



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND  
PLANNING**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Petition 002-25: Hawker Village shops redevelopment](#))

**Members:**

**MS J CLAY (Chair)**  
**MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)**  
**MR P CAIN**  
**MS C TOUGH**

**PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 28 AUGUST 2025**

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**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Mr J Bunce (Ph: 620 50199)**

**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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## **Privilege statement**

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.00 am**

**LOVEDAY, MR ANDREW**, Director of Property Development, Woolworths Group

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, and welcome to the second public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning for our inquiry into petition 00225: Hawker Village shops redevelopment.

Last week our committee visited the Hawker Village shops and heard from locals, who attended a public hearing at Hawker College, some of whom are here today. Thank you for your interest. Today we will hear from Woolworths, Friends of Hawker Village, Belconnen Community Council, Belconnen Way Hotel, and the ACT government.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of our city and our region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event or who may be watching from somewhere else.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly, and it has the same standing as the proceedings of the Assembly itself. Today's evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard, and it will be published. Our proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. If you take a question on notice, it would be useful if you could use the words, "I will take that on notice." That helps our committee to track down those questions later from the transcript.

I would like to welcome Mr Andrew Loveday, representing Woolworths Group. Thank you very much for your time and for joining us, Andrew. As a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege, and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not inviting opening statements. Do you have an opening statement that you need to make? We can take one in writing, if needed.

**Mr Loveday:** I have prepared an opening statement.

**THE CHAIR:** We would love to hear your opening statement.

**Mr Loveday:** Thank you, Chair, and committee members, for inviting Woolworths to address the inquiry today. Woolworths has held a long-term presence in the ACT. We currently operate 21 supermarkets and employ over 2,600 team members.

In order to better service our customers, we often develop new supermarkets in areas where we determine there is an undersupply or need. Our new store development services communities by maximising shopping convenience through new shopping

services, easier car parking, and support for a range of other businesses and services, and local infrastructure. Our developments also support broader retail players, including medical centres, cafes, fitness centres and the like.

Over the last five years, we have added hundreds of specialty tenancies in centres that we have developed, supporting jobs and small businesses through our developments. Importantly, our developments also support further investment in local areas through the supply of critical infrastructure which supports housing growth.

In Hawker, our application to acquire four parcels of land from the ACT government would support a new retail development, including a full-line Woolworths supermarket and direct-to-boot, new specialty shops, and updates to the current centre, including new walkways, public areas, a playground, and car parking. Our proposal is in response to demand for new retail amenity and choice in the area.

In the supermarket industry, a benchmark that is commonly used is one full-line supermarket for every 8,000 to 10,000 persons within a defined catchment. We have identified that the area serviced by the existing Hawker supermarket contains approximately 12,000 persons within a primary catchment, and with a secondary population of 16,000 persons, with no full-line supermarkets in the whole catchment.

Based on this benchmark, there is strong demand for a full-line supermarket in the Hawker central area, and up to three stores in a broader catchment. Our current store cannot sufficiently meet this demand, which means that more people need to jump in their cars and travel to a larger shop to access a large range of items. This is what underpins our proposal to revitalise a section of the Hawker shopping precinct.

The proposal would provide further benefits, including new construction jobs and ongoing retail jobs, renewable energy to power the store and tenancies, electric vehicle charging, a playground, an outdoor space, and refreshed landscaping. The proposal also supports some of the big drivers and targets within the Belconnen district centre, including greater investment in group centres to ensure long-term viability.

With this said, we understand that there is now a greater focus on delivering more housing. Whilst our proposal to date has not included housing, we understand that this may be a key element which the ACT government may want to see on the site, to support its target of 30,000 new homes. We believe new housing for families and individuals with various levels of income is important. As we progress through the next stages of master planning for this site, we are willing to work with government to determine whether a mixed-use development, including housing, is feasible on this site, having regard to planning, urban design, construction cost and feasibility outcomes.

It is important to note that, at this stage, Woolworths is only applying to purchase four lots of government land. If approved, a development application would need to be submitted and assessed, a process where far more detail on the proposed development and further community consultation would be considered.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to take any questions from you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Andrew. You have already gone to my first question.

Government, at the moment, has said, “No, thank you,” to the application in the current form for a direct sale, because it does not meet government’s strategic objectives. It meets Woolies’ strategic objectives, but not ACT government’s, for a group centre. The government particularly highlighted shop-top housing, and housing. It sounds like you are considering a different proposal that includes housing. Have I heard that correctly?

**Mr Loveday:** What we have said to date is that we have put forward a plan that we think focuses on delivering an improved community-based shopping centre precinct, which we think does meet some of the strategic objectives of the government. More recently, we have become aware of the government’s focus on housing and that they would like to see more housing on this site.

We are in the early stages of concept planning. Any development of this site will be subject to a rigorous planning process through development applications and so forth. As part of that, we are willing to consider putting housing on the site. We understand that, while the current planning controls do allow for housing, they may not allow for the scale of housing that the government would like to see on this site. There is a process to go through there, but we are willing to work through that with the government and other key stakeholders.

**THE CHAIR:** I take the point that, when you get to a DA stage—if you get to a DA stage—there would be much more firm proposals, and there is a process for that. But before you would get to that stage, you would need to have the land, presumably, by direct sale, public tender or some other process. Government will need some information about what they are making a decision on, until then.

A lot of what we heard, to summarise, I would say, was a desire for there to be improvements at Hawker shops. I think it was as close to universal as you could get, in any planning conversation that I have heard. But there are different views on what that should look like. There have been a lot of views that we do not get great outcomes when we just tackle a tiny bit of a group centre. I understand why your proposal has dealt with the site that you own and the site that you are trying to purchase, but a holistic version would be better.

We have heard criticism of Dickson shop-top housing. Some of the criticism has been that it was not a holistic planning process. We have heard a lot of desire for other things which might be part of a larger development, such as subsidised community space.

Some of the elements that were already in your proposal were a playground, active travel connections, a bit of greenery and better lighting. Some of those things are already in there. There is a desire to have a mix of shops there, with the high vacancy at the moment. Nobody has quite seen how that entire vision would come through.

Are you likely to work on that, or are you likely only to continue to work on Woolies and the car park proposal?

**Mr Loveday:** I think there are some really good points. I do think that, when you are looking at these district centres, having a good master plan is important. That brings all the different elements of these centres together. Our proposal, in its own right, is specific to the land that we control and that we are seeking to acquire from the

government. But we would be more than willing to work through a broader master planning approach to the site that brings all the key elements together within the district centre.

**THE CHAIR:** One of the other things that came up a lot in submissions and from witnesses was about the nature of the consultation. I think it is very good that you did public consultation. We see that there was public consultation done. There were some specific suggestions made, such as there could have been geographic socials advertising; that is quite cheap to do. There could have been earlier and better onsite signage of both the proposal and consultation sessions. There were a few specific suggestions about how consultation was run.

Do you think there would be any lessons learned there about how to do public consultation in future? Would you be interested in running consultation that runs along the good planning and consultation principles that we have in our planning framework?

**Mr Loveday:** Firstly, I would say that we do feel that we took a comprehensive approach to the consultation sessions that we did. We had over 45 workshop participants, we had 179 drop-in attendants, and there were 49 online comments. We felt that it was a relatively comprehensive approach. We letterbox-dropped over 3½ thousand dwellings across the catchment and provided ample opportunity for consultation with the community. We also had a website that was ongoing and accessible by all of the community. From our perspective, at this early stage of the proposal, we feel that the process that we have run was comprehensive, but we are always happy to take feedback on that.

The other point I would make is that, if we do progress further, consultation with the community does not stop here. As I said, the plans are in early stages. There will be a lot of stakeholder engagement ahead, whether that is with the government or, absolutely, with the community, in terms of understanding the feedback on plans, what the community would like to see on this site, and how it relates to the broader catchment and being part of that. With the process by which that consultation takes place, we are very open to working with the government around how that would occur.

**THE CHAIR:** Would Woolies be happy to commit to doing geographic socials, updates and ads, and onsite signage, going forward, both of which are pretty cheap and easy to do? They are not big asks.

**Mr Loveday:** Absolutely.

**MS CARRICK:** One of the major issues around shops is parking. Could you talk us through how parking would work? I understand that the existing car parking is generally replaced when a site is developed. If there is a master plan that densifies around the shops, and the surface car parks become apartments or mixed use, I note that, when I see this happening, you end up with a lot of street parking, and what parking is available at the shops gets clogged up. It is then difficult for people to access the shops. Can you talk us through your views about the whole parking situation?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes, absolutely. Firstly, I would say that parking is one of the most important considerations for us as a business, when we do any development. One of the

key drivers of delivering customer amenity is good accessibility of parking and convenience of parking. It is a key consideration for us.

The way that we generally approach parking, when we look to redevelop an existing centre, is to make sure that the existing parking numbers, that are already there, are replaced, and that there are sufficient allowed for any additional retail space that is provided, as part of the retail development.

In the case of the Hawker proposal, there is car parking on grade at the moment. We would be looking to replace that, plus provide additional car parking for any additional retail, commercial or residential space that is provided with the development.

**MS CARRICK:** Group centres are the hub of the community. Would you be willing to work with the government to ensure that there is plenty of space for alfresco dining, and that the pavements are not too narrow? When you have underground parking, you cannot fit deep-rooted street trees there, because there is underground parking. Places sacrifice their street trees, and they sacrifice the width of the pavement, so that you cannot have alfresco dining and people moving through at the same time. Are you prepared to ensure that there is space in a development or are you into high yield at all costs? There is a balance to be had, when it comes to how much money you can make in all of this.

**Mr Loveday:** I completely agree. One of the benefits of Woolworths as a developer in these local centres is that we design the centres with the knowledge that we are going to be part of that community, and we are going to operate in that community for decades to come. We do operate different metrics to a lot of other developers where everything is a profit-driven outcome. They want to develop a centre, make a profit and move on. We take a completely different approach in our planning and delivery of centres.

We know that, from a supermarket point of view, our best supermarkets are operating in really strong community centres. When we look at developing a shopping centre, we do not just look at what is the right outcome for the supermarket; we look at what is the right outcome for that centre and that community. We make sure that we invest in all of those things that you mentioned—good car parking, good accessibility and good urban design, as well as really good convenience for all customers, all patrons and all the other retailers that will be supplementary to or part of the development. They are all really important factors for us. We would absolutely be aligned in that way of thinking with the government and the community.

**MS CARRICK:** Often in shopping centres there is a central square or a place where the activity primarily is. If you scatter it too much, you lose the beating heart of your little local shops. Is Woolies happy to open up onto where the active area is, to help bring more activity? I say it in the context that I have seen, at the location of other shops, where Woolworths will have a blank wall onto the little square and have everybody coming from the southern car park. This is not at Hawker; this is not where I see it. Everybody comes in from the southern car park, in and out, and they are not engaging with the rest of the group centre. I would not like to see that happen. If you are in the southern part of the shops, how do we get people into the rest of it?

**Mr Loveday:** I agree with you; I would not like to see that, either. The best centres are



where there is good engagement and good connectivity between all the key elements of the centre—car parking, the supermarket and all the other retailers—and you get a really good balance of movement and activity through the centres.

The success of all those other retailers and the way that the community space works are as important for us as the supermarket, because these centres need to work together. It is about working through those design elements to make sure that it is not just a good supermarket with accessibility to car parking; actually, having a really good, well-operating centre is absolutely critical, and something we would certainly commit to.

**MS TOUGH:** You mentioned your metrics show that you need one full-line supermarket for every 10,000 people in a catchment. There has been some criticism that there is no need to turn Hawker into a full-line supermarket, that being a metro works really well for the community, coming and going. How do you come to those metrics, and why do you see that it is important in that area to move to a full-line supermarket?

**Mr Loveday:** That is a good question. Firstly, with regard to the metrics, this is a national metric that we apply across the country. It is a pretty high-level metric. It is something that is probably quite industry understood, in terms of the amount of catchment population that is required to support a full-line supermarket. That is the basis that we operate on.

In terms of the existing operation within Hawker, the existing supermarket, it is small, and the offering there is quite compromised. It certainly does not offer a full range and a full level of service that we would like to be able to deliver for this community. We listen to our customers a lot, and we get a lot of feedback from our customers. There is something that we call “voice of customer” which is, effectively, constantly asking our customers for feedback based on their shopping experiences across our store network.

Within the Hawker “voice of customer” feedback, the key things that we are constantly hearing from our customers is, “Store’s not big enough, doesn’t offer full range, we need to go elsewhere to get our full-range shop, it’s good for a top-up shop but not quite what we need for a full family shop, store’s tired, store can do with reinvestment.” These are the key things.

That, on top of our metrics around the way that we look at population sizes and so forth, is probably what has us focused on saying: how can we deliver a better shopping experience and a better service for this local community?

**MS TOUGH:** When you say a better range, I am assuming you are talking about things like gluten-free foods, health foods and those other things that do not always fit into a smaller supermarket?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes. My daughter is actually coeliac, so making sure that there is a full gluten-free range is something I am pretty passionate about. That is exactly right. My local shop is also undersized; I know that, when I go there, quite often we go past the closest supermarket to get to the full-line supermarket, because it has that broader range and the things that we need for our family.

**MS TOUGH:** The Belconnen mall has a full-line Woolworths and other supermarkets

in it. There is the Jamison centre nearby, with a full-line supermarket. What are some of the benefits of having that closer to home?

**Mr Loveday:** There are probably a couple of things. One is about being able to revitalise Hawker and create a really good community centre that meets the community's expectations and the government's expectations of revitalisation. That is one aspect to it. Having a supermarket that is closer to the customer, from our perspective, is really important, and being able to offer a walk-in service as well as an online experience through the supermarket is important as well. Some of the trends that we are seeing from our customers at the moment involve that blend of being able to shop close to your home, as well as put in an online delivery and pick it up or have it delivered close to your home. It is that level of experience which at the moment is not quite there within this catchment, and there is certainly the opportunity to deliver that.

**MS TOUGH:** Does Hawker have direct-to-boot and online delivery?

**Mr Loveday:** I would have to take that on notice. I am not 100 per cent sure.

**MS TOUGH:** The chair is saying she does not think so.

**THE CHAIR:** I am prepared to say I do not think we have direct-to-boot, because I reckon we would have seen it there.

**Mr Loveday:** I do not think we have direct-to-boot. There may be an online service out of the Hawker store, but I do not think there is direct-to-boot.

**MR CAIN:** If the government does not approve the direct sale or if you do not proceed to the DA, what plans would you have for enhancing that little precinct?

**Mr Loveday:** It is a good question. There is no doubt that the land we control is not a huge piece of land. Our ability to redevelop the land that we control at the moment would be limited, particularly given that a key part, as I said earlier, of any redevelopment that we would like to see at Hawker is expanding the community services on the site as well—additional retail, services and so forth. Our ability to achieve that on the land we control would be quite limited. We would look at what other options exist there, but we do not have any definitive plans.

**MR CAIN:** You would be continuing the metro there, though, if the government said no to the sale; is that right?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes. We would continue operation of the metro.

**MR CAIN:** You also mentioned that, in your business assessment of the area, there was the possibility of three other stores in the area. When you said "area", what part of town did you mean by that?

**Mr Loveday:** I meant that the way we look at a catchment is that we have a primary catchment of population. We say, "This catchment would most likely shop in a certain area." We would define that as being that Hawker precinct, which has up to 12,000 people at the moment. We also then look at the number of secondary catchments that

sit outside our primary catchment. These are areas where they would not necessarily all come to Hawker; they would probably go to a range of supermarkets.

Within that secondary catchment, we have identified a population of almost 28,000 people. With respect to those 28,000 people, there is actually no full-line supermarket. At the moment, they would be shopping at all the other supermarkets that sit outside our catchment. That is the way that we have looked at that.

**MR CAIN:** At the moment, the surrounding suburbs in that southern area of Belconnen—Scullin, Page and Weetangera—do not really have a general supermarket. Have you been looking at the scenario where you could have, say, a metro-sized supermarket in each of those suburbs, which currently do not have any general-purpose supermarket for the community?

**Mr Loveday:** I am not aware that we have been looking at a strategy beyond Hawker at this point.

**MR CAIN:** Where did you think the three extra supermarkets could actually be?

**Mr Loveday:** The point we were making was not that there are sites available for the supermarkets, but that there is a population scale that could support up to three supermarkets.

**MR CAIN:** You are saying you could imagine a business case where there is a possibility of three extra supermarkets, but you are saying you do not know where they would be?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes. We are just saying that there is a population there that could support it. We have not identified locations where they could be, but the way that we look at it is from a population perspective.

**MR CAIN:** Is it something that Woolworths would consider as an alternative approach to developing other supermarkets within that catchment area, and perhaps even getting the same sort of population grab that you are hoping to get from a full-line at Hawker?

**Mr Loveday:** We have not identified any other locations for a full-line supermarket within that area—

**MR CAIN:** Or other metros?

**Mr Loveday:** We have not identified any other locations for a supermarket or a metro within that area, which is why we have focused on Hawker. We think that Hawker, as a precinct, is the most logical location for a full-line supermarket.

**THE CHAIR:** Andrew I am interested in making sure we look after the diversity of our community at those shops. We have heard from submissions—but I just know this as I have lived in that area since the late seventies—that we have a really mixed group of people who go to Hawker. We have a lot of older people and we apparently have quite a lot of people who are neurodiverse who are choosing to shop there because it is easier to get into a smaller shop and it is an easier area to navigate. We have a lot of

parents with small children and a lot of people with disabilities who live quite close by who walk to or use that shop.

Some people have raised concerns about whether there would be parking that would suit those people and have said that it would be really important to make sure that there is enough parking that suits those cohorts. Also, they are worried about changing the layout of the Metro to a full-line supermarket and whether that would actually make it too far for people who cannot walk very far to shop and whether it would be too overwhelming for people to shop. Have you thought through any of those issues of the people who currently find it convenient to shop there and how you would look after those people if it changed?

**Mr Loveday:** Certainly as we progress through our planning proposal, understanding the dynamics of the community and the shopping base will be key for that. We are not at that stage at the moment, but certainly as we progress through planning and the finer details of any proposed design, really understanding the local dynamics of the population, the people who the shop there, ensuring we design something that is appropriate for all and very considerate of the population dynamics would be key for us.

**THE CHAIR:** If you move from a Metro to a full-line supermarket, it is, to state the obvious, going to be bigger. You will have to walk further inside the supermarket; regardless of where you park, you will have to walk further; and they are often different sorts of environments—they are often larger, louder and brighter environments. Does Woolworths have any experience in making sure that, for people who are older, people who cannot walk easily and people who are neurodiverse, they design those environments to suit people with those needs?

**Mr Loveday:** I probably cannot talk specifically about some of the attributes of our supermarket design. It is a little bit out of my sort of experience. I know we do a lot in terms of working with all of our customer base. A good example is Quiet Hour—I am not sure if it is on a daily basis or several on a daily basis or several times a week—which is an hour where we turn off the music within our store to enable customers who may be impacted by that to be able to shop in a quiet environment. I am also aware of lots of examples where our store teams work closely with customers who may have mobility issues and things like that to get around the store to make it a good shopping experience for them.

I probably cannot talk about the design and specific elements of it, but our teams are a part of the community. They love to get to know the customer base and they love to be able to shop and make good experiences for all of our customers.

**THE CHAIR:** I wonder if you can think of any examples in Canberra—or, if you cannot think of, maybe if anyone in your team can find out later, you could come back and tell us—where you have a full-line supermarket that Woolworths thinks is doing a really good job at catering to people who have mobility issues or disabilities or are neurodiverse. Are there any examples that people can have a look at and see how it is?

**Mr Loveday:** I will have to take that on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** I will get you to take it on notice. Only come back to us if you have a good example—and no penalty if you do not. We are not going to hunt you down and shoot you for that one.

I am also interested in the diversity. Some of what people want from a group centre—and I would say at Hawker they do not currently have this—is a diversity of traders. There is a real desire not to just have a big supermarket and nothing else. There is a real desire for some community space and also a range of different traders. We did a bit of a walk around. I will not quote any particular traders who spoke to us because they spoke to us off record. But I know that you have been working with at least one trader, and they feel like they have got a good place in any designs going forward, and we know of at least one other trader who does not feel like they have had those conversations. If Woolies were successful in any kind of acquisition with any kind of process, what would Woolies do to work with traders to make sure we get a good range in that redevelopment? You would presumably be the major player there and you would have a huge role in shaping it.

**Mr Loveday:** Absolutely. We have lots of examples of centres where we have gone into an old centre and redeveloped it, created a full-on supermarket and worked with a lot of the retailers that existed there. A good example of that is in Emerton in New South Wales, which was a tired, run-down old centre with a lot of long-term traders that have been operating there for years, and it was a small supermarket. We redeveloped that centre and expanded the supermarket. We worked with a lot of the retailers there to actually come back into that shopping centre as well.

It is a great example of where we have reinvested in a centre that has then delivered a range of services and a range of operators but also giving the existing retailers a new opportunity to be part of that as well. The response from the community has been amazing in terms of the way that that centre operates and the role that it plays within that community. When we talk to a lot of the existing traders that are now in that centre, they could not be happier with the way that that has panned out.

From our perspective, firstly, a successful supermarket in Hawker is actually going to be part of a really successful centre. Being a successful centre, requires a broad range of retailers, services and so forth, not just a supermarket, to be able to deliver that. Secondly, from our perspective, we are very respectful and we understand that there is a lot of really good retailers that have been in place for a long time. So working with those retailers on potentially coming back into the redevelopment—how that would look and how that would take place—would be critical for us going forward.

**THE CHAIR:** There is a particular interface there with the Belconnen motel, where, I assume, if somebody is staying in the Belconnen motel, they want to easily be able to get to the supermarket. Would that be something that Woolies could incorporate into a design if they were successful in getting a redevelopment up?

**Mr Loveday:** Critical access points and access pathways for all of the adjacent properties and surrounding properties would be something you would consider as part of the more detailed design and planning phase.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS CARRICK:** My question is around process. In your view, what constraints do you have in your path to achieve a good outcome for the whole centre? Are there any barriers in trying to get there? What is the process that you see in trying to get a good outcome for the whole centre? I guess that maybe goes to master planning. You mentioned that master planning is being undertaken. Are you working with the ACT government? You mentioned that you are working with other traders. So is it Woolies and other traders, or is it the ACT government working with Woolies and other traders to get a master plan for the precinct?

**Mr Loveday:** To the first question around constraints, I would say that probably the biggest constraint at the moment is that we are not in a position where we actually control all of the land. We have made a proposal to the government to buy part of the land. We have put forward a plan—which is really a first-stage plan—to the government as to what we think could be achieved on the land. But we accept that, if we get to the next stage, sitting down with the government, the community, the traders and so forth and working that plan to the next stage will be important.

In terms of master planning, I think what I said earlier was that, at this stage, our plan really is about the land that we control and the land that we are seeking to acquire from the government. I think there is merit in broader master planning, particularly in these areas where connectivity and expansion of other areas is important as well. From our perspective, we would be happy to work through that process with the government, the community and retailers. But it is probably the next stage of planning, if we get to that point.

**MS CARRICK:** Have you had any conversations with the ACT government about participating in broader master planning?

**Mr Loveday:** No. To this point, there has not been a discussion of that.

**MS CARRICK:** If the direct sale does not go ahead, would you participate in an open market tender process?

**Mr Loveday:** We would consider it. We would need to consider it further, but we would do so.

**MS CARRICK:** If the community has ideas that they would like for Woolies to understand—maybe not just at the shop level but at the higher level, like as Director of Property Group—how do people let you know their great ideas?

**Mr Loveday:** As I said earlier, we would have a lot more further community consultation. So there is the opportunity through that process to do it. We also have a website where we can give feedback—and we all see that feedback. So there is a range of opportunities for them to connect directly with us and share their ideas.

**MS CARRICK:** So they can go to a website and give you ideas for a particular shop?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** All right. Thank you.

**Mr Loveday:** We will send you the website address.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**MS TOUGH:** You mentioned in your opening submission how the government has said no to this kind of proposal because of the strategic objective of having more housing in the ACT and the original plan does not include housing. We have heard from some members of the community that maybe housing on the site but not on top of the shops would be one thing. The government is looking at the use of shop-top housing. We have also heard about the need for having commercial spaces available on the site as well—not residential and not retail, but commercial spaces—for other businesses to use. I am just wondering if that is something that you will be taking on board for any future considerations—like how that mixed-use will look.

**Mr Loveday:** It is a good point and it is something we still need to work through. Across the country we have a number of mixed-use sites. We actually have a whole team dedicated to mixed-use development. We recognise that in not only the ACT but also most states there is a housing crisis or some high demand for increased density and so forth. Being able to deliver good mixed-use outcomes is really difficult sometimes. Often the sites are not massive sites, so you have physical constraints. It is a tough commercial environment at the moment with construction price escalation and so forth.

Getting the right balance between a good mixed-use scheme that not only delivers to the community the convenience, the amenity and all those things that they want to see out of the retail aspect of the project but also integrates housing and density that a lot of the governments want to see from a housing target perspective and also delivering a commercially feasible development—pulling all of those elements together—is not easy. But, as I mentioned earlier, we often look at our developments a little bit differently in terms of we are going to be there, we are going to be a long-term tenant in that centre and we can invest and take a longer-term approach to investment. So, as an internal developer of the supermarket, it is a key sort of thing that we look at—and we see Hawker in the same way.

One of the challenges at Hawker is that, even with a consolidated landholding, if we are successful in acquiring the government land, it is not a huge site. So getting the right balance between all the uses that we would like to see on the site can be challenging, and it is something that we need to work through with the government and all the key stakeholders.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you. That is good to hear. As a parent myself, one thing we have also heard a lot from the community about is access to public toilets. There is a public toilet block at Hawker. It is not—

**MR CAIN:** Flash?

**MS TOUGH:** It is not flash. It is not in the Metro part of the shopping centre; it is kind of across in a car park. It is not the most well-used bathroom block, would be the polite way to say it. Is there consideration going forward around incorporating public toilets

and accessible toilets into the future development?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes, absolutely. If we were to do a development similar to what we have proposed, we would definitely have public toilets in there. Typically, in a development like this, we would probably have a parent's room as well. So we would have increased facilities available.

**MS TOUGH:** Wonderful. That is great to hear.

**MR CAIN:** What is your understanding of where the government is up to and where you are up to in your conversation with them?

**Mr Loveday:** To this point, we have made an offer and that offer sits with the government. We understand that there is a process that is currently taking place, which is part of this process, and I guess from our perspective we will see how this process runs out and then how the government responds to that in regards to our offer.

**MR CAIN:** When you say "this process", do you mean these hearings and this committee's inquiry?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes. We understand that, should the offer or the approach to government be accepted, then there is a process by which land valuations and so forth take place, which we would undertake with the government.

**MR CAIN:** Have you been given an indicative timeframe from the government on progressing your request?

**Mr Loveday:** I think a 12-month timeframe has been put forward. The government has also asked us to consider housing. So that is, I guess, part of the next stage for us to work through with them.

**MR CAIN:** Sorry; 12 months from what event or what date?

**Mr Loveday:** I think from earlier this year, but I would need to check the date specifically.

**MR CAIN:** Do you mind taking that on notice, please, as a query?

**Mr Loveday:** Sure.

**MR CAIN:** Do you mind saying what stage you are up to in terms of developing your own counteroffer to the government?

**Mr Loveday:** We are currently comparing plans and we are currently looking at integration of housing within those plans. We are working through that process at the moment, but we anticipate being able to complete that within the 12-month timeframe that the government has asked.

**MR CAIN:** As much as you are able to say and to what level of detail, what would be different about your proposed counteroffer to the government compared to your original



offer?

**Mr Loveday:** The government has asked us to consider housing. Our original plan did not have that. So we are working through whether that is a proposal that we think is viable on this land at the moment. If so, then that will be part of that proposal.

**MR CAIN:** So how much housing and what type? Are you able to go into the detail at all on what you are contemplating?

**Mr Loveday:** We are really in the early stages, and we do not have the detail at the moment.

**MR CAIN:** Are we looking at 10, 50 or 100 dwellings? As much as you can say would be appreciated.

**THE CHAIR:** Peter, he has answered.

**MR CAIN:** I am happy to see if he wants to respond to my broad numbers there.

**THE CHAIR:** Andrew, you are welcome to answer, but you have said that you cannot say. So, if you continue to say that, that is okay too.

**MR CAIN:** Sorry, Chair, but it is in the hands of the witness if they want to answer or not.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure.

**Mr Loveday:** All I can say is that we are considering a mix of housing options across the site at the moment and testing different options.

**MR CAIN:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Andrew, there has been a lot of community interest and concern, I would say, about why government would do a direct sale as opposed to an open public tender process or some other more open process. The government has some statutory requirements around that. You are already aware of those. But I think there is also a public interest argument.

We have heard from a number of submitters, including Belconnen Community Council, that open processes get better value for money for government. We have heard from a lot of people that going out to market and makes sure you can put all the options on the table—and maybe it is not just Woolies; maybe you would want to talk to other retailers or maybe you would want a mix of different ideas. Can you explain to me—not from your own commercial point of view—if there is any public benefit in a direct sale as opposed to a more open process?

**Mr Loveday:** Sure. From our perspective—and this goes to some of the questions and some of the discussion that we have had today—there is an opportunity in Hawker to upgrade the whole precinct and to do something that improves the shopping experience and the community experience for the customer and for the population of Hawker. We

think the best way to do that is by consolidating the various landholdings so that you have a site with the scale to actually deliver those outcomes. Our approach here is via direct sale, because we believe that, by consolidating the land—and we already control part of that land—we can actually work with the government on delivering those outcomes.

I guess the risk with an open market sale or selling to somebody else that did not have control over our landholdings is that the site could be developed in a fragmented way and you could not actually achieve the scale and some of the community outcomes that the government and the community would like to see on the site.

**THE CHAIR:** So the primary benefit of going with a direct sale with Woolworths is that you can consolidate the blocks that the government owns and Woolworths owns, and the primary disadvantage of going to a public tender, in your view, is that the government could only go out to tender on the sites that they currently own?

**Mr Loveday:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And if the government did decide to do a direct sale, how do you think the public interest could be served by that? What could the government or you do to make sure that the public interest is served through a direct sale process?

**Mr Loveday:** I think there are probably two aspects to it. In terms of value for money, I think there is a pretty clearly defined process of valuation and how the land is valued as part of that process, so the community can feel comfortable that that was being achieved. In terms of the community outcomes and the development outcomes of the site, as we have said today, there will be a consultation process as part of any future planning process that would involve listening to the community and listening to key stakeholders and trying to marry up all of those objectives and desired outcomes of the key stakeholders as part of that process. That was something that we have worked through with the government.

**THE CHAIR:** Fiona?

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, Chair. Do Woolies have housing at other sites? Have you done it before or is this a first time for you?

**Mr Loveday:** We have a number of projects across the country or sites across the country that we are delivering housing on at the moment. There are various ways in which we do that with partners and so forth. We bring residential partners in at various stages to help the delivery of those. There is a site in the ACT, at Moncrief—which was a government tender process that we were successful in winning—that we also propose to deliver housing on. That is a process we are working through at the moment as well.

**MS CARRICK:** When you put housing on, you will have to pay a lease variation charge. Is there any opportunity to negotiate with the government through the whole process that the lease variation charge is invested back into the Hawker community, for community facilities or upgrades—just reinvesting it back in the community?

**Mr Loveday:** I am not across that detail at the moment. That is a detail that we would

need to work through going forward.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Caitlin?

**MS TOUGH:** I have actually asked all the questions I had. It has all been covered. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Peter?

**MR CAIN:** I am happy, actually. Is there anything that Mr Loveday would like to say in closing?

**THE CHAIR:** Andrew, Peter's question to you is: is there anything else you would like to tell us?

**Mr Loveday:** Not specifically. All I would like to say is that, on behalf of Woolworths, we are grateful for the opportunity to meet you and to talk to you about the opportunity. The opportunity to revitalise Hawker, to invest in Hawker and to deliver a level of service and operation to that community is something we are very excited about.

We recognise that we are underservicing that community at the moment with our existing store and that there is so much potential in what could be delivered here. We are a collaborative group. We work with a lot of governments and a lot of communities on unlocking key objectives. That sense of collaboration is an approach that we would certainly bring to this project. If the government is willing to work with us, we would love that opportunity.

**THE CHAIR:** I might ask one further question. Andrew, does Woolies currently own any of the other sites other than the Woolies Metro and the car park in the Hawker shopping centre?

**Mr Loveday:** We own the Woolworths and we own—I am just trying to think how to explain them—the few shops that sit out the front; so 56 Hawker Place and 38 Hawker Place. I think there are six or seven shops that sit out the front of the Woolworths supermarket. We own those as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Are they currently tenanted or untenanted? Are they vacant?

**Mr Loveday:** I think there is one vacancy in those. I think there are seven shops there, including two ATMs—so five retail shops and two ATMs—and I think there is one vacancy at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you able to tell us why there is a vacancy?

**Mr Loveday:** I am not too sure, to be honest. Our strategy would be to lease those shops ongoing. So I suspect it is just an interim period.

**THE CHAIR:** I might also indulge you just to get on the record—I think I have the

figures but I just want to confirm them: can you tell us how big a Metro is and how big a full-line supermarket is?

**Mr Loveday:** Metros range from anywhere from a couple of hundred metres up to about 1,500 to 2,000 square metres. A full-line supermarket's range generally is about 3,500 square metres.

**THE CHAIR:** I am glad I asked. Those are larger differences than I thought.

**Mr Loveday:** It can vary quite a bit.

**THE CHAIR:** On the proposal that you had developed, what was the size of the supermarket in that one—the full line supermarket?

**Mr Loveday:** I think it was about 3,500 to 3,800 square metres.

**THE CHAIR:** Andrew, thank you very much for your time today. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for appearing. I would also like to thank Broadcasting and Hansard, as always, for recording. If any member wishes to ask a question on notice, please upload it to the Parliamentary Portal as soon as possible and within five business days. We will pause our hearing now. Thanks, Andrew; you are free to go.

**Short suspension.**

**GINGELL, MS CHRISTINE**, Committee Member, Friends of Hawker Village  
**SAUNDERS, MS MARGO HILARY**, Committee Member, Friends of Hawker Village

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Ms Margo Saunders and Ms Christine Gingell, who are representing Friends of Hawker Village. Do either of you have a comment to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Ms Gingell:** As well as being a committee member of Friends of Hawker Village, I am also the treasurer.

**THE CHAIR:** As witnesses, please note that you are protected by parliamentary privilege, and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. You are here to speak to your experience and your views, so it is absolutely okay to state your opinion; that is your evidence.

We understand that you have requested the opportunity to make a brief opening statement. If you can keep your remarks brief, that will give us as much time as possible for questions. Thank you very much for your submission. We have read and received that. Is there a brief opening statement?

**Ms Saunders:** Yes. Thank you for the opportunity to present our information today. Friends of Hawker Village was formed in June 2010, in response to community opposition to the proposed sale and development of an ACT government-owned car park at the Hawker Village shops. The government's subsequent draft master plan for the shopping area also failed to attract the necessary level of community support.

In 2012, the draft master plan was set aside, and the government announced a three-year moratorium, definitely not a 13-year moratorium, on government-sponsored development at the shops. The proposals which were of particular concern to the community at that time have been echoed in more recent concerns in relation to the Woolworths proposals. These include relocating the supermarket to the Springvale Drive car park, replacing street-level parking with underground or undercroft parking, and increasing the height of buildings.

In our discussions with shoppers about the current proposals, a number of themes have emerged. A quick and convenient parking arrangement is absolutely fundamental to this centre. Yes, to improvements, but retain the low-rise design and the open, street-level parking. Because shopping centres are public spaces as well as commercial spaces, there needs to be genuine consultation about significant changes, rather than crucial decisions being made behind closed doors.

The sheer lack of formal information has also been noteworthy and concerning. The majority of shoppers with whom we spoke, including frequent visitors to the centre, had received little or no information about the proposals. Remarkably, Hawker traders told us the same thing.

Many shoppers said that accessible and convenient parking is one reason, or the major reason, that they visit this centre. Busy parents going to and from work or school pick-

ups and tradespeople with large vehicles and trailers know they can access the parking areas and the shops quickly, easily and safely.

They also value the ability to do their shopping without having to run the gamut of a large, full-line supermarket. A significant proportion of visitors are older or have mobility impairment, including those who visit a number of health and medical services located at Hawker, most of which do not feature on Woolworths maps of the area. For these people, the ability to park only a few steps away from a manageable-size supermarket, and other shops and services, is more than a matter of mere convenience. It is a lifeline to shops, services and social spaces.

It should go without saying that inclusive urban design should be an intrinsic element of the government's ambitions for Canberra to be an age-friendly city.

Friends of Hawker Village are not anti-development or anti-change. We support improvements which respect and enhance the positive features of the Hawker centre, and which respect the context and character of the centre and the surrounding residential area. We are as concerned and as disappointed as everyone else that this area has been neglected for so long because of what appears to be deliberate inaction by the government and the private landlords.

We agree that the buildings and public spaces should have been better maintained and that they are overdue for improvements. But the relevant questions are: what should those improvements consist of; who should be responsible for them; and what process is most likely to deliver the best outcomes for the community?

The current direct sale process is problematic, particularly for significant blocks of land in established areas. As we have said in our submission, an application is not a public document. Community engagement is designed and conducted entirely by the applicant, and the applicant's claims are assessed without a systematic and prescribed process for public scrutiny and comment.

Raising objections at the DA stage is too little, too late. The primary issue is not the design detail of what should be built on the land, but whether the land should be transferred from public to private hands for those purposes. The setting and design of the Hawker Village centre reflects its position as an intermediate-size centre in a residential area. Based on the Woolworths applications, the other FOI documents and the community feedback that we have received, we cannot conclude that Woolworths has made a valid, much less a compelling, case to support the direct sale.

It is fair to say that the government's failure to meet its responsibilities for maintaining and improving the Hawker centre has led to the present situation, where a commercial developer is seeking to privatise public spaces as part of an overall plan which, in the view of many visitors, would destroy the very features that attract them to the centre in the first place.

The need for updates and upgrades is often cited by those who express support for the Woolworths proposals. The choice, however, is not simply between doing nothing and accepting these proposals. We, and the overwhelming majority of those who have engaged with us, believe that there is a genuine case for a more considered approach,

with more government and community involvement.

We thank the committee for your interest in these important matters.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Like you, we have heard a lot of different views about this, but I would say the largest view is that the shops should be upgraded and improved, and that there should be change. The Belconnen Community Council put in an excellent submission; their survey said that 85 per cent of people agreed with that idea. We are definitely in a space that we need something different. It is now a matter of looking at what that difference is.

We have a number of vacant shops in Hawker at the moment. We only got to that at the very end of that hearing. Do you have any views on why you think some of the shops are not occupied at the moment? Why are some of the other traders not operating in a good and thriving manner around there?

**Ms Gingell:** No evidence other than hearsay—that the terms which Woolworths were prepared to give in a lease were not satisfactory, because they were not long enough. Obviously, if they are planning to do this in the next couple of years, they do not want to have continuing tenants. I believe that is the case for the restaurant, and I do not think they are renewing leases. With the TAB, you would not really call that a proper community retailer. It is almost like a pop-up Asian shop. They put in lots of shelving, like you could buy at Officeworks—metal shelving, and it has product. I could put my hand on my heart and say I have never seen a customer in there. With the supermarket, the post office, Rocksalt cafe and the takeaway, they buzz. Olive Restaurant is very well supported, in the back building.

**THE CHAIR:** The bakeries do all right.

**Ms Gingell:** The bakeries do quite well, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** The butcher goes great guns.

**Ms Gingell:** And that is despite the fact that Woolworths supermarket has a bakery section, anyway.

**THE CHAIR:** Chris and Margo, you have talked a lot about the character of Hawker Village, the Hawker group centre. Can you tell me a little bit about the character of it? Some of that character is probably coming from a mix of different shops, some of which are doing well and some of which are not. Tell me a little bit about what you see as the character of Hawker Village.

**Ms Gingell:** Low rise, sunny, sky views, and wide walk spaces. There is some seating, to sit out. Unfortunately, the seating, which got rat infested, was never really enhanced to make it an attractive place to sit. Those are the things for me.

**Ms Saunders:** Yes, I think that is right. There used to be a very attractive, leafy pergola right in the middle of the courtyard, but the vines were torn down and nothing was done to replace that. The character aspects that Chris has mentioned really go to the heart of the public realm of the centre and the way it has been neglected. After the end of the

previous moratorium, it seems like the government just washed its hands.

A lot of visitors to Hawker have said that they felt they were being punished as a result of the failed master plan, and that the government said, “If you don’t want our master plan, we’re not going to do anything.” Nothing really had been done. Until some months ago, when the surface of the children’s play area was redone, nothing had been done to maintain or enhance the public realm of the area.

**THE CHAIR:** Is height part of character? If it is, can you tell me if you have any firm views about height?

**Ms Saunders:** The low-rise character of the area is something that is frequently mentioned by people when they say what they like about it. We did a survey of attendees at the November 2024 Weetangera Primary School fete. On the survey form, people were asked to indicate what features—this was only for people who shopped at Hawker—of the Hawker centre they particularly valued. The low-rise design was one of the top three features. Obviously, it included ease of parking, but the low-rise design and character was one of the things that was commonly cited.

In terms of the setting and the nature of the place, it goes to the heart of this centre being, number one, an intermediate centre. It is not a Jamison; it is not a Kippax. It is not on that scale. It is an intermediate-size centre in the middle of a residential area. It is not a commercial area. Other than the shops, you have only the hotel and Meet-Point House, the old Belconnen Soccer Club, on one side, and you have the Shell service station and KFC on the other, and that is it. It sits within the middle of a residential area, and the only access to it is from residential streets.

**THE CHAIR:** It is a group centre, though, so it has been highlighted as a group centre.

**Ms Gingell:** I do not recall any opportunity for community input to the decision to no longer have intermediate centres, and to have only local centres and group centres. My recollection is that it was an announcement rather than involving any kind of consultation. I could be wrong.

**THE CHAIR:** We might follow that up with the minister, because I do not know the history of that, either. There is obviously a conversation about whether there should be shop-top housing in the area, and whether there should be shop-top housing on this particular site. There is a lot of, I would say, nervousness around shop-top housing, and there are some submissions that we have received that have gone more into, if we had it, what it would look like.

Voices of West Belconnen spoke a lot about integrated European-style shop-top housing. They highlighted some of the features where shop-top housing works. They said it is part of the whole development. You do not do it in a bits-and-pieces manner. Part of the problems they highlighted with Dickson is that you have this old and new aspect; a little bit of Dickson got redeveloped, but it was not actually integrated. Do you have any views about that?

**Ms Saunders:** In terms of our views about housing at Hawker, it is difficult to comment without seeing an actual proposal, obviously. Our general view is that a proposal for



shop-top housing in this centre would require additional consideration of overall design, parking, the amenity of public areas and particularly the suitability of this location for residential accommodation.

I was struck by some comments that I saw in social media from residents of the new Giralang centre. These are people who live on top of the shops at that centre, and they are having continual problems with noise. If you have a 24-hour gym located beneath you, you are going to have issues. Particular consideration needs to be given to the amenity in relation to housing in this particular area, and the connection between the design of the centre and what else is going on there. Access to green space, noise and all those things would need to be considered.

**Ms Gingell:** Shop-top housing is totally inconsistent with retaining the low-rise nature. To me, low rise would be a maximum of one extra level on top of what we have. Very serious consideration would need to be given to the overshadowing that might occur, because we have those sunny walking spaces. They could just become dreary wind tunnels.

**THE CHAIR:** I would agree with you. I would not say shop-top housing is low rise. Fiona?

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, Chair. I am curious to know why the master plan of 2010 or 2012 failed. What was the problem with it?

**Ms Saunders:** That failed basically because of the community. I have a copy of the *Canberra Times* article reporting on that. There were 1,896 signatories to a petition presented to the Assembly with regard to that. There were well over 200 submissions. Basically, there was a lot of community feedback. The whole approach was never really accepted by the community. I was there at the time; I have been a member of Friends of Hawker Village since the beginning. There was a feeling, as there is now, that it would be good to do something to improve the Hawker shops, but what was being presented was out of scale for what people felt was appropriate.

It also involved relocating the supermarket to the Springvale Drive car park, the same as we are seeing now. People said, “No, we don’t want to lose the surface parking. That’s what makes this centre work.” There were proposals for six-storey buildings. It was just seen as too much. It was interesting; even the butcher, who has been very involved, I understand, in the Woolworths proposals, said at the time that it was just too big and too much. It was just not appropriate.

We are seeing some similarities, but it was just seen as overkill for what was actually required.

**MS CARRICK:** That is interesting because, as time goes by, heights just seem to get higher. Now, in group centres, you can see zoning for eight storeys around them. One of the fundamental things is to try and save the little square from overshadowing, because you will have zoning that will put in heights that are higher. Because the sizes of the little squares are all so small, you do not have to go very high for them to be overshadowed, if you zone it on the north side. That is to be fiercely protected.

It is the government's policy to densify shops. Would it be better, in your view, to have what appears to be happening, with Woolies working with traders to put in another submission to government with shop-top housing on the car park, or have another go with the government at updating the master plan?

**Ms Saunders:** Friends of Hawker Village has a position that we would prefer not to see development on the Springvale Drive car park. It seems to us, looking at the consultation process for a direct sale versus the consultation process for a government-sponsored draft master plan, that there is a world of difference. The consultation that was done for the draft master plan in 2010 to 2012 was actually quite extensive. It is just that the outcome of what was delivered was not consistent with community expectation. But there was a good, prescribed consultation process.

We do not get that with a direct sale. Our view, as we said in our submission, was that it was completely inadequate. To hear Woolworths defend that consultation as comprehensive is really hard to understand, because it was anything but. I think that a better process, with more government involvement and more opportunities for community input and feedback, would be preferable.

**MS CARRICK:** As you said, what improvements, who is responsible and what is the process? Perhaps it is a case of getting to the bottom of that.

**MS TOUGH:** We heard Woolies this morning talk about the population of the catchment around Hawker being enough to support up to three full-line supermarkets, while currently there is just the metro-size store at Hawker. We heard that a full-line supermarket brings with it more choices for customers, like a gluten-free range and other more specialised ranges that might not necessarily be in a metro. Although there are other supermarkets nearby, at Jamison and in the Belconnen mall, people need to travel further to get to these supermarkets. If you have a family with young kids or you are relying on public transport, that can make it more inaccessible to get to these supermarkets. Do you see a way of having improvements at Hawker Village, with a full-line supermarket somewhere on the site, to allow different groups to have access to what they need?

**Ms Saunders:** We were really interested to hear what Woolworths said this morning about the basis for their calculation for the supposed need for a full-line supermarket at Hawker. We heard that that was based on a national algorithm. Thank you, Woolworths, for admitting that, because that takes no account of local design, transport and shopping pattern issues. It is not based on the way things work in Canberra.

If you consider the primary catchment suburbs—Hawker, Weetangera, Page and Scullin—and the secondary catchment area—Florey, Cook, Latham, Holt and Macquarie, or whatever the list was—our calculation is that there are currently five full-line supermarkets which regularly serve this population. We have Westfield Belconnen, Kippax and Jamison with full-line Coles and Woolies, and we also have three Aldi stores, all within a few kilometres of and easily accessible to these suburbs. There may not be full-line supermarkets in Weetangera, Page or Scullin, but with the way things have been set up in the ACT for the location of supermarkets, the population of those suburbs have easy access to not only full-line supermarkets but smaller supermarkets as well.

Our argument is that the catchment populations are not nearly as poorly served as Woolworth suggests. In fact, they are already well served. The committee would be aware that there are plans for additional supermarkets. Chris and I just visited the Woolworths metro in Wright, which was new, shiny, bright and amazing looking. There are also smaller supermarkets at Florey, Cook, Latham and Holt. There are the revamped Belconnen markets. There is a big Woolworths at Charnwood. There are more planned at Strathnairn and Ginninderry. We do not see that it is nearly as bleak as Woolworths is trying to make out.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a supermarket at Latham?

**MR CAIN:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** I think it closed.

**Ms Saunders:** Is there a supermarket at Latham?

**MR CAIN:** No, there is not.

**THE CHAIR:** The rest of your list was right, though. I do not think there is a supermarket at Latham.

**Ms Saunders:** Okay.

**MR CAIN:** If Woolworths keeps the metro, however that comes about, if the metro remains as it is, on behalf of Friends of Hawker Village, what would you like to see done with the Hawker group centre?

**Ms Saunders:** Chris and I, and other members of the Friends of Hawker Village committee, have spent a lot of hours in face-to-face engagement with people at the Hawker shops, letting them know what is happening, because they did not have that information, and getting their feedback. One of the comments or requests that came through most strongly was that people would like to see improvements within the existing footprint of the centre. They do not want to sacrifice the car park, but they look around at the buildings and say, “These are dirty; things could be improved.” People have commented that the liquor section within the metro is taking up space that could be used for food products. The liquor section could be moved into one of the other areas outside.

They want to see something happening within the footprint of the centre. The feeling was that, because Woolworths owns the supermarket building and the building opposite, it would have scope, perhaps by purchasing some of the public land directly around that, and the ability to do a redevelopment within the existing footprint of the centre, which would include, if they needed to, expanding the metro.

We were trying to find out what the size of the Hawker metro is compared to the one at Wright. With the one at Wright, as soon as you go in, you think, “Wow! This feels about two or three times the size of Hawker.” It probably is not, but it has really high ceilings and the aisles are wider, so it feels bigger.

In short, the feeling that we have been getting, the view from the shoppers, is to take advantage of the buildings that they own, and maybe a bit of the public area; redevelop there and get what they want.

We were told two years ago that the current Woolworths metro at Hawker does not meet the corporate standards of Woolworths. When we heard that, we felt that it was within Woolworths' ability to redevelop that metro so that it does meet the corporate standards. If you look at the one in Wright, you will get an idea of what that is.

I want to correct a statement in the attachment to our submission. The submission says that we have not had any discussions with Woolworths. We did have a Zoom meeting on 6 July 2023, but it was very general and not particularly productive. It did not get to the heart of the sort of detail that the government wanted Woolworths to discuss with Friends of Hawker Village, particularly in relation to the issues around the previous draft master plan. Yes, we did have a Zoom meeting with Woolworths two years ago.

**Ms Gingell:** Obviously not memorable.

**THE CHAIR:** With your suggestion that Woolworths could redevelop the metro into a better metro, how would that improve the rest of the Hawker shops? I could see how that would give us a nicer metro than the one we have now, but I am not sure how that would give us nicer shops. Would it then be up to the ACT government to come in and upgrade the shops, like they did at Evatt?

**Ms Saunders:** There are two issues. One is whether improvements to the Woolworths would prompt the numerous private landlords to do something about the buildings that they own. All the buildings at the Hawker shops are under a range of different ownerships. An upgraded supermarket could actually be a prompt for the private landlords. What you say about a master plan is absolutely correct. If we had a good, agreed, acceptable master plan for the area, that would say to the private landlords and any private developers, "This is what is now expected for this area." The process around achieving that, as I said earlier, is much more comprehensive in terms of community involvement in the process around a direct sale.

**Ms Gingell:** I understand that the walkways, which are a big problem, because they are unattractive, they are littered and the paving is not safe, would remain an ACT government responsibility. If Woolworths came up with a design that used, joined or integrated the two buildings that they own, there could be a bit of paving lost in achieving that. With the rest of it, I would assume that it is an ACT government responsibility

**MS CARRICK:** Would you accept it if you had a master plan that curated it properly, rather than just having a blunt instrument with heights that are higher? It could have heights that were higher, without overshadowing anything, and lower heights to keep sun from going into spaces where you want the community to be.

**Ms Saunders:** From everything that we have heard, solar access and a nice, open feel are really important for people. People have said to us that they have lots of other options for going to enclosed places. Being able to retain the solar access, not having a

wind tunnel and all those things would be really important. It would depend, obviously, on the location, any setbacks and any particular design features.

Certainly, there was a feeling, at the previous draft master plan stage, with six storeys, that that would be too dominating for the area. If you look at the area, it is a low-rise residential area. There are not any other big buildings there. I think there was a feeling, and there may be a feeling now, that that would be out of place.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you so much. I am sorry we ran a little bit over time. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. Thank you, broadcasting and Hansard. If anyone has a question on notice, please put it on notice within five days. We do not usually give our community witnesses homework, though. Thank you very much for your time. We will now suspend the proceedings, and we will reconvene at 10.45 am.

**Hearing suspended from 10.38 to 10.46 am.**

**BUTLER, MR LACHLAN**, Chair, Belconnen Community Council

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Mr Lachlan Butler, from the Belconnen Community Council. As a witness, you are protected by parliamentary privilege, and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not inviting opening statements, but I will check to see if you have brought one.

**Mr Butler:** No, I am happy to move straight to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** That is great. You have given us a great submission, so we have a lot to go on. Thank you.

**Mr Butler:** Very good.

**THE CHAIR:** And if you have anything further to say later, you can provide that in writing afterwards.

We will start with questions. Lachlan, I want to start out by thanking you for doing the survey. That now seems to be a bit of a standard practice with Belco Community Council submissions. You had 148 responses. That is a really good response rate.

**Mr Butler:** Yes; with that one we letterboxed that survey to 4,000 people across the four suburbs surrounding. We had 148 responses. It was the first big survey that we have done in recent years, and we have continued that practice.

**THE CHAIR:** That is great. There were lots of mixed results in there, but there was one really clear one. I think you have got about 85 per cent of people who would like some kind of upgrade or redevelopment at Hawker shops, so it sounds like that is a pretty strong view.

**Mr Butler:** Definitely. I think it is probably the strongest view you can get. You are not going to make 100 per cent of people happy. I spoke to someone that said that Belconnen has been on the decline since 1972, and I do not think anything you do at Hawker could change their mind about that one! But it is pretty clear that most people want something to happen there.

The survey that we did was done at the time Woolworths was doing their consultation, so we did not have any real, concrete plans or designs to comment on. The questions were quite vague in nature, but there was definitely a consistent theme of “Do something there,” and then mixed views on exactly what the scale is and what that looks like.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, absolutely. You have talked a lot about how the community really values this; it needs to support local family shops; it needs to support a range of different businesses. We have got different community needs. Can you tell us a little bit about what you think the community needs are for the Hawker Group Centre?

**Mr Butler:** I think people want a place for community. It is a community hub. It is where you go to meet your friends. It is where you go to do your shopping.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Butler:** I was just there earlier this morning. I was standing in the Woolworths part, and I was looking around, and there was not a lot of places to have a conversation. The public realm needs uplifting at Hawker. The government recognises this; the minister, in his statement of planning priorities talks about the importance of local shops. We want to make sure that, since this is one of the first redevelopments that has come out since the minister has made that statement, the precedent that is set with these shops is good and very strong. It will mean that not just these shops will have a good outcome but also the shops that follow.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. And some of those meeting places and local amenity that comes in the form of cafes and things, and the physical space, also probably comes in the form of bringing more people to the shops to use and enjoy those areas. Did you get any really strong flavour about how to do that or just the sense that it needs to be done well?

**Mr Butler:** I think if you ask 10 different people, you get 10 different answers to that one.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, sure.

**Mr Butler:** But I think you want to have a place that people want to go to, and because they go to that, it means that those local businesses are supported. We have seen in local centres around the ACT that when people do not go there for whatever reason, the businesses fail. Then it is a snowball effect, where there are fewer businesses there, so fewer people go. We do not want to go into that snowball effect at all.

**THE CHAIR:** No, we do not. And do you think we should be providing for just a little, local Hawker community, or do you think it is a larger Belconnen catchment area that we should be servicing there?

**Mr Butler:** I think it is classified as a group centre, so in the planning documents it is interpreted to be servicing the suburbs around it. There are suburbs around it that have declining local centres that do use the Hawker shops as their local shops, so I think we do have to think a little bit bigger picture, but it is not going to be the next Westfield. It is not the next town centre or anything like that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Fiona?

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, Chair. With respect to process, Woolies is working on putting in another submission that has shop-top housing, I understand. That would still be a Woolies-focused thing: they would talk to traders and the community perhaps, versus the ACT government doing another master plan for the whole precinct that is holistic, with the homes, the jobs, the public spaces, the public realm, the places where people would want to congregate—to identify them and work on them. What is your view about the two ways forward?

**Mr Butler:** It was interesting listening to Woolworths earlier this morning. They talked about the opportunity and excitement they had in redeveloping the Hawker centre. But

it was interesting that it seems to be conditional, in the fact that it is a direct sale with limited transparency and no competition. The direct-sale application process that Woolworths has got I do not think will lead to the best outcome.

Jo, I think you mentioned earlier today about the piecemeal development approach not being the right outcome. I think in an ideal world, when the ACT government heard, Woolworths were going to do this, back in 2023, they would have been an active participant in this process and started some of those master plan talks or at least defined what they wanted to see at the Hawker Group Centre. I think in a less ideal world, when Woolworths made its direct sale application in March last year, the ACT government would have taken that as an opportunity to be an active participant.

But, instead, what we have seen is really nothing from the government. We kept asking for updates about the process. We did not hear anything until earlier this year, and it was sort of vague: “Do some shop-top housing. It does not really fit what we want.” Whether or not it is not a master plan, I think the ACT government needs to be clear on what it actually wants at the Hawker Group Centre, and what the government views and wants there should there inspired by community feedback.

**MS CARRICK:** Given that there are other car parks, there are opportunities; it is not just this one. Moving on to car parking—it is a major issue. I understand the desirability of being able to park close to the shops to run in and get your things and go. The convenience is one aspect of it, and then there is the government’s desire to densify. What is your view about car parking?

**Mr Butler:** I think everyone has said it today: car parking is really, really important. What that car parking looks like, I think, needs to be inspired by community consultation. It is all about trade-offs. You cannot have everything all at once. Would it be to densify the existing building sites and to go a bit higher there but keeping the surface parking? Or do you get rid of the surface parking, and not densify, and expand out? Or do you knock down all the buildings small businesses are in so that you can make more surface parking? You are probably not going to do that one, but it is all about the trade-offs of what you value. And I do not think 45 people, or the number of people that attended and engaged with Woolworth’s consultation plan, where they did not have any plans to show—I do not think they have got enough information to make that decision on how they should be delivering parking.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. And building heights—low-scale is fantastic, but we have got the housing crisis, so there is the push to densify and the “missing middle” and all of that. So as far as building heights go, where do you stand?

**Mr Butler:** In that survey mentioned earlier, back in 2023, the most common response was to do two to three storeys—that was the biggest group of people, followed by going up to four storeys, and keeping it at the single level. I think there is a little bit of room to potentially go a bit higher, but, again, it all comes down to what it actually looks like and what trade-offs you make with all the surrounding parts.

**MS CARRICK:** When it comes to trade-offs, what is your view about curating the building height so that you have lower ones around your northern sides of your public spaces to allow the sun in and your amenity, and then higher ones where you are



overshadowing roads and you are not impacting on public spaces?

**Mr Butler:** I think that makes sense, and I think that is why there is value in not doing piecemeal development. It is doing that bigger, group centre thinking. You do not want to develop this part and then realise, “Oh, actually we want a community centre. We need some sort of infrastructure, and we have to put it on this site.” That then could have poor outcomes that could include the shadowing on public realm.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Caitlin?

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you, Chair. Following on from what Jo said about getting 148 responses, that is a pretty good response rate. I am interested in what were the demographics of those who engaged and what were the main concerns or positives that people came back with.

**Mr Butler:** The demographics we posted on website, so I am happy to share that with the committee after this.

**MS TOUGH:** That would be great.

**Mr Butler:** From memory, it does skew older—to an older demographic. I think that is why one of the recommendations we made in our submission to this inquiry was to do proper consultation and to make sure you are hearing from a broader range of people. We are just humble volunteers. We had to rely on people self-selecting to do our survey. But if you have got some more resources, you can reach out and engage people who are less likely to engage proactively.

**MS TOUGH:** Yes; thank you. On that, a lot of the submissions we received tended to skew to an older demographic. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that and people having a say, but for people of my generation and a bit younger it can be a harder to engage. I think you covered it—that Woolies or the government, in going forward, make sure all demographics are covered.

**Mr Butler:** One hundred per cent. It is one of those things where, if we all get together, we put the whole community first. You hear from people that have been around a long time, and they have got the known experience about how the centre functions and things that have worked and things that have not worked. Then you have newer or younger residents that do not have that lived experience so much, but they are the ones that are going to be living with whatever happens for a lot longer. I think the whole community has valuable input. Woolworths can say they did a comprehensive job on their consultation, but I think most people would probably disagree with the work that they did.

**MS TOUGH:** Thank you.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you again for the work of the BCC and for your very thorough submission. One thing I was interested in during the Woolies presentation is that they have indicated scoping for, potentially, three supermarkets in the area. They were not

very specific about what the area was or where those other locations might be, but I guess it raised the possibility for me, in terms of a planning point of view, of Scullin, Page and Weetangera, which do not have any general-purpose supermarkets at all, and whether there is scope for thought on planning of southern Belconnen to really try and service those suburbs. Obviously, that would still leave the possibility of Hawker being refreshed and maybe even the Metro being upgraded, perhaps even into a full-line service.

**Mr Butler:** I think that planning work definitely needs to be undertaken. It is the same with similar things like early childhood education facilities. We need to be planning for all the things that people rely on. I think, at the end of the day, people make commercial decisions. We have seen some difficulties in some of the new suburbs like Denman Prospect, with the IGA there and getting that off the ground when there were not enough people to support it. We need to be able to create these local centres where the anchor tenant can survive but the small businesses can also survive. There is definitely planning work that needs to underpin that. It is a challenge, but I think we should not shy away from challenges. We should be trying to make every local centre as great as they possibly can be.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you. Does the BCC still have the view that the direct sale should not proceed absent of a full community consultation?

**Mr Butler:** The direct sale process exists for a reason, but it is not the default option. There is a reason, with procurement, you do not just go to one provider; you go out and test the market. I think the ACT government should stick by its own viewpoints on how to sell land, which is not a direct sale approach. When you have an open tender or an EOI process, or something that invites alternative perspectives, you invite competition; you start that conversation and you provide that input. The direct sale process, I think, as we have seen so far, has been very, very underwhelming, and I do not think we will get a very good outcome.

I was listening to the chap from Woolworths. When he did the consultation with us, it was the visioning stage, no designs. Then they submitted the direct sale application. I heard earlier today that they are talking about how they are still in the early concept plans. How can the ACT government make a decision on whether the direct sale is appropriate if Woolworths does not even know what they are going to build there? The only thing that seems to have come out of their consultation is the need for a bigger Woolworths, which seems to align more with Woolworths' shareholder values and not Canberra community values.

**MR CAIN:** From the committee point of view, obviously we are having hearings, and we are going to be producing a report with recommendations. What would BCC's top three recommendations be?

**Mr Butler:** The key one is proper community consultation, and it all stems from that. The issue with the direct sales comes from community consultation. The issue with the ACT government comes from that community consultation. I think we really need to have that big vision of what is going to happen there, because it is a poor outcome if we decide, "Let's build in this part here," and not give any thought to what is going to happen anywhere else; then, at some point maybe, "We will think about doing

something here.” It will not be a coherent, well-functioning centre. I think, really, community consultation comes at the start of it.

If I was going to give you a second one, it would be that the ACT government needs to reflect on its previous work with group centres. We heard earlier today about the Hawker Village master plan from 2012 to 2014; the failures that occurred there. We have seen similar failures in the Kippax Group Centre. We saw them do the master plan work and then a private entity, Kippax Fair, overrode that master plan with their own one, and the master plan we have today is the one that was designed by Kippax Fair, not the one designed by the ACT government with the community. Then we saw poor processes with trying to sell the land around Kippax Fair to get that redevelopment going there.

We have seen the government not do a great job with improving its group centres, and I think it really needs to look inwards and ask, “How are we going to be better?” Is this going to be the issue that we have at every group centre that requires work? We saw issues with Giralang local shops—different story and different issues there, but we have seen it with Giralang shops. Hawker has come up multiple times now. We have seen it with Kippax. A decade of just talking about doing stuff and we are slowly getting there. With Kippax, they eventually went with a direct sale process, but that was after pausing the tender process halfway through and all sorts of stuff that came out of there. If they are really keen to do shop-top housing and really keen to reinvigorate local shops, the ACT government needs to make sure they are doing their part right.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** You are talking a lot about the role of government, Lachlan, and you are doing so in a really, really articulate way. I really appreciate it. I will add another one to your list of failed master plans of Belconnen: we had a beautiful Belco CBD master plan, which I think everybody would have been quite happy with, if it had got built. That is not what is getting built though.

I put this to Woolworths this morning, and I will probably put it to the minister too: how is it in the public interest to do a direct sale rather than some other process? Public tender is one; there are EOIs and RFPs. There are lots of different ways you could get interest. The only reason he gave, really, was because they already own Woolies and they own the car park, that is going to give the best chances of having—I am so sorry; because they already own Woolies and they want to buy the car park, they have got the best chance of putting those together. It sounds very similar to what we heard at Kippax and the reasons that were put up as to why that needed to be a direct sale and not an open process of something else.

If government did take a bit of leadership with a master plan or some kind of visioning of what we need to have there, and was a bit more proactive in being involved and leading the consultation, do you think there is a way to get holistic planning that could be delivered on the ground, given that we have got a different range of leaseholders and given the situation we have there already?

**Mr Butler:** I think, realistically, if Woolworths are that confident in their perspective, they should be willing to test that in an EOI, an open tender process and genuine

consultation. And, yes, I imagine they could possibly put forward a better option. I doubt they are going to try and fit a Coles there, and an IGA or a Supabarn probably would not be as successful there but prove it. If they genuinely believe that, go through a proper process and prove it.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and where is the harm? Do you think that causes delays? Do you think that would lead to better consultation? Are there any benefits or disadvantages with doing something like that?

**Mr Butler:** There are going to be delays, but I think the delays are on the part of the ACT government. They probably should not have given up on the master plan process. It should have been a continuing conversation with the community. You do not just put your hands up and walk away. When they heard Woolworths wanted to do this, they could have done something. Last year, when the direct sale application was put in, they could have done something. When they rejected it earlier this year, ACT government could have done something.

We live in a capitalist society. Woolworths are more than welcome to put forward ideas and to say, “We want to do this. We want to buy that,” but it is the ACT government that is meant to be there to make sure the best outcomes happen. That is the ACT government’s job. I think with developers the conversation is always “evil developer”, “evil Woolworths”, but they are very simple to understand: it is develop and make money. If you understand those two key principles about a developer, you can work around the system; you can figure out what they are going to do; you can figure out what they want. And, really, the ACT government should be stepping in and trying to guide it to get the right outcome.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, it is very reactive at the moment, isn’t it? It is very developer-led and reactive.

**Mr Butler:** I think they should be an active participant, not a passive bystander.

**THE CHAIR:** Jumping back a step and before the government gets to what process to go through on the decision of whether it should in fact sell or redevelop that car park—there are the two car parks; whether the one car park should be redeveloped—do you have a strong sense of what will best serve the community going forward for the next 50 years, a surface level car park or something else?

**Mr Butler:** That is a good question. I think genuine community consultation would probably answer that. I, myself, do not often use the Hawker Woolworths or the group centre there. I personally prefer underground parking, and I like my car not being in the sun and not being rained on or anything like that, but it all comes down to trade-offs. Do you go higher on the existing footprint and keep the open surface parking lots, or do you keep the low-rise part and expand out? There are so many different ways to go about it, and it is having conversations with people and asking, “How do you make the many people happy?” It is balancing all those different trade-offs to get a good outcome.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Fiona?

**MS CARRICK:** I have got a couple of questions. I have noticed, with the developments,

that the government is seeking the private sector to provide the community facilities. Potentially, they would ask Westfield to provide whatever community facilities, and sometimes that does not lead to the greatest outcomes, because they can close. If nobody takes up the tenancy, then what happens? Do you have a view about whether the ACT government should be providing community facilities or whether it is okay, with the trade-offs, with having the private sector provide them?

**Mr Butler:** There are definitely trade-offs. I agree with that. If the government does it, there is obviously a cost to it, but I think the cost is even greater when you sell off an asset and let the private sector do whatever. There is no guarantee, like you said, that it will be there in 20 years time. We want to see these community assets stay in the community. We do not want to see them go away. And as we have seen in the Belconnen Town Centre—and you see it everywhere—land does not magically appear. If a development happens and a community facility is gone, it is quite challenging to find a new spot, especially in the town centre where prices for land have gone up.

I think this conversation has happened with our pools, as you have advocated for, in Woden. We have seen, with Big Splash, big issues there. With CISAC, the lease for that does not require a pool to be there forever. I was recently reading in the *Hansard* about how, I think, in the mid-2030s, the owners could turn that all into apartments, and where would you put a pool then? Once the private sector has these assets, there is no way to ensure that those assets will remain.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you. My other question is a planning-type one, and, I guess, it is all trade-offs, as you say. If Woolies builds on the southern car park, the Springvale car park, and there is underground parking, do you have any concerns about people driving under, going into Woolies, doing their shopping, coming back out and driving off, and the other part of the group centre becoming less active?

**Mr Butler:** Definitely, and that is why the big picture viewpoint is necessary here, because if you are going to have underground parking, it should really support the entire group centre. If Woolworths has escalators going straight to the Woolworths part, and that is the most convenient way to access it, that is what people will do. So that is why the ACT government should be stepping in and saying, “Here is what we want,” because Woolworths can say what they want—again, it is capitalist society, and they are a private company, and they have got shareholders—but they should not be dictating what the outcomes are for our community.

**MS CARRICK:** Do you think that the ACT government should be master planning so that there is a balance in the centre, with something that draws people to the other side of the town centre so that then there is traffic that moves between them?

**Mr Butler:** Definitely. I think you want it to be a place where people go frequently. You want it to be a place where people want to stay, and that is one of the arguments for shop-top housing: that you have always got that steady flow of people around. And as mentioned earlier, if you are going to do shop-top housing, you want it to be good housing. You need to have it properly integrated in there. You do not want to just put shop-top housing on top of the petrol station. There are good ways to do shop-top housing and not so good ways to do shop-top housing. Yes, I definitely agree.

**MS CARRICK:** And when I say “traffic”, I mean foot traffic moving between them so that the centre is activated.

**Mr Butler:** Yes, definitely. You want people around. You want people moving around. You want it to be a good place for people to want to be.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, because people like activity. Activity seems to attract activity.

**Mr Butler:** Definitely.

**THE CHAIR:** Awesome. We have time for one more quick question, if there is one more.

**MR CAIN:** Do you have something in closing perhaps?

**Mr Butler:** I have always forgone the opening statement and never had time for a closing statement!

**MR CAIN:** Thirty seconds!

**Mr Butler:** I think the ACT government has a role to play here. Woolworths is not the bad guy here. It is the ACT government that needs to be guiding and setting the rules for how Woolworths behaves. We have got to be proactive about this stuff. Like I have said a couple of times, the ACT government has had plenty of opportunities to step-up and do something, but it still has not. From our perspective, we are advocating for better outcomes and better consultation, and unfortunately at this point, that is probably going to lead to delays, but they are not unavoidable delays. We could have been doing this concurrently with everything that Woolworths was doing. I am very, very keen for the committee to be pushing the ACT government on how they are learning from all the previous errors they have made and how they are they going to make this one be a good outcome. How can they be an active participant in this? They cannot just continue saying, “We are assessing it. We do not have anything to say. Oh, do some shop-top.” They have got to genuinely get involved to get good outcomes.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Lachlan. That was excellent. Thank you for coming in today. Thank you for giving up your time both on the council and in hearings. We very much appreciate it. If anyone has a question for Lachlan on notice, please upload it within five days, and think carefully about his volunteer time before you do that! We will adjourn now. Thank you.

**Short suspension.**

**RUSSELL, MR DEANE**, Director, Belconnen Way Hotel

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, Deane Russell, from the Belconnen Way Hotel. For the Hansard record, can you state the capacity in which you are appearing today?

**Mr Russell:** I am a director of a management company that runs the Belconnen Way Hotel. My mother, Mrs Yula Russell, who turns 99 this year, is the sole owner and trader of the hotel, and I am representing her. By way of background, she came here in 1959 and developed the Deakin Shops, the Charnwood Shops, Southlands Mawson, Chifley, Waramanga and the Belconnen Way Hotel. She bought the land at the Albert Hall in 1970, and built that block as we see it, before the shops went in. It is part of the NCDC plan for regional shopping centres and the bricks we used matched the shopping centre. Hence, that is part of my submission, that the NCDC has quite specific broad suburban plans for community centres to be used locally. So there were not these grand areas, with respect to Belconnen and Woden, these large areas moving away from Civic.

That was the broad principle of the original Walter Burley Griffin plan. So moving forward from that, we have owned and run that hotel for 53 years this December. I have been actively involved in it. Now I have other business, but I have been actively involved in it since then, including bottle washer, barman and storeman. We got the first Les Girls in from Kings Cross. We had the Paul Hogan show. We have had the Tony Barber show, for those who can remember.

We are very actively involved in the community and sports. We started the West Belconnen Rugby Leagues Club chook raffles; we started the darts club and the soccer club. We employ local people. We have been actively engaged in ACT tourism. The ACT government over time has changed legislation, which has severely affected our business, ie clubs, letting Woolies sell grog cheaper than we could buy it wholesale. We have had to change our business over 53 years. This proposal by Woolworths will destroy our business.

**THE CHAIR:** Deane, thank you so much. I am just going to cut in and say a few procedural words, and then we will proceed.

**Mr Russell:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for that history. I grew up in the area and I did not know half of that. That was great.

As a witness you are protected by parliamentary privilege, and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

Deane, we have seen your submission. Thank you very much for that. We actually went and did a site visit last week, which was great. One of the things we did was we tried to walk from where the current Metro is across to the club and motel. It is not easy to get through at the moment, I would say. One of the concerns that you flagged is, if anything happens there, we need a really good interface. Can you run us through some of the ideas you have or some of the concerns you would have about that?

**Mr Russell:** Our business at the moment, and for the foreseeable future, is a lot of interstate people who come to do trade work in the ACT. So we have changed our motel style into more kitchenettes so that people can get access to the supermarket, cook their own food, and it is a different—it is a bit of a medium to long term. In addition to which there is the ACT Housing and the ACT OneLink, et cetera, where we get long-term stay people. So that secure access and that more easy access to the shops is important.

But more importantly, Woolworths are proposing—and we are not opposed to Woolworths being involved in the development of the shops—it is the way in which they have put a wall directly on our boundary to cut our exits off, et cetera. So that is important to us. We have tried to talk to Woolworths to say, “Look, you would be mad not to integrate your thinking with our thinking.” We were prepared to spend money, make a covered walkway, put an elevator in, you know, be sensible about business. Anyone who wants to spend \$20 or \$30 million bucks next to another business would enhance our business. We would be mad not to talk to them. I have a couple of other things that I would like to just mention.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. Go to those, please.

**Mr Russell:** So there is a couple of boxes here. One is a government policy about selling assets, land. If I could make a point: everybody is talking about the carpark, but it does involve Hawker Place, which is a street. Now that street is important to us. We have in fact had plans, going back for quite some time, to build on that verge and then front that street with shops, because we have a headlease that allows different types of things. The other thing is that, if I could make a point?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Russell:** If McDonalds wanted to build something on Anzac Parade because it suited them, I do not think the government would allow them to do that, just because somebody wants to take over a public street. Parking is a different issue. I would like to separate that out as a policy issue because that is a very important thing I think for the ACT government to set a precedent on. I do not know if there are any other precedents about public streets, but that is an important access point for us. The other thing about parking is that it strikes me a bit odd that they want to build an underground carpark and then put a loading dock on a carpark. That is a bit odd to me. That is not a good use of land, but that is their issue. When you were up there, did you notice the path that was between the two buildings?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Russell:** Now that is the proposed exit for the carpark, the underground carpark, going across a bike path and a public park. So presumably the sale will include a public path, a bike path and public land. So our customers will have to walk out onto Belconnen Way, down away from the city, around that park, up in the dark, around the top of the shops and around into the supermarket, or go up through Springvale Drive around to the Shell station.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.



**Mr Russell:** The second thing is, I want to make the point, that the overall planning — understanding fully well that the federal Labor government wants to build more homes, which makes sense to everybody, and we are not opposed to that through the ACT government with the correct planning—but you look at that whole block as a single planning zone. So we had some previous plans that had 80 apartments on our block, only going three storeys because we are sunk down a bit. So that would only make it one storey, bringing it up into line.

Our block is 6,300 metres, or 200 metres. So there is ample opportunity if the ACT government has a broader plan to bring a development instrument that allows multiple use. If you go to Sydney, go to Lane Cove, they have done a beautiful job with the local shopping centre there. They have done a really good job. The same with Neutral Bay, they are struggling with that at the moment. So anyway, that is broadly what I wanted to say. That we have been actively involved in the fabric of tourism and economics in Canberra for a long time, and for Woolies to come along at the very end with a plan saying that it cuts you off—not appropriate.

**THE CHAIR:** Deane, that is excellent. I am going to hand over to my colleagues, but I am just going to reflect back a couple of the things I have heard which are very interesting to me. It sounds like you tried to talk to Woolies and they did not talk to you much. It also sounds like, as with many of our witnesses, you think it would be better if government developed a whole plan for the area and there might be other people interested in making changes in the area. It sounds like you have already suggested that possibly your business might make changes in some of your areas, and that it is very important that all this stuff is integrated well. Have I broadly got some of your points right?

**Mr Russell:** Correct. Our headlease allows doctors, dentists, travel agencies, hairdressers and restaurants because we got an extra 50 years. We paid for an extra 50 years. This is another point I would like to make. When the ACT government, with their headlease with Woolies—Woolies put a proposal, and I do not know if you have seen that diagram. It shows that they are going to put a proposed supermarket on the carpark footprint but not take over Hawker Place and have free parking. So on the premise that they took that over and signed a deal with the ACT government, they have now gone big bang theory, which is their prerogative to do as a developer, of course.

**MS CARRICK:** My question, then, comes to housing. What are your views about shop-top housing and the height. You mentioned that three storeys would not be very high, but the government in the missing middle is into densification, so what are your views about heights around the centre?

**Mr Russell:** Well, I live in a high-rise in Sydney, and near shopping centres, and it is fabulous. It is vital. There are different groups of people—downsizers, younger people, people with kids, et cetera—the size of apartments is a big, big thing, and that facility nearby, the doctor, the dentist, the supermarket, that is where these big things—I mean, lifestyle is changing.

They have done a fabulous job down at Kingston, have not they? That is my view, and Manuka and these places. So there is no reason you cannot think like that without having a monstrosity. I am not suggesting 50 storeys like North Sydney, not at all. Three

or four levels—commercial, retail, supermarkets, doctors, hairdressers—that just makes sense to me.

**MS CARRICK:** I am interested that you talked about the size of apartments. I note some of the developers around here will go for yield and 50 square metre apartments, but to attract downsizers—I think it is important to have some apartments that are attractive to the downsizers. I think that is what you alluded to.

**Mr Russell:** In Sydney, there are different downsizers. In the ACT, with respect, because I have been here a long time—I went to Yarralumla Primary School—people tend to go to Bateman’s Bay, if you do not mind me saying, but having said that, it is something that we had a town planner look at with our headlease about 12 or 15 years ago. We had three-bedders, two-bedders and not too many one-bedders. I think that is more student accommodation, ANU stuff, if you do not mind me saying, in that area. I am just thinking sensibly. The question is, is somebody going to sell a big house in Hawker to go to a three-bedroom in Hawker? I am not sure about that, but what I am sure about is that there is a market for three-bedders for families—that is my sense—in the ACT, because you have to add bus services, parking, you know that type of thing.

**MS CARRICK:** So coming to parking, one thing I note is that in some of the developments around Canberra, because they are crowding in a lot of apartments, there is a lot of overflow parking into adjacent car parks and shops. So what is your view about how you get adequate parking if you are going to have apartments?

**Mr Russell:** You just have a rule. For every apartment, you have to have so many parking spots. I live in an apartment in Sydney that has to have one for a certain size, and two for a certain size, and visitor car parks, and bike parking and electric vehicles. It is policy. The people work out the numbers if you are bringing in these boxes. Look, the other thing about planning and policy and plans is that you are really allowing Woolies in a way to have spot planning and that just does not make sense to me.

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, it is piecemeal.

**Mr Russell:** Mrs R has had that place for 53 years. I have other businesses, et cetera, and I run that business. I am not going to be around in 50 years’ time. That building will not exist as it is now in 50 years’ time. If you took a 50 year view, I mean Canberra is a wonderful—our kids live here. I am just saying that that Hawker area has completely missed a cycle of Belconnen in a way.

We are thinking about what it could be. It could be a series of lovely, at our end, say four or five apartments because we are down one level. We already have underground car parking because we had to have so many parks for that business. You can build underground right down. We go down two levels underneath there. You can have three or four levels of apartments. Our design had a big walkway all the way through to the shops. You can build down for residents because residents can just drive in, press a button, go up in the passenger lift. That is not a problem. Whereas for people shopping—my view is there should not be paid parking for locals because they are already paying rates and taxes. It is like parking at a beach in Sydney. Locals get parking for free if they are lucky enough to live near a beach.

I am just saying there are ways around it. If you are local, you live in a catchment area, bang, you hit the thing, you are getting free parking for a couple of hours or half a day or whatever it is. It is just policy in my view.

**MS TOUGH:** You made some wonderful comments I think around how Hawker could potentially look in the future and potential development on the site, but you said the Woolies plan, as was put forward originally, would be very, very detrimental to your business and the hotel being able to operate. In the future, with a potential Woolies coming back with different plans or whatever the government decides to do going forward with Hawker, what collaboration would you like to see with Woolies or whoever is helping the site and government, to make sure that your site is properly integrated into any future Hawker Village?

**Mr Russell:** We have a set of stairs. You have to walk across a laneway. It is not covered. I mean, we would be happy to contribute to whatever that looks like. We have already done the planting. Mrs R planted all those shrubs—whatever it is needs to be done. We would like to demonstrate that we have been part of the community and ACT tourism for an awfully long time, and we have tried to contribute and do the right thing, sponsor this and all the rest of it, as businesses do. It is just a dialogue. We have tried to have a dialogue. Who would not have a set of hotel customers being able to walk into your business, not walk around the block. I mean, I fundamentally do not get it really.

**MS TOUGH:** Yes. As Jo said, last week when we visited, trying to get even just from the Metro into the hotel, we got a bit confused about where the entry and exit was, so yes, I can see the benefits in having that proper linkage.

**MR CAIN:** I am just wondering what engagement has the ACT government had with your hotel?

**Mr Russell:** So at my outreach, they have been very good, in my view. The sales division has been very open about what Woolies are trying to do and that type of thing. They have been very supportive of some of the suggestions that I have made. I have some recommendations that I would like to read out, please, in a minute that covers off some of that stuff.

I will say that the minister's statement, in my view, was an appropriate kind of way to go at that point in time. They may have—I hear the Belconnen community group saying they might have started it earlier in the cycle, but now they have come to a position where they seem to me that they are thinking about a broader consultation and a broader plan.

My view is the public servants have been very responsive. I am not saying they are agreeing with me but at least they are listening and returning calls and emails. From that point of view, I do not have any problem, but as far as development of a master plan, I know there is thinking—I think the minister has flagged that there is going to be a broader look at the whole area. I know there has been some digging out there in the car parks recently. Did you know that, with the—

**THE CHAIR:** Some drilling, yes. We did hear about the drilling, the testing.

**Mr Russell:** So they are thinking about it, but when you think about the Belconnen Way is a major four lane, to and fro, and then you sweep back from our block into the car park up the hill into the first set block, there is a huge—if you thought larger and two or three storey developments, walkways, a community area and playgrounds. I mean that is a wonderful big set area to think bigger, is it not?

I mean, why has KFC put their KFC there? Because there is a catchment. From what I understand from Woolies, they normally need 10,000 homes for a supermarket. Well, there is 30,000 homes in there, and I think Hawker is one of the highest per household incomes in Canberra, if I am not mistaken. I am just saying that there is opportunity in there to really create something, in my view.

**MR CAIN:** So do you have a view on whether the direct sale is the best process for enhancing that centre or even whether the eastern carpark should be sold?

**Mr Russell:** Could I answer that question by reading out my recommendations?

**THE CHAIR:** I would love to hear them.

**Mr Russell:** Recommendation one, that the Australian Capital Territory land—and that is a sledge about the NCDC—land known as the “public free parking area at the Hawker Shops and the public road Hawker Place” not be sold by the ACT government. That is my first view.

Secondly, recommendation two, that if the ACT government does proceed to sell the public land at Hawker shopping centre to facilitate an expanded Woolworths precinct, then the following applies: (a) only the carpark be sold and not Hawker Place; (b) any Woolworths’ controlled carpark be free for 24 hours a day; (c) that the public path between the current Woolworths’ loading dock and the Belconnen Way Hotel guest rooms not be sold; and (d) that the public park and bike path on the proposed exit to the underground carpark not be sold. I have three more.

**MR CAIN:** Are you happy to send those through to the committee?

**THE CHAIR:** I am actually quite happy to listen to them.

**MR CAIN:** So it is on Hansard? Yes, sure.

**Mr Russell:** Recommendation three, that if the ACT government proceeds to any sale of public land at the Hawker shopping centre, that it be by public tender. I think that is good government policy, if I can put it that way.

Recommendation four, that if the ACT government proceeds to sell any public land at the Hawker shopping centre, then the original National Capital Development Commission suburban shopping centre planning concepts be continued to ensure a proper integration of the shopping centre with the Belconnen Way Hotel site.

Before a development application is lodged, that the design is assessed by the ACT Government Architect, noting that the role this officer plays is a pivotal role in the

development of the ACT building and places through leadership and independent strategic advice to government on architecture, planning, design and related matters. In particular, that role promotes high quality design and a strong urban design across all government agencies to the private sector.

That is pre-DA, so if they go to sell, they have a contract and in the contract is the government architect. That would be my suggestion. That will tie in to make sure any development in that area ties in with the broader territory plan about environment and trees and all the rest of it.

I have one other: that the original leasing contract negotiated by the ACT government with Woolworths, which included free parking and not taking over Hawker Place be adhered to. I have a plan of that original, which is on the ACT government's leasing website. That is it, thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that, Deane. We still have time. I heard a great deal about master planning and the history of the site. I am interested in testing some of these things with the minister. We do not often put plans to the ACT Government Architect, but we sometimes put significant developments to the National Capital Design Panel. I wonder if that would be—

**Mr Russell:** It is the same—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, the same. That is what you mean, yes.

**Mr Russell:** If I could just talk to that for one second. There is a bar at which it automatically goes to that authority, and Woolworths, in my view, has set out their plan so they do not jump that bar, but if you take into consideration the carpark, the loading dock and all the other services in that, it certainly jumps the bar, if you do not mind me saying it.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I test you too? We have heard lots of different views of what the local character is at Hawker, and some of those views of the local character are that it is open plan access, sunny access, current single storey, not any higher, no housing, surface level car parking. Some people see that as inherently part of the local character. You actually put out quite a different vision for the whole area which sounds a lot more developed than what is there already. What is your view of the local character of that area? You have got quite a lot of history and you have got a pretty clear vision for that place.

**Mr Russell:** So going up the hill from Springvale Drive, those first set of apartments, how high are they? Three?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, three storeys I think.

**Mr Russell:** I mean, they are not the most beautiful piece of architecture you have seen in your life.

**THE CHAIR:** They are not, but they are homes for a lot of people.

**Mr Russell:** So the new architecture—there are two things in my view. The population demographics are changing in the ACT. Hawker will certainly be changing in the next 10 or 20 years for lifestyle, age, needs, et cetera. The second thing is that the architecture now is amazing, is not it? Like the quality of the buildings and the fitouts. It is not just a set of red brick block of apartments, two little dingy rooms, some parking underneath, if you do not mind me saying. It does not take too much to think about some gorgeous areas around different parts of Canberra, that they have done really, really well. You have only just to think—I mean, I just drove down to the Manuka cinema.

**MS CARRICK:** There is no Manuka cinema anymore.

**Mr Russell:** No, there is not but it is not the most elegant building, is it? It looks quite nice, it sits there, but there is a lot of other well-designed buildings. I mean, you can set policy parameters.

**MS CARRICK:** I am very interested in the policy parameters. We used to have rules where we did have parking, one park per one beddie, and one and half per two beddie, and over three, two parks, or whatever it was. It was something like that. There were rules.

We have deregulated and we are outcomes-focused now. So those rules are becoming diminished. You will see it in the federal arena where they are trying to build a lot of houses, and they are saying that red tape is getting in the way and planning processes, and there are too many planners, and all that. So there is this tension between having rules and being more outcomes-focused.

Anyway, in the ACT here we are outcomes-focused now, so the government has just got to consider some guidelines. It does make it a bit more difficult to probably have certainty around—

**Mr Russell:** Well, that is a plot ratio issue then, is it not: height, plot, gardens, amenities. You just set the boundaries, and if the architect does not hit those boundaries, well then you do not jump the fence. Look, I understand what you are saying, and you are right about red tape, but what is happening in the hotel business?

Our hotel rooms are these 1972 big motel rooms with kitchens. All that is going in motels now. They are bringing in little rooms. They do not have fridges anymore. They have a TV and a bed. They do not even have a cupboard. They do not have any ironing facilities. They are forcing people down to their restaurants and bars. That product is changing. How people travel, when, how long do they book for, all that is changing. If you jump forward ten years with AI and booking in with a phone and all that stuff, that is what you have got to be thinking about I think.

You are right if you set some parameters. I mean, I am not suggesting covering that block in apartments. You can have three floors, gardens in between, walkways, shops and restaurants. I am not suggesting you build a North Sydney by any means, and I am not here to tell people how to do a planning instrument either. My main goal is to make sure that if it does go ahead with Woolies, and we wish it does, then we get to have an integration say. That is my main—

**MS CARRICK:** Yes, thank you, and there is policy around certain planning characteristics.

**THE CHAIR:** We might be at the end of our time now. Deane, thank you very much for coming in. On behalf of our committee, thank you for your time. You are a busy man. That was absolutely fascinating and so valuable. If any members want to ask Deane a question on notice, please upload it within five days, with respect, for his time. Thank you for coming in.

**Mr Russell:** Thank you very much for the opportunity.

### **Short Suspension**

**STEEL, MR CHRIS**, Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development,  
Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport  
**AKHTER, MS SANZIDA**, Acting Executive Group Manager, Development and  
Implementation, City and Environment Directorate  
**ENGELE, MR SAM**, Deputy Director-General, City and Environment Directorate  
**MUNDY, MR GRAHAM**, Senior Director, Land Supply, Development and  
Implementation, City and Environment Directorate

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Mr Chris Steel MLA, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, and we welcome all of your officials. I might get each of you to state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

**Mr Mundy:** Graham Mundy, Senior Director within CED. I am in charge of the team which was looking at the site investigations of the car parks.

**Mr Engele:** Sam Engele, Deputy Director-General, CED, and I look after the old EPSDD's stream of the directorate.

**Mr Steel:** Chris Steel, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

**Ms Akhter:** Sanzida Akhter, Acting Executive Group Manager, Development and Implementation in CED.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I remind you that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and you are bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not inviting opening statements, but you are welcome to table anything further that you need to today or that arises out of these hearings. We have had a number of hearings now and we have heard a lot of different visions for the site. I am going to start with some common ground that I think we have. The Belconnen Community Council survey sounds like a pretty accurate view. I reckon the vast majority of people in the area would like change at the Hawker Group Centre and would like an upgraded and nicer shop. This is pretty common. There are a lot of people calling for the ACT government to be more involved in what happens there.

There is a bit of frustration over failed master planning processes in the past, and we have had a lot of people calling for either a master plan now or some kind of holistic planning approach, rather than simply looking at the Woolies site that they own and Woolies' bid for the car park and Hawker Place and simply responding to that. Do you have any views on that? Do you understand why people would want the ACT government to be more involved, to put something more comprehensive together for the whole group centre?

**Mr Steel:** Yes. I think it was envisaged in the Belconnen District Strategy that there was further planning and non-planning initiatives that could be undertaken in this group centre. That was identified through the planning system review. There is now some work that is being undertaken across the 14 group centres to look at some of the issues



raised through the district strategy, which at some point may be presented to the community. I guess what we are interested in is hearing from the community about what some of those things are that they want us to look at.

Some early due diligence work has been happening in relation to the broader site, which Mr Mundy can talk to. Obviously, we have had a proponent-initiated direct sale application as well, which the government had been considering and then of course went back to the proponent recently—which you would be aware of—in relation to their plan for part of the site.

Yes, there is work happening. I think this committee will be invaluable to get feedback from the community and through the committee about what things we should consider as we move through that work that is focused on shopping centres and also housing outcomes as well.

**THE CHAIR:** While there is mixed views on housing, we are certainly hearing some people who see the need in a housing crisis, and I understand the government has stated objectives for group centres. Can I take it that that means that the government would not proceed with the direct sale that is on the table at the moment until it had done that more holistic planning and actually been directly involved in getting community views? Or is it that you are doing a broader picture and you are going to go ahead with this proposal at the moment anyway?

**Mr Steel:** Ms Akhter, would you like to take that and speak around the direct sales process?

**Ms Akhter:** As I guess you know, EPSDD at the time when the directional application was received looked at the application and its merits under the legislation. There are processes that we need to go through. In light of the government's objective and the community's expectation and also what value the direct sale application would bring to that area, at the time, we advised the minister that it is not supported. Since then, we have advised the Woolworths Group of the decision, and they have not reached back out to us. So, at this stage, I would say that it was rejected at the time and we have not had any further engagement with Woolworths.

**THE CHAIR:** We have heard from Woolies this morning that Woolies has taken that message and is currently having a think about whether they come back to you with a housing integrated proposal. They obviously have not done that yet. What I am trying to get to is: is the government simply going to wait for proponent development proposals and make individual decisions on that, or are we now going to move into a place where government takes an active role in what the whole site looks like and helps lead that outcome?

**Mr Steel:** That probably goes to the work that we are doing in relation to the broader centre and due diligence that is required to then undertake some further work. So the answer is: yes, we are looking at the whole site—so beyond the car parks specified by Woolies as part of their direct sale—to look at what the other opportunities are there. It is probably worth going into what some of that work is.

**Mr Engele:** Maybe I will talk broadly about the centre's work, and then we can run you

through the individual studies that we are undertaking.

**THE CHAIR:** If you can do that really briefly, that would be great.

**Mr Engle:** Sure. As the minister said, we are looking at all those different centres. They each have their own unique characteristics, and some of them will be more suited for proponent-initiated direct sales and others will be more suited for government-initiated work. We have been working through that, but the first step is really to understand what the capability is in terms of what can be built on there. That is what is driving our studies. These studies are occurring at a number of group centres at the moment. I might hand to Mr Mundy to talk through the specific studies.

**Mr Mundy:** We are basing this on what we call the stage 1 investigations, which is basically desktop, looking at what the constraints of the sites are and the car parks. We are now doing more detailed assessments in terms of contamination, geotech and our normal range of studies—traffic, trees and all those investigations which are much more detailed—looking to see what the constraints are and what area, if any, is developable on the sites. Most of those are due mid to late September, because some of the contamination needs to go to a laboratory for results and such like that. The results of that will also be made publicly available, the same as the stage 1 was.

**THE CHAIR:** Where is the public information about what I am going to call the planning process—that is, the studies and planning processes? At what stage in this process does the public get to input into government on the Hawker Centre?

**Mr Engle:** The key thing at the moment is to understand whether any change can occur to those sites. A big thing that we are seeing is the utilisation of car parking. Those car parking studies are actually telling us in some areas that any development will require large amounts of replacement car parking. When you combine that with possible contamination, it does make some of these centres unviable in terms of redevelopment. We really need to get a better understanding about the replacement parking requirements and what infrastructure needs to be upgraded. We know that big infrastructure upgrades can add significant cost. These are all the elements at a very base level that we need before we can even understand what the potentials are in the Hawker Group Centre.

**THE CHAIR:** That sounds great. I understand all that. But this is news to me, and I am looking at an inquiry in Hawker and I live around that area. At what point, in what month in what year, is the Hawker and Belconnen community going to be told about the government's involvement in this and at what stage community can input into that government involvement? I understand that no decisions have been taken. I understand that studies are underway. But, at the moment, the community has only seen a Woolworths proposal. The community does not actually know that the government is doing this work.

**Mr Steel:** I think they are, because there has been some engagement on the due diligent—

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; great. Tell me about that.

**Mr Steel:** I think the major point is that the government is not proposing anything at Hawker Group Centre at the moment. These studies are just preliminary studies off the back of that proposal to look at what the constraints on the site are that might then help to inform future development of ideas and opportunities. But we do not have any actual specific proposal at Hawker Group Centre.

I appreciate that the community would like to get engaged, but we are not proposing anything at this point in time. Yes, at a future point in time, if something was proposed, hypothetically, on the site, then we would look at opportunities for engagement with the community. But the government is not proposing anything at the site at the moment. The due diligent studies are just looking at the opportunities around the site. There has been some work done to engage with the community just to let them know about the fact that we are doing the site investigation—boring and the like—to be able to find out more about the site.

**THE CHAIR:** I might just summarise where I think things are at and then I am going to hand over to Mr Cain, who is desperate to ask a question. Ms Akhter has told us that the current proposal has been rejected. The government has told us about some due diligence studies about this site and any many other sites. The government have told us that they do not have any proposal and that there are no immediate plans for there to be a government-led proposal or planning exercise, just due diligence. Have I, broadly speaking, got that correct?

**Mr Steel:** Yes, the due diligence, depending on what it shows, it might inform further work. The government, more broadly, has set out further work that its wants to undertake around planning reforms to support more housing, particularly looking at the group centres. We expect those due diligent studies might inform that work. But that is not a priority piece of work at the moment. The missing middle housing reforms are the current sort of housing priority at the moment. Then we will be looking at more transit-oriented development planning work. This is not necessarily a transit-oriented sort of site. That further work on the group centres will come a little bit later.

I think the inquiry is welcome, because it will throw up a lot of ideas, and we are really keen to hear what those are from the community. But the government is not presenting something at this inquiry around what we specifically want to do at Hawker in relation to a proposal.

**THE CHAIR:** Sure. We were not asking for your proposal today, Minister. We were asking if government would take a lead in master planning or a proposal in the future. And it sounds like, at this stage, the answer is no. But I am going to hand over, for a supplementary, to Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** You were talking about some broad surveys of group centres. Can you tell us which group centres those surveys include?

**Mr Steel:** All 14 are being looked at. But the specific studies will differ—

**MR CAIN:** Is that the whole of Canberra or—

**Mr Steel:** Yes, all 14 group centres are being looked at.

**MR CAIN:** In the whole of Canberra. Are you saying that you are going to be doing that before you make any decision on the Hawker Group Centre?

**Mr Steel:** What decision?

**MR CAIN:** Whether to approve Woolworths' application for a direct sale.

**Mr Steel:** As Ms Akhter said, they have already gone back to effectively rejecting—

**MR CAIN:** No, Minister; I am asking you. So you are doing a survey of the group centres. Does that mean that you are going to wait for that outcome before you make any decision about the Hawker Group Centre?

**Mr Steel:** Effectively what has happened after the Woolworths proposal is that we have now gone and undertaken those studies to help inform the decisions that need to be made under the Planning Act with regard to direct sales. One of those decisions that has to be made by government, and through the process—

**MR CAIN:** Sorry; you are not answering my question.

**Mr Steel:** I am, Mr Cain. If you would not mind just waiting until I answer it, and then you can decide whether it is good enough or not from your point of view. The decision that needs to be made through the direct land sales process is whether the proponent application should be accepted or whether the government should consider putting out the land that they have applied for to a competitive process. These sorts of studies will help to inform those sorts of decisions through the Planning Act direct sales process.

**MR CAIN:** So you will be completing a survey of all the group centres and then you will make a decision on the Woolworths application? Is that correct?

**Mr Steel:** The surveys at other group centres are not relevant to Hawker.

**MR CAIN:** They are not relevant to Hawker. Why have you decided, in principle at least, to a direct sale of the eastern car park?

**Mr Engele:** We have not.

**MR CAIN:** So why are you entertaining an application? You have actually rejected an application and then put conditions that you might approve it if they do something additional in housing. Why have you even said, "It is possible that we will do this," rather than saying, "No, we will not do a direct sale"?

**Mr Steel:** I do not think is quite true, if you look at the letter that had been written by the then EPSDD, in relation to this matter.

**MR CAIN:** But, clearly, Woolworths are under the impression that, if they modify their plan, you will consider favourably a direct sale. You are stringing them along. Are you stringing the community along as well?

**THE CHAIR:** Should we just get a statement again of what the government considers is the status of Woolworths' proposals today?

**Ms Akhter:** The proposal that we received at the time has not been supported by the government, at that stage.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Akhter:** The response to them outlines the government's priorities and expectations in terms of objectives in group centres, including Hawker in that particular instance, and, if Woolworths is going to come back and come up with a different proposal, we will look at that.

In this context, I want to clarify that there are a number of ways community or commercial organisations can buy land from the government. Direct sale is just one of the mechanisms. When a proponent comes to us with proposals, it is not unusual for us to look at the proposals and assess the merit. That is what happened in that particular instance. It is a common thing that we do.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move onto Fiona's question.

**MS CARRICK:** Thank you, Chair. My question is about the missing middle and is in the context of the Hawker shops—because that is what we are here about today. When you are looking at all the group centres in that context—and you are looking at the individual ones—will you have a bespoke plan for each group centre as you go through the missing middle process?

**Mr Steel:** The missing middle housing reforms are focused on RZ1 and RZ2 zones, not commercial zones.

**MS CARRICK:** So, when you are looking at the group centres there, it is not in the context of the missing middle?

**Mr Steel:** It may provide missing middle housing, but we are framing that as around sort of a shop-top or shop adjacent housing. That is how we are referring to it. The missing middle housing reforms are a specific set of reforms that we have been consulting on with community. They have a specific draft major plan amendment associated with them and a design guide, which is just focused on RZ1 and RZ2.

Obviously the group centres are commercially zoned, and so they have a different set of requirements under the Territory Plan. In terms of the shop-top work, there is planning work that will be getting underway, looking at: what are the current Territory Plan requirements around commercial zones? Is that inhibiting the potential of shop-top housing currently? Are there changes that could be considered? That work is at a reasonably early stage. So, no, there is nothing to present to the community yet. But, if there was, then we would have to do that much in the same way that we have done with the missing middle housing reforms.

**MS CARRICK:** Okay. So missing middle, RZ1 and RZ2—and this is another body of work about group centres.

**Mr Steel:** Yes.

**MS CARRICK:** So you are looking at the possibility of housing in the commercial zoning in a group centre?

**Mr Steel:** It is already permitted; it is just a question of whether there are further opportunities to reduce barriers or enable that shop-top type housing in the centres. And then the other piece of work is looking at: is there underutilised land available at group or local centres as well, including Richardson, where that might enable more of that mixed-use style development to occur, with residential on top and commercial on the bottom of the centres, which may also assist the viability of these centres in the long run. That work is, again, at a fairly early stage, and we are not presenting anything at this particular point in time. But if there is something, through this inquiry, that we should be looking at as part of that process, then we can consider what that is.

**MS CARRICK:** If you look at it in a bespoke manner, building heights, for example, will be different across group centres. Hawker might have lower ones and others might be higher.

**Mr Steel:** Yes. They are at the moment.

**MS CARRICK:** I know, but, as you are going through this process, do you have any plans that group centres will be allowed to have a height of 26 metres? Will you put—

**Mr Steel:** We do not have a proposal at this point. The work has not progressed that far. We are just looking at what the current planning controls are in the Territory Plan for these centres. One of the interesting questions that has come up, and it is certainly in my mind—it is based on some comments that have been made by the community on the Woolworths' proposal—is: is Hawker a bit different in terms of its status as a group centre? I have certainly wondered whether the Hawker group centre is, in fact, functioning as a group centre or whether it is functioning as a local centre. We all have to think about that. I am not suggesting we would change the status of it, but we would have to consider what is different in Hawker to the rest of the group centres and consider whether there are actually opportunities for some of these initiatives.

**MS CARRICK:** That is interesting. Group centres are different sizes. Some are really huge, like Cooleman Court. It is massive. Curtin is small.

**Mr Steel:** It is not the size of Kippax. It is a much smaller group centre. It has constraints, and, through the due diligence work, we are trying to get an understanding of what those constraints are before we progress anything further.

**MS CARRICK:** I cannot remember your exact words, but you talked about making sure that the centres are thriving. Will you look at how they are laid out? For example, if you have a big supermarket and everybody parks underneath it to do their shopping, and then they drive away, the other end of the shops potentially becomes quiet if there is no foot traffic. If there aren't things that bring people to both ends of a group centre, you will potentially have it all happening at one end and the other end will be quiet. You will not have foot traffic moving through. Will you look at those sorts of things:

where things are positioned and how you can make the whole centre active?

**Mr Engele:** Definitely. There are the existing constraints of the existing layout of the centres and the ownership structures. In some cases, where the centres are owned by just one corporation, it is easier to manipulate some of those boundaries. If the ownership is more fragmented, it is much more difficult. I definitely take your point about foot traffic and the location of car parking. The replacement car parking is a major constraint because the car parks are generally not owned by the centres. The interface is important, because, for those centres to function, people need to be able to park. It is a big thing that is coming out a lot in our studies. We look at each centre individually and we walk in each centre. We look at the condition of different centres. Whilst they might be quite dated, some centres are still in good condition and are well used; some newer ones are less so. We are seeing those differences. We are looking at the different commercial spaces, offerings and level of vacancy. As part of this due diligence process, we are taking a quite detailed look at each of them.

**MS CARRICK:** There is a lot of 50-square-metre housing around already. If you do put housing there, will you look at two- and three-bedroom places that will attract locals to downsize around their local shops and put rules around the number of car parks?

**Ms Steel:** Housing is currently permitted in the zone. It is important to note that the government does not own all of the group centres. There are privately owned buildings and businesses that operate in them. Obviously, decisions about investment and renewal of those private buildings are private commercial decisions. The government's role is mainly around the planning settings for the centres, which is what we are looking at—what is potentially allowable in the Territory Plan that might enable them to undertake that work. There are current territory planning controls and we are looking at some of the issues. If you are suggesting that we should look at the permitted size of apartments, we can note that and consider that as part of the—

**MS CARRICK:** Yes. In some of the planning, you can have a certain percentage of 50-square-metre housing and another percentage of other housing, but, if you want to encourage downsizers to move to local shops, you need to have some two- and three-bedroom apartments, because they will not necessarily want to downsize to 50 square metres. I have one more question. It is about solar access. Will you make sure that there will be solar access in the public spaces—for example, at Hawker—and that there will no tall buildings around the public spaces?

**Mr Steel:** We do not have the team here that looks at the Territory Plan, but, within some of the Territory Plan settings, there are already solar access requirements specific to the group centres. As part of the work, we would look at those controls. I do not have a comment to make specifically about Hawker, although solar access requirements are obviously considered generally as part of the planning process. If a development were proposed, that would be considered.

**MS TOUGH:** You mentioned earlier that direct sale is just one way land is purchased from government. What are the requirements in the legislation for the direct sale method? And how did this apply to the Woolies' proposal?

**Ms Akhter:** For a direct sale proposal to be accepted, the proponent needs to meet one

or more of the grant objectives that are set out in the Planning Act and also in the regulations. They often need to have an acceptable business case. That would be the minimum requirement, but we would also apply the lens of the priorities of the plan, such as the Planning Strategy vision and the minister's current planning priorities, as well as, of course, community benefit that the proposal would bring and whether it is the best option for the territory to take as a sales process compared to other options that are available.

**Mr Steel:** That includes, for example, competitive sale of the site as an alternative or not releasing the site at all.

**MS TOUGH:** How has that been applied to the Woolies' application?

**Ms Akhter:** We have not gone too far in the process, because, when we looked at the proposal, we considered the planning objective, the policy setting and the minister's priorities in the planning statement, and it was obvious that we were not in a position to support the proposal at the time. We made them aware of the expectations of the government in the Planning Strategy, the minister's priorities and the policy settings that we have. As I said before, if they come back with a different proposal—noting that they own the building and the land in Hawker—we would be open to consider their revised proposal, while we have the broader reform that the minister mentioned—that we are undertaking to understand the site constraints more broadly across all 40 group centres, including Hawker.

**MS TOUGH:** How many owners are at the Hawker site? Woolies owns the building that Woolies is in and one of the adjacent buildings. Do we know how many owners there are across the site?

**Mr Engle:** I believe it is a fragmented ownership structure. There are a number of small businesses operating there. We would have to take the exact number on notice.

**Mr Steel:** We can take that on notice. Generally speaking, each group centre is different in terms of the ownership structure. It is a problem. When you have a structure like that, it can create problems with getting reinvestment in the centre. For there to be agreement amongst the owners for renewal of the privately owned buildings, there is a similar problem. At Kamah Village, for example, in your electorate, Ms Tough, a business may own the part of the building that they operate from, but it may be part of a broader connected building. When those buildings age and they need renewal and reinvestment, individual owners may not necessarily be willing or have the capital to invest in the broader renewal of the private buildings; whereas, if you have a single owner of a centre—Kippax is one example—they often have the capital to reinvest and are willing to reinvest in the centre.

It is something that we will have to grapple with at some point in the territory, because there is a large number of fragmented centres and their buildings are ageing. Something has to change. It is not necessarily something that government can lead. It may require owners to discuss amongst themselves—how they wish to consolidate or address those issues. I note that, as the government—through the City and Environment Directorate—has undertaken shopping centre renewal through investment in upgrades to public spaces around shops to make them look better, members of the community that are



concerned about their shopping centre have talked a lot about the ageing privately owned buildings. At the moment, there is a split incentive because of the fragmentation of ownership in those centres.

**MS TOUGH:** That makes a lot of sense. Given the fragmented nature of Hawker and that you are taking on notice how many owners there are, could we get that with a map that shows which owner has which part of Hawker Village and which bits are government owned at the site?

**THE CHAIR:** I will add to that. Can we get an indication of which parts are occupied and which are vacant at the moment? That sounds like excellent information.

**Mr Steel:** That is not necessarily information that the government would hold. Some of it would be. ACTmapi provides a custodianship map that would give you some indication of what is public.

**THE CHAIR:** Do the best you can. Peter and I will swing by and scribble over the top of it.

**Mr Steel:** I am not sure that we will be able to comment on vacancies, but the Land Titles Office might have some information about who owns the specific—

**Mr Engele:** We might have the number of vacancies, as opposed to which individual sites are vacant. We can look at that.

**Mr Mundy:** At a quantum level.

**MS TOUGH:** I am sure we can work out which ones are vacant.

**MR CAIN:** The local member can visit and find out which ones are vacant. Given you are doing a review of group centres—it would be interesting to know more about that, so as much as you can tell the committee about that review would be appreciated—what public consultation is included in that review? And do you have plans to consult with the community on refreshing and upgrading the Hawker Group Centre?

**Mr Steel:** The government does not have any plans at this point, but if we did we would consult with the community. We have—

**MR CAIN:** Sorry, Minister—you are doing a review of the group centres, so how is it that there is no plan to consult with the public on the review of group centres—in particular, to consult with the Hawker and nearby community on at least the Woolworths' proposal?

**Mr Steel:** The government does not accept the Woolworths' proposal in its current form. That is why we are not consulting with the community. I have noted the feedback from the community on it, but the proposal was rejected at an early stage, before it even came to the executive, which is where direct sale matters eventually come to. The government is currently undertaking some early due diligence on the group centres. I would not characterise that as a review; it is just about undertaking work that has been identified in the district strategies to look at the group centres. In the context of the

planning reforms associated with our commitments around enabling more housing supply, we may develop specific proposals that come forward at group centres, in terms of under-utilised land at the group centres or as part of the consideration of the planning controls of group centres, and then reinforce some specific changes. But none of those have actually been determined yet.

The major planning amendment process set out in the Planning Act clearly outlines the consultation points with the community. There are multiple points: on a draft plan amendment, if there were a change to the Territory Plan, and then it would be referred to the planning committee for a potential inquiry into it as well. We are not at that stage yet. There would be consultation points in any changes, but no specific changes are being proposed at this point. This inquiry is happening at an early time in the process as we look at the group centres, but that is actually not a bad time to get input from the community about some of the issues that are occurring at the centres—issues that we may need to consider in the future.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, can you confirm whether the government has plans to consult with the community on the development at Hawker?

**Mr Steel:** We are not proposing any development, but, if we were, there would be a requirement for consultation.

**MR CAIN:** But, given the interest in the community through petitions—and there is clearly this inquiry and the public interest in that—do you need much more to prompt you to look at what the community wants for that group centre?

**Mr Steel:** We have already heard from the community quite a bit in response to the Woolworths' proposal, but we will no doubt hear more through this inquiry about some of the issues. Of course, we heard from the community as part of the planning system review, which was the largest consultation undertaken in the ACT government's history, about a range of matters in the Belconnen district, including matters that relate to this group centre. Before we undertake any specific work on changes at any group centre, a level of due diligence work needs to be undertaken. That is the stage we are up to at the moment.

**MR CAIN:** During annual reports hearings last year, I asked you about consulting on the Woolworths' proposal and you said that consultation was happening, but of course that was with Woolworths itself. I urge you to consider consulting with our South Belconnen community on the future of this centre.

**Mr Steel:** Sure. That is noted. It is really important that proponents consult with the community on whatever they are proposing for the group centre, especially about the existing property that they own. The government will, of course, consider the views of the community through the processes under the planning system, but we should not abrogate the responsibilities of the proponents to consult with the community. That is good to help inform properly considered proposals before going further in the planning system.

**MS CARRICK:** I want to ask about your views about public versus private investment in group centres when it comes to community facilities. What are your views about

private-public investment? And will the government identify gaps in the group centres and whether there are any at Hawker, and then invest in community facilities?

**Mr Steel:** There is actually a section in the district strategy about community facilities and group centres, acknowledging that they are generally important community hubs, because they are places where people meet and undertake activity, but also because they function as local assets for the community. There may be need to look at what is required in each of the centres. The district strategies have done that to some extent by identifying some of the opportunities for future community centres. You can go to the map. You may remember that each of the district strategies has a map that identifies where the existing community facilities are in the district and where potential future opportunities are in the area. It says: “Proposed new community asset locations”. That is on page 37 of the *Belconnen District Strategy*. I am looking at the map now. There is a range of facilities around the area, but none are specifically proposed at this point in Hawker. Of course, the government is also open to feedback about the needs of the community. Community needs assessments are being undertaken by the City and Environment Directorate to help inform some of that work as well, right across the Belconnen district.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank witnesses who have assisted the committee through their experience and knowledge. We thank broadcasting and Hansard staff for their support. Thank you for coming.

**The committee adjourned at 12.31 pm.**