a hundred per cent of the time, but it does provide the opportunity for something that might be quite a viable option in terms of something like that happening maybe a couple of days a week. And then there is the consideration of it being located reasonably close to the Holt local centre. On that basis we have got some rules which limit the size of the shop—if there was to be a shop, for example, in the community centre—to no greater than 200 square metres.

MR COE: What consultation or what discussions have you had with Roads ACT and ACTION about the variation?

Ms Moser: Sorry; can you repeat the question?

MR COE: What discussions have you had with Roads ACT or ACTION about the variation?

Ms Moser: We have consulted TAMS in terms of the road section within that. They have had a look at the traffic report that is an attachment to the planning study. There were some concerns also raised by the community in that regard. They are thinking that the capacity of the current roads is going to be able to cope. It is my understanding that the proponents also propose certain road management strategies. I understand that they are appearing later today and they can probably go into more detail in regard to that. But there has certainly been support from Roads ACT.

We did consult with ACTION. It is my understanding—I do not think we actually got a specific comment back—that in general they look at demand for services, and whether there is going to be a bus route into the site or not would depend on the demand. Because of that uncertainty regarding demand, we have chosen to require the pathway to the existing bus stop to ensure that there is reasonable access with reasonable slope so that all people, including those with a disability, will be able to access that existing bus stop.

MR COE: Has any consideration been given for a road or a footpath going from the northern part of the development up to Southern Cross and past the substation or anything like that?

Ms Moser: I think that that would be quite a difficult path across the golf course. Britten-Jones Drive actually goes through the middle of the golf course up to Parkwood Road, which adjoins Southern Cross Drive. Across the golf course people have also raised concerns about golfer and pedestrian safety in that regard, so it may not be desirable to do that. I think that the proponent, later today, can better answer that question.

Mr Calnan: It has never been part of the proposal and it has really not been considered as an option.

MR COE: Will it be possible to go from the northern part of the development across the golf course into Britten-Jones?

Mr Calnan: No. We have talked about making provision for emergency access across the golf course, but there is no intention to have any formal roadway across the golf course.

MS LE COUTEUR: Or even footpath?

Mr Calnan: No. Only for emergency—that egress.

Ms Moser: However, if the proponent were to put something like that forward, what we are proposing in terms of our plans would not—we could still consider whether that is going to be appropriate, if golfer and pedestrian safety could be considered. But

that is something that the proponent would need to look into.

Mr Calnan: But this is the indicative plan. We are not at the point of considering an estate development plan for the site. The proponent has provided us with an indicative plan. I understand that this link here is just to provide access to the golf course, not to provide for a road linking through to Southern Cross Drive. That has never been part of the consideration.

MS LE COUTEUR: So will it actually give access to the golf course? I am aware of Yowani, I think it is, in north Canberra, where they have fenced it all off so that, for the people who are living around it, there is only one way in. They used to be able to get in through their backyards.

Mr Barr: Get on and play a few holes without going to the clubhouse.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. It is a kilometre walk all the way around. You would think that golfers could possibly manage it but—

Mr Barr: I would presume that the golf club would have an interest in ensuring that anyone who is wanting to just get on and play a few holes of golf actually did have to pay some green fees and start from either the first or the 10th tee, as would be customary in golf etiquette. I suppose it is really a question for the proponent, in the end.

Mr Calnan: With respect to the details of the interface here—for instance, whether it would be a solid fence, transparent fencing or whether there would be some other sort of interface—we really have not got into that level of detail at this point. We have talked about making provision for emergency access so that, in the event that this road was blocked for some reason, there was still opportunity to get out of the estate. That would be something they would need to identify as part of their detailed plans.

MS LE COUTEUR: I asked earlier about how this sat in terms of the government's soon-to-be commitment to a 40 per cent greenhouse gas reduction target, and you did not actually address that. Do you have any thoughts about that or is that something that ACTPLA is not considering?

Mr Barr: In the context of any future development having to meet the relevant requirements of the territory plan and the Building Code of Australia in relation to, say, energy efficiency and those sorts of elements, it is from the point that policy has changed and new developments are required to meet those new performance standards. So the water-sensitive urban design requirements, the six star et cetera, are requirements for new development in the ACT. Is the question heading in a direction that is more around the location in the context of spatial planning? Is that where you are heading with it?

MS LE COUTEUR: No. My understanding is that shortly the Assembly is likely to pass a greenhouse gas reduction target of 40 per cent by 2020. Certainly, the Labor Party have said that this is their intention. So I think we can probably assume that before anything is actually done physically in this development that will be the ACT's target. Certainly, one would expect that this would be in operation in 2020. In 300

new houses, have you thought at all about how this is consistent or not with a 40 per cent reduction of greenhouse gases in the ACT? Or is this something that does not enter your—

Mr Barr: The modelling for that policy decision is taken in light of anticipated future population growth. You cannot look at each territory plan variation in the context of whether it is going to be a net contributor or otherwise to greenhouse gas emissions. Ultimately, we know we have to plan now for somewhere in the order of 80,000 additional Canberrans by 2030, so by 2020 presumably about 40,000 people, just through natural population increase—births exceeding deaths.

The projections around that greenhouse gas emissions target are based on a growing population. The question then becomes one of opportunity cost, I suppose, around where within the city new development will occur. One would also want to look at some of the triple-bottom-line elements of this in that sustainability, as I am sure we all agree, is measured more than just in terms of environmental sustainability. We would want to be more efficiently utilising existing infrastructure and locating people close to existing services.

I understand the direction of the questioning but I think it is perhaps beyond the scope of a territory plan variation of this nature to be able to give you a figure that will say, “This will lead to so many extra tonnes of carbon emissions.” Obviously, there will be some, but what we can confidently say is that the emissions from development in Canberra in 2010 or later will be considerably less than under previous policy settings, be it 10 years ago, 20 years ago or 30 years ago. We have all collectively made some decisions about what levels of sustainability we want to build into future urban development. This will have to comply with those standards.

Mr Calnan: There are a number of policy initiatives that have already been put in place like the six-star energy rating. This development, if it is approved, will have to comply with those. In terms of the location, whilst it is on the edge of Belconnen, it is a similar distance from central Canberra as other similar sorts of greenfield developments in Gungahlin. As I mentioned earlier, whilst this particular development is not adjacent to the local facilities in Holt, it is a similar distance to the distance from the edge of other suburbs to the local facilities that serve those. It is really about the future policy settings that are put in place. We cannot foreshadow those in this variation. There will be other mechanisms that will do that. But this development will need to comply with those—with any policy settings that are put in place by the government to achieve those sorts of outcomes.

MR COE: What need is there for independent living units for aged care or retirement options in Canberra?

Mr Calnan: I do not have the data but I can tell you that Canberra’s population is ageing. The growth in the cohort of older persons as an overall proportion of our population is going to increase. I think there is wide consensus around that.

Mr Barr: Not always, but I will come to that in a moment.

Mr Calnan: There has been quite significant demand that government has been

attempting to address over recent years with release of sites for aged-care facilities. There is nothing in this plan that requires this particular development to be occupied by older people. It is available, as I understand it—certainly under the territory plan—for anybody who wishes to purchase into it. However, the proponent has indicated to us that it is intending to market it by aiming at that independent aged cohort.

Mr Barr: Or potentially transient singles and childless couples. It is possible.

Mr Calnan: There is nothing that will exclude them.

Mr Barr: They certainly would not be excluded, would they? I am sure there will not be a monoculture created.

MS LE COUTEUR: There could be aged people who are transient singles.

Mr Barr: Indeed, at different points in their life cycle, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Many of them will be, probably.

Mr Barr: That is exactly the sort of accommodation that this city needs to provide because we have an overabundance of accommodation that caters for a particular sort of household structure and a pretty significant undersupply, if you know current demand in this area and demographic projections. So it would appear that the proponent has done some skilful market research and identified an area of particular need. I am yet to meet a developer who wants to develop a product that no-one wants to buy.

MS LE COUTEUR: One of the other areas of concern, obviously, of being on the outskirts is bushfires. The positive thing is that there are not any trees on the other side—but only from a bushfire point of view, I hasten to say.

Mr Barr: I understand there are sweeping views of trees in the distance, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is this going to be vulnerable to bushfires?

Mr Calnan: It is on the western edge of the city, and that is an issue that we have looked at very carefully and had advice on from the Emergency Services Agency. They are satisfied that the provisions that are made in the plan to deal with the issues are satisfactory. There is a requirement for development along the edge to be built to higher bushfire attack standards. So that issue has been carefully considered and has been signed off by the ESA as being acceptable.

I think the original proposal for this development came not long after the 2003 bushfire, so we were very sensitive to that issue and we have been very sensitive to it all along. We have continually emphasised to the proponent that they needed to address that issue, and they have taken it seriously and they have been able to convince us and the relevant authority that this is an acceptable development in that location.

Ms Moser: We have also put in the concept plan a specific requirement which is a

rule that the estate development plan identifies bushfire protection measures, including higher construction standards, required of buildings in bushfire prone areas as endorsed by the Emergency Services Agency. That is actually a mandatory rule. So there is no opportunity to do something different from that.

THE CHAIR: As members have no more questions, thank you very much for appearing before us, minister and officials. We might have had one question taken on notice about what the territory plan was for that particular area regarding land use policy—

Mr Barr: Previous land use policy for that area.

Mr Calnan: Yes, we can provide it to the secretary.

THE CHAIR: before the nine holes were actually established in the first place. We will get a copy of the transcript to you in the usual manner and you can check it for accuracy. Thank you very much.

Mr Barr: Thank you very much.

Mr Calnan: Thank you very much.

BURROWS, MR JON, General Manager, Magpies Group

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Mr Burrows. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services inquiring into draft variation No 298 for the Belconnen golf course in Holt. Have you had a chance to read, or are you familiar with, the privileges?

Mr Burrows: I did. I have. Yes, I am familiar.

THE CHAIR: And you are happy with it? Did you understand the content of that?

Mr Burrows: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Do you have some opening remarks that you wish to make before going to questions? We have until 3 o'clock with you.

Mr Burrows: Yes, just briefly. I am the General Manager of the Magpies Group. We took over the golf club in April 2002. It had been in administration for a small amount of time. The golf club makes a small profit each year, but it does it under very difficult conditions. Everything is a little bit old up there. We support this proposal to develop the land at the old 19 to 27 holes, mainly because it will give us better infrastructure and, hopefully, more members and more green fee players and make the whole enterprise, the golf club, a little bit more sustainable.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I will throw it open to questions from members. Ms Le Couteur?

MS LE COUTEUR: Thank you. You are not the owners of the land?

Mr Burrows: We lease it.

MS LE COUTEUR: You lease it. I am just reading through your submission again. You have got an MOU with the actual owners?

Mr Burrows: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: What degree of assurance do you have that this will continue as a golf course into the future? I am not sure if you were here at the beginning of the hearing, but I asked Mr Barr about the situation of golf courses in Canberra. There are a number of them which appear to be trying to reduce their size.

Mr Burrows: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Or else be gotten rid of altogether. Is this likely to be the first stage, from your point of view as a golf club, of a process which ends up with all housing?

Mr Burrows: A golf course has to have 18 holes. There are pitch and putt courses—I think Southern Cross have got a pitch and putt; that is a little bit different—but even

pitch and putts are 18 holes. We do not see this as ever decreasing to be smaller than a full championship 72-par, 18-hole golf course. It needs a certain length and distance to become a 72-par golf course.

MS LE COUTEUR: So that is how you see it?

Mr Burrows: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: But is your agreement with the owners, Woodhaven, such that that will continue in perpetuity?

Mr Burrows: Our lease covers the 18 holes. Where this development is going—our only concern with the development is how it will affect golf as far water and public safety are concerned, and public safety includes golfers hitting balls into houses.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Mr Burrows: It will be an 18-hole golf course.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you think there will be any issues on your border?

Mr Burrows: There are a few minor issues down near the bottom of the current second, but we have pretty well addressed those. The main thing is getting space so that balls do not lob into houses and that sort of thing. We cannot see any real issues. Over the period of discussions—we have had discussions for quite a number of years—there have been a few minor issues, and they have all been resolved. The minor issues have been things like the distance between holes and little things like that.

MR COE: With regard to the Magpies' involvement in the club, how far does this go back and what changes did the Magpies bring to the club to make it more viable?

Mr Burrows: In 2002—that is when we took it over, in April 2002—basically we just streamlined it a bit. Then, nearly a year to the day from when we took it over, in April 2003, we closed the old 19 and 27 holes. There were a number of reasons. When it was a 27-hole golf course—that goes back 30 years—there was no Gungahlin Lakes golf course; there was no Gold Creek golf course. There is one out at Goolabri, a little nine-hole golf course. The other thing is that golf is not a growing game—it is a steady to even declining game—so there was no need to keep those 19 to 27 holes open at all.

The other thing is that physically we could not keep them open in summer because we just could not get enough water. That is still the case. This year is not a problem. The biggest water issue we have got with most of it is how it drops out of the sky. We get water from Molonglo; that can keep the 18 holes going, but we just cannot get enough to keep 27. And we do not need it. We would have gone broke if we had tried to keep the extra nine holes open.

MR COE: From a financial point of view, how will it make the course more sustainable? What do you intend to do?

Mr Burrows: Part of the agreement we have with the developers is that we will get some new infrastructure. There is a new clubhouse and things like the irrigation. The irrigation there is 30 years old; we need new pipes. That is a million dollar investment. These are the things you do not see. These are underground pipes; they are starting to bust because they are 30 years old. And it is just generally better fringes, better improvement.

MR COE: Do you see the residents of this new development as much of a target or do you see them as perhaps even being existing members at the club that may well want to move closer?

Mr Burrows: Hopefully, if there are roughly 300 people in there, we will get some. I do not know if we will get a lot, but with golf you do not need a real lot. We would have 650 members. A lot do live on the current estate. If we got 20 or 30 members out of the new development, we would be more than happy. The other thing for the golf club—the golf clubs that are struggling do not really have social clubs that get used or clubhouses that get used very well. That is a very important part of the business for us—that we get that little bit of trickle through, whether it is local builders or whatever. We get a little bit of that now, but nowhere near enough. The facilities are getting pretty old up there. The clubhouse is very old; it needs a fair bit of money spent on it.

MR COE: With regard to the new clubhouse, what changes would you see with the number of gaming machines and the allocation of them?

Mr Burrows: If we can get additional gaming machines, we would, but that is only a small part of the thing. It is more just getting the bar, the food and the general public turning up there for social-type events. And better facilities for golfers when they finish golf, especially on corporate days. And corporate days for us are not a hundred people; it is more like 30 people. We can do it now, but we do not do it particularly well. People who might play golf two or three times a year will pay more money to play somewhere else because there are better facilities at the end of their golf, and probably better facilities while they are at golf. We do not have particularly good golf footpaths or anything like that. We just have gravel paths and things like that.

MR COE: Is it likely that the new clubhouse would become the main facility for the Magpies?

Mr Burrows: No, it would not.

MR COE: It will still be at Kippax?

Mr Burrows: It will stay at Kippax. Kippax is the main site. We have put a lot of resources into the golf course, and we have also got the city club; we do it from the sports club. The main club does good trade. We would not change that. Plus we own the main club; we lease the golf club.

MS LE COUTEUR: Are your members as a whole happy with this proposal?

Mr Burrows: Most are. There are a few that are not, but I think the ones that are not are the ones that are probably a little bit uneducated, as in they do not really know the full extent. But we have had—

MS LE COUTEUR: The full extent of what? Your problems, the full extent of the development or what?

Mr Burrows: They listen to rumours. They think it will not be 18 holes, it will 16 holes; or it will not be a 72-par golf course, it will be reduced. We have had a number of public meetings. We send out monthly newsletters to keep them up to date as much as possible. We cannot tell them a lot because this is a very slow process, but we just keep them up to date as much as we can.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is this going to make a difference to the water supply? I think you have had negotiations in the past around using grey water and things like that.

Mr Burrows: We use the Molonglo. We have had discussions with the developers about that. The important thing for us is that we have got our Molonglo supply intact. We get a lot of water from a dam down at the other end of the golf course. That will be intact. What we call the main dam is actually a very small dam.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you have not looked at all at potentially using water from the development, be it grey water or roof water?

Mr Burrows: We have not resolved that. If we can, we would take it, but we have not resolved it. Our main concern is to get continuity of water and the cost of water. We are still discussing that but we have not come up with a final answer.

MS LE COUTEUR: So it is not going to be something of a condition of the development that water is diverted from the development to the golf course?

Mr Burrows: My understanding is that water will be diverted to some of the ponds. There is a group of ponds there. The development itself would probably take it for its own irrigation and other purposes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you mean these little ones?

Mr Burrows: Yes. Our understanding is that they will use most of their own recycled water themselves. We will take any excess but they will be using most of it themselves.

MR COE: I guess, in net terms, as long as someone is using the water, there is no change, really?

Mr Burrows: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: But it is not going to be a water plus for you. One of the things that Federal was talking about in their proposed development was that, if it went ahead in the way they were talking about, they would sell the blocks on the basis that the water that ran off from it, including from the roofs, went to the golf course. I think

it is much more attractive for the people—

Mr Burrows: It is going to be captured there. It is not a big concern for us because we do have a good water supply. Federal have got a very poor water supply. That is a big difference. We will take any water we can, if it is suitable.

MR COE: With respect to that area, holes 19 through 27, is that actually a part of your current catchment or is the water from there flowing elsewhere?

Mr Burrows: No. We get a little bit of catchment off the first and there is a little bit of stormwater but it is very minor. In fact, this is the first year that that dam has ever filled up by itself in eight years, and it is only because we have had so much rain. So the main dam is basically a holding pond where we pump water up from the Molonglo sewerage works. We extended it a little bit, deepened it, a few years back. It has probably got about eight million litres in it. In hot weather, that would last us maybe 10 or 12 days. So we have to constantly pump up water. We do get a bit of water down the bottom now; we put in a secondary line. There is another course down near Parkwood Road—another dam down on Parkwood Road. That holds far more water than the main dam, or what we call the main dam.

MR COE: Is that dam near the first going to change at all with the development?

Mr Burrows: The shape will change, yes. The final capacity will be about the same.

MR COE: What process have you had to go through internally to get the tick of approval? Has it simply been a board decision or have you had to go to the membership?

Mr Burrows: We have had over the years probably three or four public meetings, and with the board. We have not invited the developer because we want people to openly say what they want. We really have to keep our members on side because if they do not like it and go, we have got nothing, so we want to keep them on side. We want to keep them educated as much as possible. There will be some minor disruption but it will not affect the golf as such. It might affect the fringe a little bit, but as far as day-to-day golf is concerned, golfers do not like change very much.

MR COE: When you talk about the members, are you referring to the golf club members?

Mr Burrows: Golf members.

MR COE: What hoops have you had to jump through with regard to the social club members?

Mr Burrows: The social club members, to tell the truth, do not care, because there are only a few that use that as a regular. They are the workers in the area. As long as they can get a cold beer and a steak on Friday nights, they like it because it is a quiet club. They have got no concerns.

MR COE: From a governance point of view, have you had to take this to the social

club members for approval?

Mr Burrows: We have kept our social club members, through our annual newsletters, up to date, but we have not had anybody ring us and ask questions about it.

MR COE: Otherwise it has just been a board decision and that is sufficient?

Mr Burrows: The golf committee really looks at that plan in detail, not our board, because our board do not know a lot about golf. They do not know lengths and pars and things like that, so we get the golf club committee to have a good look at that. These are people that play golf every day of the week and we accept their advice and their concerns—not that they have had many. We have had discussions with the developers but at the end of the day they have been relatively minor.

MS LE COUTEUR: From a governance point of view, you have the golf members separate from the other—

Mr Burrows: No, we treat them all as the same. We have got 16,000 members; 650 of them pay more money to play golf. But the 16,000 all get discounted green fees if they play golf. We would like as many people as possible to play golf. We have probably got about 2,000 people who go up there and play golf socially and another 650 that are golf members and pay their extra \$800 a year.

MS LE COUTEUR: In my question before I had not really appreciated that it was all within the one. If you just look at the golf members, are they happy with the change—

Mr Burrows: The majority are, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: as distinct from the 16,000 who probably—

Mr Burrows: At the last public meeting we had we pushed it as hard as possible. We pushed it for a month: “Turn up, turn up, turn up.” Probably 30 turned up. Sometimes a big meeting is not necessarily a good meeting. Big meetings sometimes indicate that there is a big concern. I think because we kept them a little bit informed along the way, they were not overly concerned. We had big sized plans up on the noticeboards for months so they could have a look at them. I think, day to day, what they were doing was talking to the golf committee and saying, “What is happening here?” Some people cannot read plans. They will say, “That looks too close to a house,” and you will say, “It’s 150 metres; it is further away than you are now.” When they hear that they say, “Oh, I didn’t realise that.” To get a golf course onto an A1 piece of paper makes it look pretty small.

THE CHAIR: There being no further questions, thank you very much, Mr Burrows. We will get a copy of the transcript to you very shortly so you can have a look at it and check it for accuracy. You did not take any questions on notice so there is nothing you have to get back to us about. Thank you very much for appearing before us this afternoon.

Mr Burrows: Thank you.

O'KEEFFE, MR DAVID, Managing Director, Madison
COHEN, MR PAUL, Town Planning Consultant, Campbell Dion Pty Ltd

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Mr O'Keeffe and Mr Cohen. Welcome to this inquiry by the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services into draft variation No 298, Holt—Belconnen golf course. Thank you for appearing before us this afternoon. Are you familiar with the privilege statement?

Mr O'Keeffe: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Could you indicate that you understand it and that you are happy with it?

Mr Cohen: Yes.

Mr O'Keeffe: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you have some opening remarks?

Mr O'Keeffe: No particular opening remarks. No doubt the committee will have a series of questions. I have made some notes in relation to some of the questions asked of some of the previous witnesses appearing before the committee. If time permits, we may come back and perhaps clarify some of the issues that were addressed by them. Mr Cohen is here as he has been doing all the planning reports and studies for us that are involved in the process. He is a town planner by practice and his role is as a consultant to Madison, who are effectively project managers for Woodhaven Investments, who are the owners of the property.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr O'Keeffe. Given that you have written down some answers to some of the queries that have been raised from members, it might help if you would address those questions now, if you do not mind.

Mr O'Keeffe: Certainly. Ms Le Couteur, you raised a question in relation to the reduction in golf courses. There are two elements to that. One is that this actually is not a reduction in the golf course. The golf course itself is intended to be maintained as a par 72 18-hole championship course. As Mr Burrows pointed out, to be a championship course it does need to have a certain length—what they call length—to it. I do not know the exact technical distance that it is, but certainly, in all the consultation that has taken place with the Magpies, and specifically their golf committee, they have reinforced the need for a certain number of metres, and we have ensured that that has been met.

Mr Barr, the Minister for Planning, made reference to the number of persons per golf course. Anecdotally, the study that was carried out by Ernst & Young for the Australian Golf Union back in about 2003 identified that in the metropolitan areas of Sydney and Melbourne they have one golf course per 50,000 persons and Canberra has approximately one golf course per 30,000 persons. So we are very well serviced in relation to the availability of golf courses. Other than perhaps a Saturday morning when they have their competitions, it is not very hard; most golf courses are what they call a walk-on. On the occasional public holiday when it is sunny and the weather is

conducive, you might need to make a booking, but generally speaking access to golf is very readily available in Canberra.

Mr Coe asked a question in relation to what consultation had been carried out on the development. I draw your attention to page 3 of the submission that we made to the committee. Paragraph 10 has a listing of the consultation. The most recent formal consultation as part of the territory plan variation process took place in April 2010. Prior to that there were, at the request of the planning authority, consultations in August 2009. These were carried out formally; they were advertised and promoted in the public realm.

Prior to that, though, there was quite a deal of public consultation with the general public in addition to the consultation done by Magpies with their members. The consultation we had included with the Belconnen Community Council, the West Belconnen LAPAC, along with residents and the general public, on about another three or four occasions, outside the formal requirements for public consultation by ACTPLA.

Ms Le Couteur raised an issue in relation to the longer term existence and viability of the community facilities. As I think Mr Calnan from ACTPLA pointed out, it is intended at this stage that the estate will operate under a community title structure, not necessarily for every individual dwelling but there will an overarching community title control, if you like. The community facilities that are intended are not intended to be on a commercial basis. In other words, we are not setting them up to be a mini commercial centre that we can go and collect rent from. They are in fact intended to be part of the overall estate and would be within the control, if you like, of that estate.

In simple terms, if you looked at it, say, as an apartment development where they might have a gym and a swimming pool, this would be a similar sort of situation where those areas were controlled by the overall estate. That is not to say that they may not wish to make a small charge. I think part of the proposal includes some storage areas; they may wish to collect a small amount of rent on some of those facilities in order to ensure the long-term maintenance of those facilities. But we do not envisage as the proponents that we would retain a longer term financial interest in, or ownership of, any part of the estate.

You also raised a question, Ms Le Couteur, in regard to how this development may help the government to achieve their target of a 40 per cent reduction in greenhouse emissions. As I think Minister Barr pointed out, obviously, the development will be subject to the planning requirements in relation to six-star energy ratings that may be in place. We have said from early days that it is the intention for this development to be more than just meeting minimum requirements.

This brings me to another question that you raised with Mr Burrows regarding the recycling and use of stormwater. At this stage it is certainly intended that there will be the availability of stormwater for use by the estate for the maintenance of the public areas, to assist. We see that there is some potential marketing benefit to being able to offer people a housing estate that may not have the same water restrictions or controls because of water being made available.

As Mr Burrows pointed out, we have had discussions about trading of water between the golf course and the housing estate. If we have surplus water that cannot be stored, they might as well use it. Similarly, during the summer period, if we need some more water we may well be able to tap in to theirs. We are looking at the possibility and have made some inquiries about the possibility of sewer mining from the Woodhaven housing estate. It is a distinct possibility for their black water to be treated and made available for the estate.

With the actual houses themselves, we envisage that the vast majority, if not all of them, would be designed to the adaptable housing code, which would make them more suitable to the older population that we envisage this development will be generally pitched towards. It is not proposed to be an age-restricted development; rather, it is proposed to be an age-targeted development.

Our experience in the past, having done many developments like this since approximately 1995, has been that you will generally attract one principal cohort of the population. That is not to say that there would not be some young families that may wish to take up residence there. We have also noticed that a lot of couples that are same-sex cohabiting couples seem to have a particular affinity with the sort of product that we develop. We envisage that the estate would include quite a range or a mix of the community in general.

Getting back to your point about the 40 per cent reduction, there is nothing that we have specifically said at this point that will necessarily go above and beyond. However, as recently as only some three weeks ago, we have started some discussions with one of the local suppliers in Canberra about the possibility of the installation of photovoltaic panels for houses.

We were involved in the construction of the housing for the Olympic village over 10 years ago at the suburb of Newington in Sydney, where the cost of doing the photovoltaic panels was \$25,000 per dwelling. From our discussions with Harvey Norman some three weeks ago, they can be supplied and installed on residential houses for as little as about \$3,000. Given the significant reduction in cost associated with that, we will be giving further consideration to that.

Mr Coe asked a question about the need for independent living and that type of living in Canberra. Without having the actual hard statistical evidence in front of me—Mr Cohen, I think, does have some of that—all I can say anecdotally is that there is enormous demand for this sort of product, and specifically the single-level product. A month would not go by where we would not get several calls to our office wanting to know, “Are you going to do any more of the Gardens type developments?” It is the sort of development that we have become fairly well recognised for and they are principally single-level dwellings, villa-type dwellings, in a town house type configuration or layout. There is enormous demand.

Unfortunately, the ACT government, or specifically the Land Development Agency, have seen fit to now release all town house land with a requirement that it be of two-storey construction. I think this is very unfortunate. It makes it very difficult for people in Canberra now, particularly older persons. When you think about it, if they are going to be moving from one dwelling to another, they are going to be moving for

reasons that it will be easier, not more difficult, and I cannot see how two-storey dwellings are easier to live in than single-level dwellings.

LDA will talk about, “Oh well, you can put a bedroom downstairs,” but a lot of older couples, whilst they live together, for reasons of one snoring too much or whatever, quite often sleep in separate bedrooms. So someone gets to sleep in the one bedroom downstairs and someone still has to go upstairs. Conversely, with that sort of design, given the small amount of land that is available per allotment, it really means that by the time you have a kitchen, a bedroom and a garage downstairs, you have little or no living area downstairs, so you still have to go upstairs to your living area, anyway.

One of what we think will be the keys to the success of this development is the fact that we will be offering principally a totally single-level development. The only real exceptions to that would be in some areas of the site where the slope is such that it would require the car accommodation alone to be at a lower level. But that would still result in all the living areas and bedrooms being on the one level.

As I said, the demand for that type of product, and given Canberra’s ageing population, is very significant. Whenever we have been fortunate enough to have product available we have had no trouble with it being well received in the marketplace. In fact, we have not been able to provide that sort of product for about four years now, since we did a development in Narrabundah on one of the club sites. I think that was the subject of an inquiry by this committee some years ago.

Ms Le Couteur raised a question in relation to vulnerability to bushfires. This was raised very early on when the estate was first mooted. As I think Mr Calnan from ACTPLA pointed out, we were proposing the estate about a month or so before the bushfires unfortunately hit Canberra. There has been enormous work done by Mr Tony Fearnside from Renaissance Forestry. There is quite a detailed report which is included in the planning study. At the end of the day, this site, as Mr Barr, the Minister for Planning, pointed out, does not have significant trees in the immediate vicinity or in the road of it; it is basically grasslands. Whilst being on the western fringe was seen as being relatively low risk, notwithstanding, there are some constraints that have been placed on the type of construction that would take place on the fringe of the proposed estate.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for answering all of those questions that members had previously asked. Going back to the community centre, I have a question around that. You said that facility would be managed by the people that actually lived on the estate under a community title, and may charge some storage fees, I think I heard you say. Would that be only to people who lived in the estate or would it be open to people, say, who were members of the golf club or members of the general public who lived in the other housing development that is within the golf course itself, or across the road from Spofforth Street, for instance?

Mr O’Keeffe: Ms Porter, we would not set that rule ourselves; we would leave that to the estate itself. In relation to the reference about a small charge for storage, we have asked ACTPLA that there be a capacity to provide small storage units along the lines of a mini U-Stow-It type arrangement. What we have found in providing a product for the ageing population is that, quite often, particularly when they are downsizing, they

have many personal effects that they, for a very good reason, would not wish to dispose of. When they are moving from a very large home to a smaller home they may not necessarily be able to accommodate all of those personal effects but would still like to keep them close by for reasons of ready access to them.

As I said, we are envisaging that there would be some storage units made available that may be let out at a nominal charge to again assist in offsetting the costs of the overall community centre itself. It might be a situation where those living within the estate, who are effectively the owners of the community centre, may have a nominal annual or weekly usage charge for the facilities that are provided. If they wish to generate some additional income, they will need to strike a balance between perhaps generating some income and having privacy and the facilities to themselves.

But that is why we are confident that that community centre can remain viable in the long term, because there would be some opportunity for them to generate some income to help defray the costs rather than be having to charge every resident. We envisage that this estate will have up to 350 dwellings. If you divide the cost of running the community centre by 350 dwellings, it is important that there is not a big impost on the individual residents, who may not have a high level of income when they are living in the estate. So we are mindful of striking that balance. Again, we would defer to the residents themselves to determine how they want to structure that in the final set-up.

THE CHAIR: You made reference to the fact that you believe there is quite a high demand for this type of accommodation. I have two questions. First, the thing I have heard is that people often find it hard to find affordable housing of that nature when they are downsizing. The other one is this: have you had much interest expressed from the region itself—people who want to stay in the region and move into one of these places?

Mr O’Keeffe: They are good points. We would have a list; there could be close to 100 people on that list who have called us at various stages over the last six or seven years expressing an interest or a desire to be made aware “when it finally happens”. How many of those may ultimately actually live there I do not know.

I can say that a high proportion of those are generally within about a five or seven-kilometre radius of the area. That is by virtue of—when they say they are from Higgins, Macgregor, Latham or Holt itself, you can work that out fairly quickly. We have also had inquiry from people who live in those areas who have an elderly parent living away from Canberra and who would like their parent to be closer to them, and closer to grandchildren in some cases.

In regard to your question in relation to affordability, we recognise that the housing in the immediate vicinity of this estate—the same people that make up the majority of the inquiry that we have had—have some of the least expensive housing in the ACT. In fact, I believe that the west Belconnen housing has pretty much the lowest median house price in the ACT.

Our experience tells us that when you are selling a product into that market, you need to pitch that product at a price below the existing housing, because people who live in

the existing houses quite probably—hopefully, from their perspective—no longer have any debt associated with the ownership of that dwelling. However, when they sell that, they have agent costs in selling it. When they buy something new, they have acquisition costs, principally stamp duty, and they have moving costs. We have always been of the view that we would define affordability as being at a price point about 10 per cent less than the median house price in the immediate vicinity.

The last time we looked at the median house price in the immediate vicinity, we defined that as being in the suburbs of Holt, Higgins, Scullin, Latham, Florey, Macgregor, Charnwood, Fraser—and we may have gone one or two more suburbs out. This was going back possibly 18 or so months ago; it was I think in the order of 350,000. We would envisage that a high proportion—and by high proportion we are looking at at least 30 per cent of the housing—would be, in those terms of 18 months ago, at about the \$300,000 or \$310,000 price point.

If we cannot provide housing at that price point, we will suffer or the development will not be as popular, because people simply will not be able to afford to move there. They will not be able to sell their home and move; the dollars just will not add up. It is as simple as that. We are not looking for labels, to be pinned as model citizens; rather, economic forces will help ensure that there is a high proportion of housing provided at the more affordable level.

If anyone is wanting assurance, I can say that under current legislation we are only required to provide 10 per cent of the estate as affordable. But the economic realities of where this development is proposed will help ensure that there is a far higher proportion than that 10 per cent minimum.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Le Couteur.

MS LE COUTEUR: Can I just check a bit more about universal design. You have mentioned that you have got the principles of universal design from North Carolina State University; you mentioned it earlier in your presentation. What exactly are you going to do? Are the houses going to be adaptable but not designed for wheelchair accessibility at the beginning? Can you just go through what you mean in a bit more detail?

Mr O’Keeffe: Okay. I will refer back to some of the developments that Madison have done over the last probably five or six years, principally in north Watson, Fadden and Gowrie. Again, as a townhouse site they had a requirement that 10 per cent of the dwellings be designed to meet the adaptable housing code. We actually had, generally speaking, in the order of 95 per cent.

What that meant, Ms Le Couteur, was that, for all intents and purposes, when you walked in the house nothing looked any different. The front door was a bit wider. All the doorways were 820 as opposed to maybe being 720 or 770. In the wall panels themselves in the wet areas, we put panelling in so that grab rails could be easily affixed to those at any point in time in the future. As I said, for all intents and purposes you would never have known it was an adaptable house; there was nothing visually changed about it. But it certainly had the capacity to have variations made to it to facilitate disabled living in some cases.

MS LE COUTEUR: Would it be 95 per cent this time, 100 per cent or what?

Mr O’Keeffe: We certainly envisage that, yes. There is no reason why it would not be. Industry has, on some occasions, bleated about the cost of doing adaptable housing. As part of industry, let me say that yes, there is some additional cost. But once you have done it on a few occasions, you realise that it is more inconvenience than cost, to be frank with you. It is getting tradespeople to do something that they are not used to doing. Once they have done it on a few developments, they have been educated and it becomes relatively standard.

The houses that may not meet the adaptable housing requirement would perhaps be the small proportion that will have the car accommodation underneath. Technically they will not meet it because of the fact that there will be stairs going up from the car accommodation to the living-bedroom areas. But once they are on that living area level, we would envisage that they, too, would be designed to the adaptable housing code.

There are in fact three levels of that. I will be frank about that. Basically there is A, B and C. When I say that 95 per cent met the adaptable housing code, that was to standard C, which is the minimum. But it is certainly sufficient. People able to live at that level of adaptability—there would be very few people that would require more adaptation than that house would require in terms of their future living needs.

Paul, was there anything you would like to add?

Mr Cohen: I think your question went to universal design rather than adaptable housing, didn’t it?

MS LE COUTEUR: Both really.

Mr Cohen: In terms of universal design, we are really talking about attention to architectural detail in terms of making the house permeable and making the house readable from the point of view of the person who lives in it—the functional relationships: putting things in relation to each other in a commonsense way so that people can intuitively find a way from one part of a house to another.

There has been an architect who has been working on this stuff for some time, on the Madison project. I have spoken to him on occasions about this. He understands that what is being looked for is those principles in terms of making the place easy to use so that you do not have places that cause it to be difficult to move around and that you go into a place and you can instinctively read where you go to get to the next thing in the way in which the principles of universal design really set out. He understands that that is what is being looked for when these houses are planned.

MS LE COUTEUR: Along those lines, will you be having footpaths or how will you have accommodation for people who are not in a car but who may not be very able walkers?

Mr O’Keeffe: I am not sure if the planning report included the level of detail—I think

it did—showing the pathways.

Mr Cohen: It shows the pathways, yes.

Mr O’Keeffe: Certainly, the intention is that there will be a network of footpaths throughout the estate that will basically see, I believe, every road have a footpath on at least one side.

Mr Cohen: That the slope of the footpath meets the code—the ACT code.

Mr O’Keeffe: So it is intended to be a pedestrian-friendly estate. Our research—we have some associates in the United States, where this form of housing is enormously popular, and very well provided, I must say. It is very well provided in terms of the amount of estates that are developed along the lines. You will see in some of the reports that we have done that we reference the term “active adult housing”. I make no apology for the fact that we have borrowed it from the United States, but it sums up exactly what this housing is. It is designed for adults who are reasonably active and wish to remain active in their twilight period, their twilight years. This housing—research indicates that two of the main interests that people in these estates have are reading and walking. So we see the provision of footpaths and walking paths throughout the estate as being not just good design, but a good marketing ploy, to be frank about it.

Again, if the committee is wanting reassurances as to whether this will be done, let me say that it is a commonsense approach from our perspective, because it will help make the estate more popular in the marketplace.

MS LE COUTEUR: Have you looked at reducing the road speed, given that it will all be residential and given your pedestrian focus?

Mr Cohen: The residential code that we have to abide by really dictates the road speed. The road widths and the road geometry determine or lower the road speed, generally speaking. The roads that are in the code are designed for 40 to 50 kilometres an hour, so they are quite low-range speeds.

We are at the beginning of a very long process. The next stage of this process is the development of an estate development plan, which will answer a lot of the questions that you asked Mr Barr and Mr Calnan. In relation to the detail in preparing the estate development plan, the suburban development code, in the territory plan, which specifies all the road geometries in terms of vertical geometry and horizontal geometry, has to come into play, and therefore the estate is designed to meet those road widths, verge widths and so on. They are all based on a 40 to 50-kilometre an hour speed limit through the residential area. So they are quite low speed rates.

MR COE: I notice from paragraph 48 of the submission that that is going to involve the relocation of the overhead powerline. Is that something that you have had to do before? That seems like a pretty serious task.

Mr Cohen: It is a big job, yes. There is one of this nature either being done now or being contemplated in the Kingston area. It is fairly normal to do undergrounding of

power cables up to 66 kV; 132 kV is a big job. There are a couple of things about this one. The actual bends that you can put in the cable as you turn a 132-kV line underground are actually more flexible than you think. The radiuses of the curves are tighter than we first anticipated when we started this. We were able to indicate a line on the ground that the cable would follow. Actew were able to accept that as something that was okay to get around a curve. I think the curve had a radius of six metres, which is pretty tight.

It is an expensive project, but putting the cable in the ground does not create any health hazard of any consequence. In order to have your hair drop out, you have to stand over the cable for quite a considerable period of time—right over the cable itself. You would probably die of old age before anything else happened—before anything happens to you in terms of electromagnetic. We discovered, as we went through this process, very early in the day, that the reservations that you have for power cables—the wide 40-metre reservations for power cables are not really to do with electromagnetic radiation; they are to do with the tower falling over and hitting you as it comes down.

Mr O’Keeffe: They are 20-metre-tall towers, so if it fell one way you would need 20 metres and if it fell the other way you would need 20 metres. That is why you need a 40-metre reservation.

Mr Cohen: If you have a look at the diagram in the planning report, with the cable buried in the ground at about two metres, the radiation peaks right over the top of the cable, but within two metres it has fallen. It goes out like that. It falls dramatically as you move two metres away from it. And where the cable is buried—it is in an uninhabited part of the estate. It is on an edge between a fairway and the residential estate itself. Therefore it would be in a part where people might walk around it and pass over it, but nobody would be in the vicinity of the cable for long enough to fall into that harm.

MR COE: Is there any difficulty in finding contractors to do that kind of work?

Mr Cohen: No. Actew are terribly keen to do that.

MR COE: Actew are doing a fee for service themselves?

Mr Cohen: Yes. It is very profitable to do.

Mr O’Keeffe: It will come at great cost, I can assure you.

Mr Cohen: It is a huge cost, but if we stay on target for this—the great problem with this is turning the power off and turning the power on again. There is a projected upgrading of the system which I think will occur at the end of next year. Actew will be turning the power on and off. If we are ready to go then, we can coordinate this with that project.

Mr O’Keeffe: So no-one will be able to blame us for their power going off overnight.

Mr Cohen: Yes. It is just a matter of all the things being set up. There is a buzz bar;

the power is turned off, hooked onto the new buzz bar, hooked off, and away it goes. That is it. It sounds simple but—

Mr O’Keeffe: So if you get up and your milk is warm one morning, don’t blame us.

Mr Cohen: That was a major factor, to move that out.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have been quite a long time planning this; I have known about it for a while. Why has it taken so long?

Mr Cohen: All this started back at about the time of the 2003 fires. A number of the people who were originally involved in this, in different parts of it, were affected by the fires. So there was an initial resistance to a proposal on the urban fringe, which might suffer from bushfire effect. I know that on the planning side in ACTPLA there were people who were living in that area who were affected. And I know from my own point of view—I have lived in Duffy and we lost so many houses in our street—that it was an emotional issue and it did take us some time to work our way around the bushfire issues.

As we went along, there were other issues that affected it, but we have methodically gone through all of the technical aspects of the job. That has taken some considerable period of time. Our traffic studies have been quite extensive and they have taken us quite long periods of time to do. The studies into water usage have not been slow to come to conclusion. We have done extensive ecological studies of the site to ensure that we were not interfering with wildlife corridors. We have done everything that needs to be done. Our time that was spent with the Rural Fire Service has gone on and on so that they have satisfied themselves that we are meeting our requirements.

It has taken us seven years to get to this stage, but I think that we are justified in being confident at this time that we have satisfied all of the standards that we have been required to satisfy. It has taken a long time, certainly. I am amazed that Madison has been as persistent and as patient as they have been. We have not just done it in a slapdash way; we have made sure that we have covered every issue.

Mr O’Keeffe: The other element, Ms Le Couteur, is that the original proposal was for what we termed a continuing care retirement community. It had aged-care living and a formal retirement village. Over the course of the early years we received feedback—some subtle and some not so subtle—that, in addition to the issue of the bushfires that were a concern, that was compounded further by a perception that we were just going to put our old people out on the edge of the city.

The irony of that was that at the time we were working very closely with Morshead Home. Had the estate gone ahead as intended at that stage, they would have been the providers of the aged-care services. They were extremely enthusiastic and excited about the prospect of having an aged-care facility in that location because—the very reason that a lot of people objected to it—it was private. Their facility in Lyneham suffers enormously from break-ins. It is in the broader community, and because they are seen as very vulnerable people they are very vulnerable to attack. Something that is not as readily in the public realm was seen as more private.

Be that as it may, for better or for worse, we accepted the feedback that we got and, in light of that, deleted the aged-care component. We also found, over time, that the market was actually changing in relation to retirement villages. The feedback we are getting now is that there is a lot of resistance to the formal retirement village, with the loan and licence arrangements and the deferred management fee structures that are in place. We have got a slightly more sophisticated, shall I say, ageing populace, with people who are no longer prepared to see 30, 40 and 50 per cent of what they lent to the retirement village operator evaporate when they hand the property back in years to come. So this development does not propose to have a formal retirement village structure. We envisage that people will be able to come in and buy them outright, as they would buy any other private dwelling.

That is not to say that we may not put some structure in place for those who may not be in a position to buy a property outright but may wish to still avail themselves of the properties. We do not have anything particular in mind, but we would give consideration to alternative ownership structures if there was likely to be a demand and it was seen to be of benefit to both the purchaser and ourselves as the developers.

MS LE COUTEUR: At some stages I have heard talk of possible community title for this. Can you just elaborate? You talked a bit about the fact that it will not be a conventional retirement development and the possible alternatives. What will it be?

Mr O’Keeffe: Community title is new to the ACT. It has been very much in use in New South Wales for a good number of years. I am aware of only one existing estate—that, I think, is at Uriarra—that is done under community title. I believe the north Watson estate at the old Canberra Fair is being done as community title. There is one at Hume, is there?

Mr Cohen: There is one going in at Hume, yes.

Mr O’Keeffe: That will be an industrial one.

Mr Cohen: No.

Mr O’Keeffe: Anyway, we envisage that within this estate there will be some town house developments. They will have your standard sort of unit title arrangements. But we believe that the best way to put some controls in place for the overall estate is by means of the community title. The individual dwellings—in other words, those dwellings that are not under the unit title—may well still be just a standard dwelling. But in the discussions that we have had with the leasing section within ACTPLA they can still fall under an overarching community title for the estate. Their individual dwelling may not be community title, but the community facilities would come under community title.

MS LE COUTEUR: So in that case you would buy two things. You would buy your house on a standard lease—

Mr O’Keeffe: And you would be required to contribute—

MS LE COUTEUR: And then you would buy a share in the community title?

Mr O’Keeffe: You would not buy a share in the community title. As part of buying that house, you would then automatically—

MS LE COUTEUR: But they would legally be two separate things. Would you be able to sell one without the other? How would that work?

Mr O’Keeffe: No. That is what I say. They would go hand in hand. In other words, when you buy this house you are automatically buying X number of—let us say that the community title association has 10,000 units; the house that you bought may come with 350 units of those 10,000 units.

MS LE COUTEUR: And you have to buy into the community title? You cannot not buy into it?

Mr O’Keeffe: That is correct, yes. For example, the actual roads themselves may fall under community title. As I said, we have had two or three discussions with the leasing section over this and we are really waiting for their advisement on this. They basically said, “Go away and get your territory plan variation; then come back and we will sit down with you.” The leasing section, by their own admission, have very little experience with the community title structure.

Mr Cohen: But the Community Title Act sets out the proportion of the land that is divided into community title on the executive level and community title on the bulk level. So it has to be a minimum of two leases. One of them is the management part of the lease. It is not like unit title where, by a process of diminution, the head title disappears and you are just left with the unit plans.

MS LE COUTEUR: You are talking about the roads as being community property. Are you implying that the ACT government will not be maintaining these or owning them?

Mr O’Keeffe: That is our preference at this stage, Ms Le Couteur, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Why is it your preference?

Mr O’Keeffe: Because we believe it will give us some more flexibility in the design of the estate itself, partially revolving around setbacks et cetera. Paul, do you want to elaborate on the technical aspects of that?

Mr Cohen: On the widths of the—

Mr O’Keeffe: Yes; verges et cetera.

Mr Cohen: We are going to have to meet the suburban code, but we may not have to meet the horizontal geometry of intersections.

Mr O’Keeffe: Generally speaking, it would give us more flexibility with the design of the estate if the public areas were under community title. Part of what we are looking at, as I previously mentioned, is the capacity to utilise the water—that is,

stormwater, grey water and even treated black water—for irrigation of the estate. So again, if we have got control of those—when I say “we”, if the community association has got control of those areas—

Mr Cohen: And the services in turn.

Mr O’Keeffe: it is far easier to manage those things.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is there anything then that will ensure that they will remain public space? From what you are saying, they will not be public space: all of this will be private space.

Mr Cohen: How do you mean “public space”?

MS LE COUTEUR: I am allowed to walk or drive my car, ride my bike along the streets and the road.

Mr Cohen: In a road reservation?

MS LE COUTEUR: It is a public space. I can only be stopped if I am causing a public nuisance or things like that.

Mr Cohen: It would not change at all.

MS LE COUTEUR: But if it is normal community title, I do not necessarily have a right to be on that space. It is not a public area.

Mr O’Keeffe: I would respectfully question that because you can drive into a town house development anywhere in Canberra, and this would be the same. It does not matter whether you go to the units over there in Reid or any other town house development throughout Canberra. You can drive in there and you can drive out, and this would be the same as that.

Mr Cohen: Unless it is gated.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, that is where I was coming from. I do not know if that is what you were planning but you are setting up that it could become a gated community.

Mr O’Keeffe: I will be frank with you: it has been suggested to us by others, “You should do it as a gated estate.” I am philosophically and personally opposed to that, but in a sense that is irrelevant. However, ACTPLA have an almost unwritten policy that thou shalt not have any gated estates or communities. So I could never envisage ACTPLA agreeing to it, and that would certainly be a requirement.

MS LE COUTEUR: How would ACTPLA have to agree to it? If it has already been established that it is not public space because—

Mr O’Keeffe: Because to make it a gated estate there would have to be structures built and those structures would require planning and building approval.

MS LE COUTEUR: So it is a very small part of it. They might be small enough but it could be got around because there are quite a few small things you could build without planning approval. If it is just the structures—

Mr O’Keeffe: Again, Ms Le Couteur, I guess I would refer to every other unit development throughout Canberra. What is to stop them making their estates a gated estate as well?

MR COE: There are one or two that I can think of.

MS LE COUTEUR: There is at least one.

MR COE: There is one over near Watson that has one of those chains that goes across the driveway. In terms of the roads, obviously the maintenance and management of that space is considerably more. Will that require a much larger sinking fund? Wouldn’t that require a fair bit of seed capital at the start?

Mr O’Keeffe: Again, the finalisation of that would be determined by discussions revolving around the value of the land, which would result in the rates that the individual owners would pay. So if you are living in a standard residential house, your UCV might be, say, \$200,000 and you pay your rates in accordance with that UCV. If you are living in a town house development, you might have a UCV of \$50,000 and the rates you pay are effectively a quarter.

If that was the case, Mr Coe, there would be additional cost associated with the body corporate type levies. However, that would generally be offset by the reduced rates that you would be paying because your UCV is lower. We are very mindful of that. People are not going to buy homes in this estate if they can see that they are going to have enormous ongoing expense that they are going to need to meet on a monthly or quarterly basis. We need to be smart about how we do this to ensure that people do not shy away because of that likely future cost.

THE CHAIR: I think we have managed to go over time, which is quite interesting. Thank you very much for appearing before us this afternoon and for answering all of our questions. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you so that you can check it for accuracy. I do not believe you took any questions on notice, so there is nothing you need to get back to us about. Thank you very much to both of you.

Mr O’Keeffe: Thank you for the invitation.

The committee adjourned at 3.33 pm.