



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND
PLANNING**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the Role and Future of the Woden Town Centre in the context of a compact city](#))

Members:

MS J CLAY (Chair)
MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)
MS Y BERRY
MR P CAIN

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2026

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Acting secretary to the committee:
Ms K Mickelson (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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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 10.00 pm

STEEL, MR CHRIS, Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Acting Minister for City and Government Services

STEPHEN-SMITH, MS RACHEL, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, and Minister for Health Infrastructure

FITZGERALD, MR BRUCE, Deputy Director General, Transport, Territory and Municipal Services, City and Environment Directorate

KHAN, MR FAHEEM, Executive Group Manager, Infrastructure Canberra

O'BRIEN MRS FREYA, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Planning, Transport and Policy Branch, City and Environment Directorate

SHARP, MS IRENA, Acting Branch Manager, Place Delivery Group, Suburban Land Agency

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning for our inquiry into the role and future of Woden town centre in the context of a compact city. Today we will hear from Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for the Public Service, and Mr Chris Steel MLA, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development and Acting Minister for City and Government Services. Thank you both for coming in.

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 this city and this region. We would like to acknowledge and welcome any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event or may be joining us from home somewhere else.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly. It has the same standing as 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. We are recording and transcribing with Hansard and we will publish. We are also broadcasting and web-streaming live. If you take a question on notice, it would be great if you could use the words: "I will take that on notice." That helps our secretariat track down the answers.

We welcome Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA, Minister for the Public Service, and officials, and Mr Chris Steel MLA, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development and Acting Minister for City and Government Services, and officials. You do not need to acknowledge the statement anymore—it applies to you—and we are not inviting opening statements, so we will proceed straight to questions. Ministers, I am going to start with Woden Community Service and the plans for the centre. At the moment, they are operating out of four buildings and that is having a big impact on their delivery of services. The government has been looking at establishing a community centre in Woden town centre for nearly 15 years, and the last iteration reached the stage where government identified a site—part of block 33, section 80—and was tendering for detailed design work on a proposal that had been developed with Woden Community Service. That tender has now been abandoned because the tendered price exceeded what

the government was prepared to pay. How much was the government prepared to pay, and how much did tenders exceed the government's pre-tender estimate?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you, Ms Clay. I will hand over to Mr Khan in a moment. I think you have summarised the situation pretty accurately. Mr Khan will be able to say whether we can reveal that information.

Mr Khan: Thank you, Minister. Thank you for the question, Ms Clay. I would have to take on notice whether we are able to provide those figures to you.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. I note this is after the process is finished, so I am hoping that makes a difference. If you take it on notice and cannot tell us, please come back with the explicit reason as to why you cannot tell us. Are you able to tell us how much the tenders exceeded that price?

Mr Khan: I will take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Okay. We know that tenders came in that were obviously more than you expected to pay. Why were they more than you expected to pay, and what did government do? Usually, when tenders come in and the procurement is not delivering the outcome that the government wants, government engages with the process rather than abandons the process. So what happened next?

Mr Khan: Sorry, Ms Clay—are you asking about the exact steps that we, Infrastructure Canberra, took at that point?

THE CHAIR: Yes. What I am wondering is: when the procurement did not deliver the outcome government wanted, did government go back to the tenderers and commence a negotiation? Did government decide to find out from the tenderers: “Is there an element here that’s too expensive? Should we change our requirements?” What did you do, or did government just say, “That process didn’t work. Now we’re going to move on”?

Mr Khan: Again, I will have to take on notice the exact steps that were taken as part of that procurement process that you are speaking to. I can speak more fulsomely to what happened subsequently, in terms of advice to government on next steps. But, with regard to the procurement process that you are referring to, I will take that on notice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I would just add that, recognising that we have taken the detail on notice, there was pretty clear advice to me quite early. I cannot recall the exact timing, but one of the first pieces of advice I had in relation to this project after I came into the public service portfolio was that they did not believe that any of the tenders received represented value for money. They obviously were not within the budget, and that is always a key consideration in relation to the procurement process that all officials are required to consider. That would have then triggered the next stages in the consideration.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That was a good answer. We would still love the detail on notice.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We have taken the detail on notice.

THE CHAIR: With the detail on notice, what we are particularly interested in is: did government over-specify requirements; was there an easy way for government to still go ahead with the purpose-built facility but consider whether they had specified things that were not required; or was it simply that either the government vastly underestimated it or, for whatever reason, the entire industry costs were higher? That is the substance of it: that judgement decision.

Ms Stephen-Smith: If I am correct, the specific tender that we are talking about was a tender for the next stage of the design process, and that tender was over-budget. So it was not about the entire potential construction cost being over budget; it was that the particular tender did not represent value for money for that stage of the process. That tender had to be closed off and then, according to the delegate's decision, there was also a parallel consideration—that, if that was the situation we were in, my view was that we wanted to deliver the community centre as quickly as possible and in the best possible way. I had responsibility for this project when I was Minister for Urban Renewal in my first term of government and I wanted to make sure we were actually able to get on with the project.

We had a conversation and Infrastructure Canberra suggested that we look at the range of options to potentially deliver this project. I agreed that we should explore all of the options to deliver this project, especially in light of the fact that the block identified for the new-build project sits on the other side of Callam Street and it was going to be a quite challenging construction process, given the construction that has been underway around it. And there was also what we knew about Callam Offices that we did not know at the time the block was identified. So a range of things went into the decision to look at other options and look at parallel pathways for delivery. It was not only that this tender came in over budget. That was one of the factors. The fact that we would have to go back out to tender and there was going to be a further delay was an opportunity to say, “Actually, a whole bunch of things have changed since that original decision was made. We should have another look at what the options are.”

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Woden Community Service were expecting a purpose-built facility. That has been the plan for about a decade. Now the plan is a refurbished building somewhere else. How many meetings were there with Woden Community Service about this change of decision before the change of decision happened?

Mr Khan: We would have to take on notice the exact number of meetings. Your question asked how many meetings we have had. We would have to take on notice how many meetings we have had, but I can confirm for the committee that we have met with Woden Community Service on a number of occasions to confirm the scope of accommodation requirements and expectations around that, aligned to the purpose-built facility which has been maintained, as part of the government's decision to now deliver the Woden Community Centre through a long-term lease in an existing building.

THE CHAIR: That is great.

Mr Khan: We have continued to have those discussions and engagement with Woden Community Service.

THE CHAIR: Do government expect that they will deliver a facility that meets the stated needs of Woden Community Service?

Mr Khan: I would say as well that these are evolving conversations, Ms Clay. It is not as simple as identifying a single set of requirements. The service has also gone through some change recently. We continue to have conversations with them. Certain community provision—for example, Little Pantry, which it currently provides for some emergency food relief—is a key scope element that is retained. That is just one example. We continue to have those discussions and they range across the spectrum. There are the accommodation requirements that you would expect for a facility, car parking allocations, the size of meeting rooms, quiet spaces, and the number of desks. But we have a clear understanding of the macro net lettable area that we are looking at as part of delivering the Woden Community Centre through the government's decision of a lease in an existing building.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I have also met with the Woden Community Service and Northside Community Service combined CEO a couple of times, including at the opening of the Gungahlin Community Centre. I checked in with the CEO at that event and he said the process is going along fine from his perspective. That was the feedback that I had at that point. If that has changed, obviously I would hope that we would hear from them. Officials have been having a lot of conversations, but, whenever I have seen the CEO, I have checked in as well.

THE CHAIR: That is great. Will government pay the costs of the refurbishment?

Mr Khan: The refurbishment of the building?

THE CHAIR: The relocation and the refurbishment. Are those costs that government will pay for?

Mr Khan: The refurbishment—yes.

THE CHAIR: And the relocation?

Mr Khan: The relocation cost is something that we would discuss further with Woden Community Service. We would need to better understand. But the intention is absolutely that the refurbishment and fit-out would be funded by government.

THE CHAIR: Great. Will Woden Community Service be managing the building on behalf of the territory? Have you resolved how that will work?

Mr Khan: Management arrangements are not resolved. We will work through that with Woden Community Service. In different committees, we have discussed that we are working through the negotiation with providers to determine the best value-for-money proposition for government, and that is our focus at this point in time.

MS CARRICK: Are you able to provide us the brief with the different options so that we are able to see the options that were considered?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

Mr Khan: A business case was provided to government as part of budget considerations.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take it on notice to see what we can provide.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. Are you able to provide us with the scope of the facility—what the different design elements will be in order for Woden Community Service to deliver their scope of services and the spaces that will be needed? Can you provide us with that?

Mr Khan: I am happy to provide those, if you are happy for me to, Minister.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes; absolutely. We would have gone to market with a statement of requirements. That statement of requirements can be provided to the committee, I assume.

Mr Khan: Yes. I just need to confirm that, as part of our approach, we left some flexibility for market response, particularly for circulation areas and how that provision could work. At a high level, if it would assist, I could go through some of the space requirements that are at core consideration. They include: office space and workstations for the staff of Woden Community Service; meeting rooms; therapeutic rooms; training rooms; boardroom space; several quiet rooms; several hall spaces and larger spaces; multipurpose rooms and training rooms, including audiovisual equipment; space for Little Pantry, as I mentioned before, to provide the emergency food relief service; kitchen and circulation space, as you would expect; toilet space; storerooms; an IT room; service space; waste rooms; a first aid space; a prayer room; a parents room; and acoustic music room spaces. These all, cumulatively, account for the broader net lettable area that we are seeking to deliver through the Woden Community Centre.

MS CARRICK: How have you assessed a location that will support community development, including town square activation and place-making, and Woden Community Service, with the critical services that it provides and its community engagement? How have you assessed the best site?

Mr Khan: Our approach to market was limited to Woden town centre. As part of the initial considerations of possible sites, we were mindful of the importance of a central location and a location that was close to public transport corridors, to allow ease of access. And we are very conscious of the community-facing nature inherent in a community centre. That was a key consideration as part of the determination of which sites would be considered further.

MS CARRICK: Have you discussed the site with Woden Community Service?

Mr Khan: No; we have not, on the basis that that is an ongoing commercial-in-confidence negotiation that we are undertaking on behalf of government.

MS CARRICK: So how will you know that a site will be suitable to them?

Mr Khan: Again, it was a key factor in our initial consideration. The sites that were being reviewed were located in Woden town centre.

MS CARRICK: When I look at the Southern Gateway, there is the existing and proposed social infrastructure for Woden town centre. There are a couple of purple-looking dots—potential future community space. One of them is in Westfield and one of them is the new building that the Hellenic Club is going to build. Can you assure us that the new community centre will not be in the new Hellenic Club building?

Mr Khan: I might hand to my colleague, Ms O'Brien. As part of the government's decision, it is for the delivery of the Woden Community Centre through a long-term lease in an existing building.

MS CARRICK: Minister, you said you were the Minister for Urban Renewal. What is the plan for—

Ms Stephen-Smith: I was, back in 2018.

MS CARRICK: Maybe Minister Steel is the minister for urban renewal. Who is ensuring that this building is fitting within an urban renewal plan?

Mr Steel: We are currently consulting on the activation of key areas within Woden town centre. Obviously, I do not know the outcome of the process that is underway—that has not been finalised—but, of course, we will look at what opportunities there are. One thing I would reflect on, having been the minister responsible for the Woden Community Centre project at its very earliest stages, is that the current location of the Woden Community Centre, hidden behind buildings on Corinna Street, is not particularly accessible. It does not feel safe for the community and does not provide the full range of community centre rooms and spaces that you would expect in that kind of facility. The opportunity here is to provide a significant improvement on what was previously provided, as far as Woden Community Service accommodation goes. In turn, the movement from that location may present some opportunities on that site in the future as well, to get an urban renewal outcome. Once we know what the outcome is from this process, that will be taken into consideration as part of the broader planning work on activation of areas within the town centre.

One of the longer term problems in the town centre has been the number of privately owned buildings that have been unoccupied for long periods of time. Thankfully, we have seen some of those buildings—some of which were former federal government public service buildings—renewed through adaptive re-use. We have seen that at Alexander & Albemarle. That is great. Some are still unoccupied. Lovett Tower is a big one, and there are others. So the opportunity through this process that is underway is: what can be done to actually activate some existing buildings that are in Woden town centre, bring them back to life, use the existing infrastructure there, and get a potentially quicker outcome for Woden Community Service, in terms of better accommodation for their employees but also providing the community spaces that do not currently exist in Woden town centre.

I think it is fair to say that quite a large number of employees at Woden Community Service need that sort of commercial accommodation. There are a number of existing

commercial buildings there that can provide that. The opportunity is to see what other community spaces can be provided, and that is the process that has been underway. That is not to say that there are no other community facility needs within the town centre. There may be others, and that is what we are consulting on with the community as part of the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Ms Carrick has a number of Woden town centre questions, so, if it is possible, could we have slightly shorter answers.

MS CARRICK: Rather than planning for the best sites to activate for people, it appeared to me that a long-term lease for Woden Community Service is driving the site where we can then activate. We are looking at activating buildings as opposed to thinking about the needs of people and where to activate, as the first port of call. That creates uncertainty. We do not know what the plan is to activate for people; we are just relying on the private sector to come forward with a long-term lease to determine how we activate the town centre.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Ms Carrick, without wanting to duplicate and dwell on what Mr Steel just said, there are existing buildings in the town centre that are currently not activated and this is an opportunity to activate one of those spaces. You are making a range of assumptions. One of the challenges we have is that every proposal that we put forward is going to have pros and cons. The previous proposal in relation to a purpose-built facility on the other side of Callam Street was not going to activate the town centre. It was not anywhere near the town square; it was on the other side of a very busy public transport interchange.

This approach to market required a location in the town centre, so it will inevitably be closer to the town square. We also have a range of redevelopment proposals that are publicly known. There is the Hellenic Club that you referred to and the Woden Scentre Group redevelopment—you referred to the purple dots—and both have a requirement for community facility space. In the case of Scentre Group, there is a quite clear proposal in their plan for community facility space. But one of the challenges we face is that, with everything that anyone puts on the table, you will find a problem.

MS CARRICK: No; I do not think so. That is not true. I would like to see a plan. You talk about urban renewal. You were the minister for that. Where is your plan for urban renewal? Where is the plan for the town centre? There is no plan. You will say the district strategies are the plan. Where in the district strategy does it talk about a plan for identified gaps? Even the Southern Gateway stuff has identified gaps in the community centre, arts and culture facilities, indoor recreation facilities, an aquatic centre, and a community service hub. These are significant bits of infrastructure that have been identified as gaps in the town centre and there is no plan for where these will go. There is not only that; we are also flogging off Callam Offices. This plan talks about a future development area, which is the old trash and treasure site. You are selling all the land that is left before you have identified sites for significant infrastructure.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Maybe Mrs O'Brien could talk about the Southern Gateway planning. There is a plan. It has consultation.

MS CARRICK: It does not identify sites.

Mr Steel: We want to have that consultation with the community. I appreciate that you have identified a site for the Woden Community Centre. You spoke to me in the car park and said that you wanted it in the Churches Centre when that was being sold.

MS CARRICK: It was being sold for \$7 million—

Mr Steel: It was not a fit-for-purpose facility. It had no community areas. There were no spaces for community use. I appreciate that was your view, but we are consulting with the community about what they would like to see in the town centre. Of course, there is always going to be need for more refined and detailed planning and design as each particular project goes ahead—the best spot for that within the town centre. I appreciate that we have disagreed over the years. You did not want to see the current interchange demolished and a new CIT built at the current interchange. We saw it as a significant urban renewal opportunity to build both a new interchange and a new CIT campus at the same time.

There are going to be differences of opinion about those things. As we work through each of those projects, we look at the opportunities and benefits that can be created through each project. I think we got a really good outcome on CIT and the new interchange, which is looking fabulous. There will be opportunities with other projects, and, if there are gaps for facilities that need to be built, then that work will happen on site identification, whether that be on government or leased land, and what opportunities and benefits that brings to the urban renewal of the centre. Having existing buildings that are empty and unoccupied is not good for the town centre.

MS CARRICK: No. I agree.

Mr Steel: There is an opportunity to tenant those and bring them back to life and have them used, and, of course, there is a climate benefit to that. Using the embodied carbon within those buildings rather than having them knocked down is good. A range of benefits can come with that kind of process. I think that is what you were suggesting at the Churches Centre as well.

MS CARRICK: Yes. They are perfectly located. They are not off yonder; they are right in the heart of things.

Mr Steel: Yes, but the government do not necessarily know what all of the opportunities are until we actually go to the community and the market and say, “Hey, we’ve got these functional needs”—in this case for the Woden Community Centre—“for a new community centre. What could you provide?” That is the process that has been underway: to actually hear from the market about what opportunities there are on sites around Woden. We do not know about that until we go through the process and actually find out. It is a fair process. It is a tender process that has all of the requirements around it. Obviously, there will be a need to consider what comes through that and to make some decisions in the future.

MS CARRICK: It is a secretive process. There is no consultation. The community does not know. It creates uncertainty. Woden Community Service does not even know what is going on.

Mr Steel: It is a fair process.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I do not think that is true, Ms Carrick. They know what is going on, and—

MS CARRICK: They do not know which site you are looking at and they do not know where they will be.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think they understand that this is a procurement that has probity rules, and that public servants have to abide by those probity rules during a procurement process. They understand the fundamental parameters of what is included in the statement of requirements and that it is a site in Woden town centre that will be fit for purpose for what they have said that they need. I am honestly at a bit of a loss to understand why you say that there is uncertainty because they do not know if it is X, Y or Z building, when they know what is in the statement of requirements and they know it is going to be in Woden town centre. The community knows that as well. As soon as there is capacity within the procurement and probity rules to tell people what the next step is, we will do that. We get a lot of feedback from the Legislative Assembly about sticking to the procurement rules, when it suits other members of the Assembly to lecture us about that, but, as soon as you want to know something that breaches the procurement rules, you think they should be breached.

MS CARRICK: No; we do not. We just want a plan, Minister. You people do not seem to understand town planning. We have all these gaps and we have no plan, and you are selling the land. Where does it leave us? Completely uncertain about our future.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I disagree that there is no plan. There has been lots of planning for Woden town centre over many years. You just have not agreed with it.

MS CARRICK: Show me where the community centre, the arts and cultural facilities, the indoor recreation facilities, the aquatic centre and a community services hub will be? Give me a plan about where they will be and how they are going to activate the core of Woden, which is desperate for activation. You are putting a road through CIT Plaza. How does that activate it?

Ms Stephen-Smith: One of the challenges is that most of the infrastructure that already exists in Woden town centre is privately owned. We cannot dictate to those private owners or acquire that land because we think, “This would be a perfect site for a community centre. Why don’t we just compulsorily acquire that building?”
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MS CARRICK: Why are you selling the last of the government land that you own? Why are you selling that?

THE CHAIR: We might move on to Peter.

MR CAIN: Thank you, Chair. I have a follow-on question from Ms Carrick’s line of questioning. I refer to the government response to our report. Recommendation 10 said that the government recommends that the ACT government develop a program of

master plans for all town centres, followed by group centres, to guide both public and private sector investment. I assume, Minister Steel, that you had a fair say in that conclusion—that the government has not agreed with the committee’s recommendation. I am happy to focus on Woden in this case, as we are. Your response says, “Oh, don’t worry. We’ve got district strategies.” The Woden District Strategy, Minister, as you would be aware, lists the Woden town centre as key site 4 out of seven key sites. That is on page 46 of the strategy. That is it. Minister, can you explain why the government response is to not agree to developing town plans? Your excuse is: “We have district strategies.” We have a one-page summary listing Woden town centre as the fourth of seven key sites. How does that make sense, Minister?

Mr Steel: We are currently consulting on planning in Woden town centre as part of the draft Southern Gateway—

MR CAIN: But why not the master town plans?

Mr Steel: There were previous master plans for the Woden town centre and other town centres around the ACT. We have a new planning system that has been introduced with the district strategies. They need to be renewed and improved over time. What we are hoping to do through the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework is address some of the contemporary questions that have been coming up about the current town centre and future planning through to—

MR CAIN: Excuse me, Minister. You are not addressing my key concern here. The government has not agreed to a recommendation. You are kind of saying, “Oh, don’t worry. We’re doing it anyway,” but the government has not agreed to a fairly obvious recommendation about developing master town plans for our town centres and group centres. You are saying, “Don’t worry. It’s all taken care of.” The government’s answer is district strategies, and, as I have pointed out, Woden town centre is site 4 out of seven, and it is highlighted on one page of the 52-page district strategy for Woden. All the words that you are offering now totally fly in the face of the government’s dismissal of a very obvious and, I think, very sought after recommendation from this committee: for the community to have the benefit of plans for our town centres and other group centres.

Mr Steel: I am happy to address the question if you will allow me to speak. In relation to the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework, we are directly consulting with the community about the future of the Woden town centre, including activation of public spaces—

MR CAIN: But you said no to doing—

THE CHAIR: Peter, please allow the witness to finish answering the question, and then you can ask a follow-up. Minister.

Mr Steel: So the opportunity here is to, through a slightly different process to what were previously master plans, build on the previous master plan for the town centre. We will be undertaking this consultation with the community to develop a final Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework that will result in a range of things that we have been very clear about during this process—potential changes to the Territory Plan, which you have not referenced, which is obviously a key document for

planning in the town centre.

MR CAIN: That is a broader statement. It is broader than the strategy—

Mr Steel: It is very specific to the town centre. Updates to district strategies may be considered as necessary. And, if there needs to be further detail in the district strategies, we will consider that.

MR CAIN: Sorry, Chair. I am happy for committee members to have opportunities. I do not think there is going to be any benefit in the minister continuing.

Mr Steel: Sorry—I have not finished. If you are not interested in the evidence, you can just say that.

MR CAIN: Nothing you are saying addresses the key problem.

THE CHAIR: Minister, please complete your—

Mr Steel: There is a final element, which is that the work will be taken forward through a range of projects. That could be master planning of particular precincts within the area. We have seen—

MR CAIN: Which you said no to.

THE CHAIR: Peter!

Mr Steel: We have seen that work happen in relation to the Matilda Street car parking site and the work by the Suburban Land Agency in relation to Woden Village, which I think is what the precinct is called, where they have done more detailed work on a large section of the town centre. We will see proposals brought forward by Scentre Group which will go out for consultation at some point. They own an extremely large portion of the town centre, and they will bring forward the detailed work associated with that for the community's view and engagement. There will be opportunities to look in further detail at particular sections of the town centre and address many of the things that are raised through the consultation. But this is about setting a high-level vision, and then we will work down from that and update other planning documents as necessary, working down to a lower level of detail. And, for individual government projects, we will also take that feedback, and that will inform those projects as well.

Ms Stephen-Smith: Specifically on master planning—and Minister Steel acknowledged this earlier—there was a town centre master plan for Woden. The community engagement report released in October 2015 talks about the different views of the community. The reality is that we had town centre master plans for a number of town centres. The implication of your question, Mr Cain, is that, if we had a town centre master plan, somehow everyone would magically agree that it was the right plan. This is not the case.

MR CAIN: No. As you said, we had them in the past.

Ms Stephen-Smith: We have had them, and this one is only 10 years old. It was given

effect through a Territory Plan variation at the time. A number of people disagreed with those outcomes and other people agreed. But one of the things about a master plan that people did not seem to get at the time—and you quoted a rather intemperate comment I made at a community meeting about this—is that, when you produce a master plan, everyone suddenly thinks that everything on that plan is going to be delivered within the next two years. You produce a master plan that looks forward—“What is our vision for the next 20 years?”—and the community thinks, “Great! We’re going to get all of these things in the next two years.” My point, Mr Cain, is that—

MR CAIN: No—you are saying there is no point in doing a plan because—

THE CHAIR: I will ask both witnesses to please stop talking. I will take a pause.

MR CAIN: That is the end of this line.

THE CHAIR: It is maybe the end of this line. Ministers, if there was key information that you did not get to from that question, please take it on notice and provide it. I am not giving you a question on notice. I think this conversation is no longer constructive. I will lay no blame anywhere on this.

MR CAIN: Just to add to the question on notice—

THE CHAIR: Peter, if you have a question on notice, it is probably better if you lodge it on notice.

MR CAIN: No—for what you are saying. If you could explain how the district strategies accommodate what a master town plan could accommodate, that would be appreciated as well.

THE CHAIR: On notice.

MR CAIN: On notice.

THE CHAIR: That one was on notice. If anything else is relevant to the original long question, you are welcome to provide that, but you are not required to. I have a new question on block 33, section 80—Callam Offices. That is just an intro in case anyone needs to come to the table. We are interested in knowing if block 33, section 80 is going to be sold as part of a package that includes Callam Offices.

MS CARRICK: How much of the precinct will be sold?

Ms Sharp: Block 33 is currently listed on the Indicative Land Release Program. We are looking at the characteristics of the block and are doing some site investigation reports so that we can confirm whether it can form part of the land release. It is identified for 2027-28.

THE CHAIR: Is the intention that it would be sold with Callam Offices on it?

Ms Sharp: We are looking at a range of options. We certainly need to address Callam Offices and the future of Callam Offices, and land redevelopment and the urban renewal

of that area is closely linked to how Callam Offices can function in the future.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I guess, and no decision has been taken yet. We have previously heard that bringing Callam Offices up to a usable standard would cost around \$128 million. Is it still the advice from government that it would cost \$100-plus million to bring Callam Offices up to a usable standard?

Mr Khan: Yes. That is the advice.

THE CHAIR: Do you think there are problems in going out to market with Callam Offices on there, noting how much it reduces the value of the land and how much would need to be invested in Callam Offices to bring it up to a usable standard?

Ms Sharp: If Callam Offices are specifically identified for office use, which is what that \$128 million was priced against, that would be the outcome that we would be seeking from the market. Of course, that would need to be weighed up against the value of the land. Regarding office use, to be honest, at this point in time, Woden town centre shares quite a lot of vacant space, in four offices. It is not necessarily a recommended use of the building. Putting it to the market will open the opportunities to look at what other options and uses could be created for Callam Offices in the context of a future precinct.

THE CHAIR: When it goes to the market, will government go to the market with the option of not preserving Callam Offices or will government only go to the market with the option of preserving the building?

Ms Sharp: The building has a heritage listing and we have to consider what that means when we go to the market, because there will be additional requirements in terms of conservation of the building as well as use of the building. At this stage, the land that is identified on the Indicative Land Release Program includes block 29, with Callam Offices on it.

THE CHAIR: Government is not considering any kind of delisting process?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I can say that government is not considering a request for delisting, and I do not think that would be successful. The Suburban Land Agency has been working with the Heritage Council to understand what is possible within the heritage requirements. There are some really significant constraints associated with that building, and we certainly know that, in terms of adaptive reuse of heritage buildings in other cities, having some compromise to enable a building to be usable is good. My understanding is that is part of the conversation with the Heritage Council at this point.

MS CARRICK: Regarding Callam Offices, will you provide the brief that breaks down the \$128 million? It might not be in the brief, but can you break down, in some detail, how we get to \$128 million—the aspects of an upgrade and how much that would cost—so we can see what makes up \$128 million?

Mr Khan: Ms Carrick, thank you for the question. One hundred and twenty-eight million dollars reflects a 2025 figure to bring the building to a suitable tenantable standard. That, as my colleague Ms Sharp was outlining, is a specific figure for a

specific purpose, and that would include modernisation and complete office fit-out, bringing the building back up to the requirements that meet the suitable tenantable standard expectation. It involves a number of pieces. As you would expect, it relates to—

MS CARRICK: You can take on notice—we do not need to hear it now—a breakdown: floors, ceilings, walls, lifts, HVAC—a breakdown of what needs to be done and what the estimated cost is. How do we get to the \$128 million?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Part of the challenge here—and you will have seen this in the release of some of the documents in relation to Burrangiri, Ms Carrick—is that, when the ACT government commissions work in relation to this, that work has intellectual property associated with it, so often it is not possible to provide the breakdown. I will take on notice to see if there is a consultant’s report that leads to that figure—if we can provide a copy of that with appropriate redactions for their commercial or intellectual property information.

MS CARRICK: That would be good. Thank you. We just want to know how we get to \$128 million.

Mr Khan: A high-level assessment has been undertaken. I just want to reiterate that point. As the minister has indicated, we will take the question on notice, but it is a high-level assessment, informed by some previous quantity surveyor work that has been undertaken. Some internal desktop analysis has also been undertaken. It is a combination of factors. It is a high-level assessment, though.

MS CARRICK: I want to know the substance to this and that we are not just picking a figure that is really high out of the air. We want to know how we get to this figure, because it is a lot of money and it is a deterrent to actually doing anything. We need to understand that deterrent.

Mr Khan: It would recognise that number is specific to one purpose—to bring it to a suitable tenantable standard.

MS CARRICK: Does it have other purposes? Are there other options?

THE CHAIR: It is okay. I think you have taken it on notice.

Mr Khan: Yes; absolutely.

THE CHAIR: We understand the information will come back, and, if there is information that cannot come back or there are redactions, we will ask for the clearly stated public reason why that information has been redacted or cannot be provided. We will go from there.

MS CARRICK: There are also the different options that you have costed. I will put it on notice anyway: what options have you considered and what is the cost of them?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I think the only option that has been costed at this point is the option of getting it up to a tenantable standard for office use.

MS CARRICK: This is about the population forecast. Obviously it is dear to everybody's heart when it comes to GST and counting the ACT population. When we are talking about the population of the town centre, if we look at a five-kilometre radius, we get to over 150,000 people. Are you planning on over 150,000 people using the town centre in the future and therefore working on the sort of social infrastructure we need for that level of catchment?

Mr Steel: What actually occurs over the decades ahead is largely dependent on the planning changes that are made to enable more population to live within Woden Valley and the surrounding areas. Part of the discussion we are having with the community is: what are the opportunities for more housing? At the same time, what comes with that housing? It is about more community facilities and infrastructure to support that growing population as well—what will be needed to support that within existing areas to support the new residents but also support existing residents with better amenity. In terms of the population, I will hand over to Freya O'Brien.

Mrs O'Brien: Going to the question around community facilities, the assessment and audit that we have done has a range of benchmarks that look at the existing population but also look at projections of population into the future and at what point we might need to see further investment in different types of community infrastructure and services. It has that projection and talks about hitting certain points of population. That is when you would need to consider additional community infrastructure. As you said, projecting population growth is difficult, but we know it is growing quickly, so we are looking ahead.

MS CARRICK: We have population forecasts. If you look at the current population forecasts out to 2065, there will be over 150,000 in the five-kilometre catchment, yet, in the Southern Gateway work for Philip, Lyons and Chifley, it has a population of 12,395 in 2025. It is not clear to me where, in the whole Southern Gateway framework stuff, you actually look at the future population and what we need. As the population densifies and we need more things, can you tell me what government land is left in Woden town centre where you can build amenity for people?

Mr Steel: There is a land custodian map on ACTmapi, if you would like to look at those sites. We publish—

MS CARRICK: I have looked at it a lot, but my point is that you are selling it.

Mr Steel: in the Housing Supply and Land Release Program, what is intended for a lease, although some of those sites may be released for different purposes. All of that information is published.

MS CARRICK: Minister, you know—you are a Woden boy—what land is left in Woden town centre to build the indoor sports stadium, the arts and culture facility, and the aquatic centre and have them well located so that they are within walking distance of the new bus interchange. What land is left that is not earmarked for sale?

Mr Steel: There is a range of sites around the Woden town centre. One example would be what is currently being used as a car park for Canberra Health Services staff, near

Canberra Hospital. It is a community facility zoned site. It is directly adjacent to sport and recreation facilities. It is a potential future high school site, should the need be there, but that site could also accommodate, in addition to a high school, indoor sporting facilities. There are sites around the town centre that are not on the Housing Supply and Land Release Program, because we may need it for those facilities in the future.

MS CARRICK: That is for a high school. What is in the town?

Mr Steel: The Territory Plan land use zones outline what is permitted within each zone.

MS CARRICK: You cannot come up with anything. This is a problem.

Mr Steel: Those are all published on the Legislation Register. A lot of the commercial zones which are in the town centre core allow for a range of uses to be delivered.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps it would benefit if you could take on notice the list of community and recreational purposes that Ms Carrick has noted—the aquatic facilities, the sports centre, the arts centre—and come back with the potential sites that have not yet been sold—not telling us where they will go but the sites that are available within the Woden town centre.

Mr Steel: All of that information is available on ACTmapi, in terms of unleased land.

MS CARRICK: I have looked at it a thousand times, Minister.

Mr Steel: And I am sure you are aware of those that—

MS CARRICK: Tell me what is left. I am telling you that there is nothing much left.

Mr Steel: For each different project, we will need to look at what opportunities are in different sites.

MS CARRICK: What opportunities are there?

Mr Steel: That is the work that is happening in relation to the—

MS CARRICK: You are selling our land without a plan.

Mr Steel: All of those considerations are occurring in relation to the commitment around a new public, government-owned 50-metre pool in Woden. Various sites are being considered at the moment. Work is currently underway to look at what opportunities there are. As part of that, we will look at Eddison Park, but there may be other sites around the Woden town centre as well. Those site-specific investigations will have to occur, and it will depend on the type of facility. That one obviously brings with it some quite strict technical requirements that will need to be considered and are different to other community infrastructure. It will depend on what you are trying to do. There is flexibility within the planning system to do a lot of this within existing land-use zones within the town centre, both on leased land and on unleased land, and, of course, major plan amendments can be brought forward if necessary to facilitate them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We have a supplementary from Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Perhaps I can add to what you take on notice, Minister. As a witness to this committee, in your capacity as a member of the executive before an Assembly committee, to me it is very disparaging of you to say, “It’s all on the website. Go and find it yourself.” I would like you to take on notice what Ms Carrick has asked for: the unleased government land on that site. I do not want to be told, “You can find it yourself.” That is an inappropriate comment from a member of the executive. I would not expect any of your senior executives to respond in that manner, and I do not think you would either.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, was there an additional question? You said you had a supplementary question. Was that an additional question?

MR CAIN: That was my additional question—that the minister should take on notice the details of what has been asked for.

THE CHAIR: Which is the possible sites.

Mr Steel: I want to be clear, though. The Territory Plan is the source of truth. It is the law, and that is what is reflected in ACTmapi. I want to be clear about that.

MR CAIN: But some detail is being asked for.

THE CHAIR: I think this will not get us anywhere useful, if both continue.

MR CAIN: Provide the detail.

THE CHAIR: Ms Stephen Smith, do you have something substantive?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes. I want to point out for the record that a number of community facilities that no longer exist in Woden town centre—the basketball court, pitch and putt—were private facilities in the first place. There seems to be an assumption that they can only be replaced through government owned land and a government building on government owned land, when these facilities previously existed on privately owned land. There are opportunities in privately owned spaces at the moment or privately leased spaces at the moment to redevelop some of those facilities. We are talking a bit as though there is only one way of doing things. The government is considering what all of the options are to deliver our vision and support for Woden town centre as a vibrant town centre with a range of community facilities.

Mr Steel: That is what is being considered with the Scentre Group proposal as well. There may be opportunities on leased land that can potentially deliver those. There is obviously a decision-making process that is yet to occur.

THE CHAIR: We will welcome the answer back. The last line of that answer may be: “In addition, there may be opportunities at leased sites, with private landholders.” Peter, do you have a final question, noting that we are running out of time?

MR CAIN: I am happy to pass to Ms Carrick.

MS CARRICK: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunities for using private land, but it does not mean that you do not have a plan to ensure that we get the right outcomes. It is not just a matter of ticking a box and Scentre Group says, “We’ll have some basketball courts on top of the DJs loading zone.” Is that the best outcome? Can you use your levers—planning approvals and LVC waivers—to ensure that we get better outcomes for the community?

Mr Steel: That is what is being actively considered, but there is a decision-making process underway and I would not want to pre-empt that. Absolutely, we are reviewing LVC with regard to the opportunities there could be to support the development of those kinds of facilities, as well as potential requirements on development when there are changes to the Territory Plan. That is being worked through at the moment, but a governance framework needs to be developed around that. We have some good examples from New South Wales about a similar framework with voluntary developer agreements that have been developed. We are undertaking work on our own version of that which could potentially allow us to harness those opportunities, but it requires a lessee that is prepared to work with government on that. Not every lessee will. We will not be able to specifically mark where the opportunities are that we do not know about.

There is a general assumption, I think, that, when we undertake town planning through a non-statutory document like the Southern Gateway plan or even a master planning document, we can literally pick every single detail of what things are going to look like in 20 years. We just cannot do that.

MS CARRICK: Minister, please—no. Come on. I have one minute left and I have another very important question.

Mr Steel: An important point to make is that there needs to be a level of flexibility built into the planning—

MS CARRICK: Of course.

Mr Steel: to enable that change over time, and for opportunities that come up to be properly considered in the context of an overall vision for the town centre. That is what we are consulting on at the moment. Lessees will come forward and community members that have aspirations will come forward after that time.

THE CHAIR: Minister, thank you very much. That was an excellent answer. We understand the concept. Ms Carrick has the last question.

MS CARRICK: In the budget papers, it says, “Investigate the possibility of expansion of the Woden Cemetery into Eddison Park.” Can you assure me that land can be used for a community garden or a dog park? Where are we putting a community garden and a dog park if you expand the cemetery? Please tell me you are not going to expand the cemetery.

Mr Steel: I am acting at the moment. I will bring up Mr Fitzgerald to provide some—

MS CARRICK: We have not even mentioned all our gaps. We do not have a dog park

and we do not have a community garden. We have up to 60 towers, over 10,000 apartments and 20,000 people. They need amenities. So please—

Mr Steel: That has not been agreed to.

THE CHAIR: Mr Fitzgerald, the question is: is the cemetery expanding or can that space be used for community gardens and other community purposes?

Mr Fitzgerald: They are all considerations that we are currently working through. It can be both, potentially.

MS CARRICK: We have so many needs identified. Surely you will invest in the Southern Gateway and not take more of the core of Woden for the cemetery in perpetuity. Please tell me you are not going to do that.

THE CHAIR: Can I confirm, Mr Fitzgerald: no decision has been taken?

Mr Fitzgerald: That is correct.

MS CARRICK: But they are planning it.

THE CHAIR: Yes, but no decision has been taken.

Mr Steel: There is also planning happening on Southern Memorial Park, which might be able to meet those needs in the future. There is quite a bit of work underway. The Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework does not address any of the issues around the cemetery, because they are not being proposed at this time, but, of course, we need to consider what the future is for Woden Cemetery as it is coming to its capacity limit. That means we have to think more broadly about the cemetery. If it does not expand, what does that mean for the cemetery as it is today, if there are no plots available? Does it mean it has to close?

MS CARRICK: Yes—close it.

Mr Steel: And what does that mean for people wanting to access burial internments on the south side—

MS CARRICK: Southern Memorial.

Mr Steel: and can Southern Memorial pick that up within a reasonable time frame? All of that consideration is occurring.

Ms Stephen-Smith: At a reasonable cost.

Mr Steel: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We have come to the end of our time. I invite my colleagues to lodge questions on notice if they have questions that were not answered. On behalf of the committee, I thank witnesses who have assisted with their experience, their knowledge and their time. We appreciate it. There are certainly a lot of you here, and

we appreciate the amount of time dedicated to help us with this inquiry. I thank broadcasting and Hansard staff for their support. Members, questions on notice need to be uploaded within five business days. Could we get the answers back within the usual five days. We expect that there will not be too many, but let us know if there is a problem with timing. We would prefer good answers and a short extension of time to receiving poor answers, if that is the choice that you face. Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 11.02 pm.