



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

(Reference: Draft variations 237 and 244)

Members:

**MR M GENTLEMAN (The Chair)
MR Z SESELJA (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER**

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 11 MARCH 2005

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr H Jaireth (Ph: 6205 0137)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

The committee met at 9.42 am.

Mr G Tomlins was called

Ms J Plovits was called

THE CHAIR: Welcome, ladies and gentleman. I'd like to open this public hearing inquiring into Draft Variation 244, Duffy, and welcome Ms Jocelyn Plovits and George Tomlins to give a presentation. Before we begin, I will read the evidence statement. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative, Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have the responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Once again, welcome. I guess we should move straight into item No 1, the presentation by Mr Tomlins.

Mr Tomlins: Firstly, we welcome your scrutiny of this process and seek your assistance in the return of the village residents following the disastrous 2003 bushfire. They're the only residents who haven't been able to return home. We'll take you through that. There's also a land issue, in that some of the land in this area of Weston Creek is owned by the commonwealth, that we need to resolve through a separate process which is going on of negotiating a land swap with the commonwealth.

The variation you see before you assumes that that process does not proceed within the timeframe that we're attempting to work with. To some extent we're torn between the urgency of returning the villagers home and getting the best solution, which is the solution of rebuilding the village in its original location. So there's that issue, and we may seek to come back to you on the issue of flexibility. Ms Plovits will go through that in more detail. Essentially we've shifted the village slightly to avoid the commonwealth land but, should the negotiations with the commonwealth prove fruitful, we'd like to shift the village back to its original location. It's only a minor relocation.

The third point I'd like to make is that, in the work that we've done on the villages, which is to ensure that we have developments which meet high standards of design and which are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, what we've done with Stromlo village is to increase it in size only, by doubling it. Normally we try to do it so that the ACT Housing component is roughly about a quarter of the village. In this case it's going to be about a half. But we think that the social mix issues are ameliorated in this instance because it's only about 50 to 100 metres from Weston Creek. With those main overview points, I now hand over to Jocelyn.

Ms Plovits: What I've got here is everything we'd like to say about Stromlo, but I am aware that our time is short so I'll go quickly through some things. If you want to explore them further, we can spend time on those particular issues. Basically it will be a brief background to the project, then to look in a bit more detail about the reason why the village is designed how it is and the aspiration we have to have six-star sustainability. We will then, of course, answer any questions you may have. I'm quite happy to stop and take questions, if that's more appropriate. As we know, 3 June is the announcement, and

we're moving through the draft variation stages for two of the three villages that are under proposal. It was needed because we had the almost total destruction of these sites and we have very fractured communities. Some are still left at the sites; three, as you know, are at Stromlo and some, of course, are desperate to return.

It's not just a statistical problem, it's a social policy problem. It's important that the people move from uncertainty and, in fact, dispossession in their eyes to a returning to the village approach. We've taken the project on as what we call bushfire recovery, not business as usual. That is why we keep pushing forward at a pace, as much as we can. It's supported by a range of documentation. Obviously the first one was the non-urban study; secondly the sustainability studies, which I believe you've got copies of—but I've got copies here in case you need them—and, of course, for Uriarra there's an additional study as well.

Why do we go to the villages? I just wanted to refresh people's minds on the fact that it wasn't viable to do nothing. It isn't viable to leave 10 families sitting out in these sites. Nor is it viable to demolish and remove the villages because you've got families at these sites. It is their home. To take that step is not a socially possible way forward. Nor is it possible to just replace the burnt out houses, because you end up in the same situation we had before the fires, which is public housing without a secure future. The land ownership was always in question—and always had been—without sustainable development around it, without innovative, excellent design.

So we came down to this fourth option, which was redevelop. We're going for the sustainable high quality, socially vibrant, increasingly self-reliant type of communities, returning the residents. We'll obviously be looking to retrofit for the existing residents returning to their residences—the residents who have missed out, without their houses—and there'll be a few additional people coming in. For Stromlo it's 20 to 40. By comparison, Uriarra is 23 to 100 and Pierces Creek, as we know, is still under negotiation.

The sustainability studies are not the “cookbook” for the villages, they're the original suggestion for the villages. The sustainability studies took into account the issues raised in the sustainability policy of the ACT government, which are based around those three pillars—people, place and prosperity. You'll see that, in the studies, there's quite a detailed analysis of how each of those can be addressed through the process. Then—and these were put together by experts, of course—the Shaping Our Territory working group supported it and the government accepted it. We also had one of the studies—the Uriarra study—peer reviewed for the sustainability issues by SGS, and they said that it was a viable way forward for these villages. These studies have been attached to the preliminary assessments which went out for public consultation.

The feedback we had from the Office of Sustainability is really important because they said the sustainability studies demonstrate that the concepts can work and achieve a higher degree of self-sufficiency, a more efficient use of resources and reduced consumption, a higher level of social capital and greater protection for the natural environment than in the urban areas. So it was a radical shift from normal urban development. It's not some concept of rural residential or anything like that, it's a whole new option for the ACT.

We've obviously had to go through statutory planning stages. Stromlo was already urban under the national capital plan. There were some minor matters we had to sort out about the landscape buffer along Cotter Road—just the width of that. Those have been done and we're up to the territory planning stages. There's been a high degree of consultation going through all of these stages. I won't go through this in detail because I know it's not the focus here today, but I just wanted to assure you that, in developing the sustainability studies, I organised a number of meetings with the various village groups. Each group has its own unique history and needs, as well as common themes, so it was important to meet with each of them.

There is no doubt that this model here in the front of the cover—and I've got a larger one there if you need it—is the preferred outcome from the villagers and from the government, but we're constrained by a problem: we've got the constraint of commonwealth land. So there's a line that goes through here, misses that house that survived, comes through here and back down there. Everything that side of the line is commonwealth land.

For the people whose houses were burnt here, although we have the goal to return them to the same site, we can't deliver that today but we're getting closer. This house here remains in the control of the Commissioner for Housing in the ACT but the land is, in fact, owned by the commonwealth. So we've got a tenant sitting on commonwealth land still, and that will remain. So that's what we prefer but, if the commonwealth negotiations went very quickly, we wouldn't be talking to you about this problem now because we'd already have it sorted and the variation would reflect that preferred plan.

Mr Tomlins: It's fair to say also that we've briefed the Weston Creek Community Council quite a number of times and we've had several meetings with the commonwealth. They vary. At one stage we were meeting fortnightly for quite a long period of time, so we're pushing that as fast as we can.

Ms Plovits: We've had a breakthrough and it looks like things will move along a bit faster now, so we've got hope. The important thing to recognise here is the social capital that we're aiming to retain and support into the future. These were very close-knit communities. I think I said to you before that Stromlo was one of the best kept secrets in Canberra. Nobody really knew that that community was there until the trees burnt down.

There are approximately 80 years of history. They had always been participants as foresters, they had always been participants in bushfire preparedness and so on, so they have a strong connection with the area. The goal we're aiming for then, under the sustainability criteria, is this vibrant mix—a robust spirit, a mix of public and private housing and self-reliant living. We looked at what that means. It doesn't just mean having a solar-powered house or a new way of managing grey water, it also means governance. So we looked at some elements being under community title to assist the people to return to the kind of management that they had, where they managed their open land and things independently of the government. These are incredibly important parts of the social framework and it's important that they continue.

One of the questions we often get asked about these villages is how much it's going to cost for Housing ACT people to be there. They will have the same regime as any urban Housing ACT person would have in that, if they need rent subsidy and they are eligible

for it, they will receive it. At the moment, most of them are in urban locations where the average rent is about \$300 a week. Those who receive subsidy will continue to receive subsidy; those who don't obviously won't. They'll also have access to the sale-to-tenants program, as would any other normal tenant. For many of them their longevity in these places means that they've already qualified, from being there more than five years. The fact that there's no house there at the moment is not being taken into account.

There's a whole section in the report about bushfire preparedness and bushfire abatement zones and the necessary activities and landscaping that will go on, as well as the type of houses that will be built. their sustainability factor is not just new and modern technology for building houses and things like that, it's also about surviving if—heaven forbid—there should be another wild fire like that one. It is a much better way. Putting it together, as you can see, we've drawn on a number of experts to assist us in that area. The design controls for both sustainability and bushfire management were costed in to the way we saw it going on.

There's a special look and feel to the place. I don't know if you've heard of this book—it's called *Meet you at the RMB*. these villages were considered, and are considered still, to be roadside mailbox delivery addresses, not urban addresses. I can leave a copy here with you. This shows you the kind of village it used to be—the well-kept houses, the neat gardens, the pride that was in the area, the original layout, of course—and the historical photos are there as well. The important thing about it, again, is the well-kept houses and the pride in the area.

The idea is to keep that look and feel in the way the design has come through. I refer to the expression of interest process that we've been involved in to date. I don't know if you've had a copy of the expressions of interest, but I've got spares if you need them. We have this approach to sustainability, to the historical nature of it, to preserving the heritage things that we've asked the Heritage Council to look at but which there's no decision on yet, and so on. We also want excellence in design and innovation in design.

This is not something where you could open this book and say, “Oh yes, look, they've written down the designs; that's what they're going to look like; no problems.” That's not what we've done at all. These were just suggestions. The tenderers will come back with their ideas for the best quality sustainability and design.

THE CHAIR: Ms Plovits, perhaps I could just interrupt.

Ms Plovits: Sure.

THE CHAIR: If I may interrupt, I just remind committee members that we only have about 10 minutes left for the presentation. So if members see any questions during the presentations, they should raise them.

Ms Plovits: Okay. Then there is six-star sustainability, higher than anything that has been called for in the ACT before. Like many things in the ACT, we are hoping that these communities will then also not be under a microscope and observed by the world, but at least are demonstrations of the application of those principles. In the tender specifications that are currently being finalised, one of the criteria is about sustainability. I think it is weighted at 25 per cent. Design excellence and sustainability will be one of

the issues on which the tenderers compete.

For the commonwealth land, if we can solve it in the timeframe, we would prefer to return to the original design in the original draft variation. We know the residents would prefer this, too, but it is not something we can guarantee. We have received a number of excellent ideas from all sorts of experts and creative people as they have heard about this project and as things have come in. As I mentioned to your secretary, I have a filing cabinet drawer full of them.

What I am in the process of doing is logging them and sending them over to the Land Development Agency. They will be listed and made available to the short-listed tenderers to come in and consult. As a government, we cannot promote one commercial opportunity against another commercial opportunity, but since people have taken the trouble to come to us with their ideas, we just want to make sure that the tenderers are aware of them.

THE CHAIR: Certainly.

Ms Plovits: And then, where we are up to, we need a secure future for these villages. Security is part of sustainability. We have done exhaustive analysis of the options and we really think it is deeply flawed to have any other solution than that. So I think I will just leave it there and have questions, if you like.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Members?

MS PORTER: I have a couple of questions.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: One is about the block size. I am still concerned about the size of the blocks. They are quite large as compared to the suburban block. I was also wondering about front fences, whether they were going to be part of it or not. If they are, then the blocks will actually remain that size. If they are not, then there is a possibility that some of that block size could be shared space and bring more of that community feel back in, such as in other developments around Canberra in Kambah and the other one in—

Mr Tomlins: Wybalena Grove in Cook.

THE CHAIR: Wybalena Grove?

Ms Plovits: Wybalena in Cook.

MS PORTER: Wybalena, and the other one in Kambah. Its name has gone—

Mr Tomlins: Urambi.

MS PORTER: Urambi Village, those kinds of things, where the block size is actually quite small but the community space, the shared community, space is big and utilised in many ways, such as for vegetable gardens and things like that.

Mr Tomlins: I suppose there are a couple of issues. Twenty of the residents are hoping to go back to their former blocks. So there would be some disruption and, I suppose, a great deal of explanation to them as to why they would have to go back to a block that was different from the block that they had been living on for quite some considerable time. That is why the block sizes have been chosen at the scale that they have. The new blocks would merge in with the existing blocks, so it is 20 new and 20 old; a maximum of 40.

There is some community space in each of the villages and in Stromlo. So that could be used for the sorts of community activities that Wybalena and Urambi use them for. They both have community tennis courts and that sort of thing and they could use them. The sketch shows a village green and a community orchard, for example, in Stromlo. The other issue, I guess, was the front fences. I think it is the normal application of planning policies in this instance with regard to front fences. There is no special policy currently proposed.

Ms Plovits: However, for the remaining houses they had front fences.

MS PORTER: Yes, I noticed that.

Ms Plovits: Those fences feature as part of the heritage value. What has been put forward is that each of them would have similar front fences as part of managing their area.

THE CHAIR: Just on the back of that—sorry, sorry, Ms Plovits—is there an APRA policy on front fence material at all? If there is no policy on the implementation of front fences, I guess there would not be one on material.

Ms Plovits: Across the whole of Canberra there should be no front fences. That is the APRA policy, as I understand it. But in terms of the lease conditions for these villages, they will be different from an urban sort of setting. To keep that rural look and feel, to keep that approach, to have areas that people can maintain in the way they want to, to have their vegetable gardens—there is one lady, in particular, very keen to return to the site of her vegetable garden—they see the value of having the fences just to keep things like rabbits out, if nothing else.

MS PORTER: And kangaroos.

Ms Plovits: There are plenty of rabbits there now.

Mr Tomlins: There are a couple of shots there of front fences and, as you can see, they are quite transparent.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Tomlins: There are others. There is another one. If I can find it, there is a low-lying one with two boards. They are not, you know, Melbourne six-foot, eight-foot high fences that are aimed at excluding people or reducing the view.

Ms Plovits: Does that help?

MS PORTER: Yes.

MR SESELJA: Mr Chair, I am interested in the numbers. I think it was 20 and now it is going to be 40. Is that right?

Mr Tomlins: Yes.

MR SESELJA: How is that number reached? What were the sorts of factors taken into account? Obviously you could have said, you know, 200. I do not know how many would fit. Are you able to let us know approximately how many ordinary residential blocks would fit on the piece of land we are talking about and how the number of 40 was come to?

Mr Tomlins: The land along the whole frontage of Duffy and Holder is quite extensive. So you could get, depending on the density, into the hundreds of blocks there. If you were to say, “No, we’re not going to have a village; we’re just going to let the urban development progress down to the Cotter Road,” in doing that you would have a number of issues to resolve. How do you handle the issues associated with the community who have been fronting open space for 30 years? Also, what sort of structure would you put in place for that land? We could have many more blocks than we have, but out of deference to the structure of the community, the village community, and also, I suppose, in terms of the feedback from the Weston Creek community council and Weston Creek residents, we have kept it reasonably small. Whereas we would normally go to, as I said, about four times the number of ACT Housing Trust houses, in this instance we have gone to twice that number because of the constraint of Weston Creek and because the proximity to Weston Creek means that they achieve social mix from being close to Weston Creek.

MR SESELJA: You talked about sustainability principles. How do they fit in terms of the overall spatial plan, looking at intensification and things like that? How does that fit with sustainability in urban design?

Mr Tomlins: Well, there are a number of issues. The, I suppose, next most preferred option by many people in the community is probably to have no housing there. So having 40 in sustainability terms is preferred to having 20. The other issues of sustainability—I have talked about social sustainability, but in terms of environment sustainability, we are talking about six-star housing. These will not be normal residential dwellings. Sustainability principles will be enshrined in the house development and that will be an improvement on what is happening in other areas of Canberra, for example.

Ms Plovits: The other thing that we should say is that both this community and this neighbouring community have asked for the rest of this area to remain landscape buffer. So, in acquiring the commonwealth land here, if that does proceed, the area that could be used for village might be used for village, if that happens before we start building, but this area here will always be open land as part of the landscape buffer. I think that is desirable in terms of Molongo development out this way in the next 50-odd years.

THE CHAIR: I am aware of the time. Ms Porter, you would like to ask one more question?

MS PORTER: Just a very quick question. Just in terms of social sustainability, I am a bit concerned that the other 20 houses, being in such a, perhaps, sought after area, will become quite exclusive residences, with maybe some wealthy people. There might be quite a dichotomy between the people in the public houses and the people in the more well-off houses, if you understand what I am saying. I am concerned that there may be some problems with the social mix. I am not suggesting that there would be, but there may be.

Then, my other issue is about the buses. Would it be possible, perhaps, to reroute the buses to come around there because there may be some aged persons living there, because of the public housing, from time to time?

Mr Tomlins: Yes.

Ms Plovits: The first thing is we recognise that, not only is there probably a difference between public housing and private housing, but also there is a difference between new residents, returning residents and old residents, the ones that stayed there the whole time. In each of the villages, we have put in a community development worker. The role of that worker is to build the social capital of the area and to assist the parties. There will be 15 to maybe 20 designs for the houses. Some obviously may be more expensive than others, but none of them will be two-storey, balustrades and things like that. They will all be single-storey, same look and feel, that type of thing. Sorry?

Mr Tomlins: The bus.

Ms Plovits: The bus. The business of the bus is that, at 40, it is highly unlikely to attract a current bus service because there is just not enough clientele to warrant it. But if it were required, there could be a circuit for the bus to go through before it joins its route out onto Warragamba Avenue. Previously the people there, and the current people there, used the bus service on Warragamba Avenue as it stands at the moment.

Mr Tomlins: And they are a lot closer than many people in the suburban areas to the bus stops. There are direct access routes shown. So the bus accessibility is quite high.

MS PORTER: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Well once again, Ms Plovits and Mr Tomlins, thank you very much for your time and your expansive presentation.

Ms Plovits: Thank you. If there are any further questions or something, we would be happy to provide information in writing to you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr R Bell was called

Mr C Stewart was called

Members, we will move on to agenda item 2, which is the inquiry into draft variation 237, the Embassy Motel redevelopment. We have a presentation from Mr Ron Bell, Development Manager of Canberra Investment Corporation, and Mr Colin Stewart from Colin Stewart Architects and Mr Malcolm Smith from Capital Planners. I advise the committee too that the *Canberra Times* have asked permission to be here for this presentation, which I believe we should accept.

I will just read you our evidence statement. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation, for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

Thank you, gentlemen. Mr Bell, would you like to begin?

Mr Bell: Mr Chairman, members, good morning. Thank you for the opportunity of being here. This project has been a little bit near and dear to our hearts as we've been involved in it now for over two years to bring it to the point of a variation of the territory plan. Perhaps just a couple of words about CIC, if I may: we are a publicly listed company on the Australian Stock Exchange. We are based here in Canberra. We grew out of Canberra roots. We've completed quite a number of joint ventures for the ACT government—all of those very successfully—and the company really is only involved in quality developments, as in Harcourt Hill, Jerrabomberra Park, the City Edge development in O'Connor, and many more. So our ideals and direction to undertake a full development of the Embassy Motel in Deakin is in keeping with the philosophy of the company but, more importantly I think, it is in keeping with government policy and philosophy about developing major corridor areas where transport and other activities are so easily achieved and looked after by the locals who can access all of that activity.

Without really wanting to talk too much about the development itself, because that's Colin's role, we have sought to have the very best people involved in this, from all of our consultants. Colin Stewart is a renowned architect, Malcolm Smith is a highly respected town planner, and we have used quite a number of other people to make sure that the development that we bring forward is of high quality and is in keeping with the site itself.

It is very important to note that this site does not join any other activity; in particular, no existing residential house would be affected by this development. I will hand over to Colin to explain the process and what we're proposing to you.

THE CHAIR: Certainly, thank you.

Mr Stewart: Thanks very much for the opportunity to talk about the proposal. There is an extensive report, which has been presented to the committee, with a lot of answers to

questions. I would like to just explain who I am and why we are associated with the project, and then, on the drawings behind you, just point out some key aspects that I think are relevant to your inquiry.

I am a qualified architect with an honours degree from the University of New South Wales, and I have a masters degree in urban design and city planning from Harvard University, arguably one of the world's best in the field. I'm adjunct professor of urban design at UC. Last year our company won the high-quality sustainable design award for the Waterside Apartments in Belconnen, which was presented by the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope. I also won the national competition for the Kingston foreshore project. So we have a strong interest in quality architecture and quality planning and urban design. Therefore, when Mr Bell and the CIC group approached us over two years ago to look at this project, we thought about it seriously—whether we wanted to be involved or not—and our professional view is that it's a very important project because of its position in inner Canberra and in relation to the government's current planning policy to protect the bulk of inner Canberra neighbourhoods and all neighbourhoods from redevelopment.

I will move to the drawings and just explain some key points. These three drawings here are critical to the planning context. This one shows the extent of green area, which is the extent of essentially preservation of existing low-scale residential neighbourhood in Yarralumla, Deakin—new and old Deakin—and Forrest, and you can see that more than 90 per cent of that area is protected by the government in terms of dual occupancy or redevelopment. There can be, of course, new houses replacing old houses, but a serious part of the government's policy is to protect neighbourhoods, and we applaud that.

There are small areas, shown in brown here, which I've marked, around Yarralumla in particular, and a small area around Deakin shops, which is called a core area. On those sites, if it is possible and feasible, there can be redevelopment on a small scale for, like, dual occupancy. Some of the sites are actually so small that it's not possible; they have to be amalgamated to achieve that.

So the sites that actually are available for residential redevelopment are very few without this variation. You will know that over the years since 1969 Deakin—only Deakin, not even including Yarralumla and Forrest—has lost over a thousand residents because of the changing family structures. It is not that we can add back a thousand—nothing like that—but it is a rare opportunity to add diversity to the housing choices in these areas for people who want to move out of a large family home into an apartment, to live close to amenities and in their neighbourhood.

As you know, there are some approved townhouses on the site next door near the soccer field and in that respect that's approved. You have The Grange on the south side. There is a huge amount of open space in this area, so we opted for an apartment development, and we have pushed the height limits to optimise the landscaped area and, obviously, views, other things and northern orientation. Subsequently, we have the proposal as you see here on this site, but we think it's very important, and all the meetings we've had over two years with ACTPLA and the National Capital Authority have shown strong encouragement for optimising this site in that regard.

This drawing here also shows the planning context and traffic context. The site is uniquely placed. It's not within the low density on a local suburban street. It's right at the

interchange onto Adelaide Avenue. So vehicular movements can be straight on, whether going south or east or north or west onto Adelaide Avenue, and at the same time the residents in this area enjoy the bus routes which go to Woden, the city, Manuka and those areas, and to schools.

So it's a unique opportunity, we believe, to do it if the alternative is just a declining population. In no way will this lead to future development, because of the government's policy on this green area. There may be a number of units on the art gallery site opposite, which is permitted, but, apart from that, we can't see how it's harmful to the neighbourhood. We think it's good urban design practice.

There have been some doubts about how to define this development. We think in the current Canberra context there has been a considerable amount of new higher buildings in Canberra. There are about six buildings now that are around 20 storeys—not in Deakin, in Canberra generally—starting with the Kingston Tower, which is 16 storeys, the Sky Plaza under construction, the Metropolitan, the Capital Tower and whatever; there are six towers around the 16- to 20-storey mark. We would consider this as high-rise. Medium-rise is more like the National or the Waterside, which I mentioned earlier, at Deakin, which ranges from three to seven storeys, and then you have the low-rise, two to three storeys like the Forrest townhouses or other developments. I would describe this as a medium-rise proposal rather than a high-rise, and I would also advise the committee that generally in a local centre the plot ratio allowable is 2:1, and this is actually 2:1. It's a very large site, of course, and it's just within the 2:1 plot ratio.

The design, as illustrated in this model, which is reasonably to scale or as good as humanly possible, shows the position of the complex in relation to Adelaide Avenue, the adjoining service station, the sports club, the shops and The Grange. As I was referring to, the gallery opposite here could also be redeveloped for a number of units. It is at the low point in Deakin; the ground slopes down. In fact, I think about the fourth storey here equates with the top of the Deakin health club. We thought it was appropriate to put the buildings here, which we would describe as four-storey with a recessed top floor. They're actually five storeys but it's four storeys with a recessed top floor; that's a definition sometimes used in the planning jargon. These ones are six storeys with a recessed top floor as well—so, instead of a pitched roof, it's actually penthouses—and that's not counting the parking level.

As you can see on these perspectives—and I should say that these aren't arbitrary sketches; they have been plotted by the environmental designers on the computer to get the actual heights—this is the view from Hoptoun Circuit. You can see the lower buildings. They're not pretty pictures; they're just trying to show exactly, as best we can, what the scale is. This is the service station, the shops are here, the larger buildings are at the back opposite the playing fields, so it's not where one immediately is walking. These are the lower buildings on Hoptoun Circuit, and this is the highway down here, which sort of rises because of the overpass—about two storeys anyway. This is the view from Adelaide Avenue, where you're elevated, and you can see the scale and the setback—I think it's 60 metres or more back to the buildings—and there are considerable trees in front here on Adelaide Avenue, which are all retained.

This is another drawing. There is a bank along Adelaide Avenue so, because of the trees and everything coming from the Mint, from the west, you see these buildings. Of course,

at night you'll see lights and whatever. It's considerable but it's not overwhelming. I was just noticing that even the trees outside here are, I guess, 15 to 20 metres. Trees in established areas are generally quite high. The highest tree here is about 25 metres, and in fact the highest part of the building is about that height—not that that's the be-all and end-all, but it's not looming as a skyscraper above the tree canopy.

It is a serious change to the Deakin area, but, because of its location, we can't see other ways to add this diversity of housing choice without disrupting open space or without disrupting existing housing, and we commend it to the committee.

I just should point out about the landscape. Earlier schemes we had had driveways into the site. The current plan, apart from two small driveways, has virtually no vehicular movement on the site. It's a landscaped site; in fact, 65 per cent of the site will be landscaped. You can do the same amount of units on a lower number of storeys, but you end up with virtually no landscaped area and a lot of units not getting cross-ventilation or northern orientation. So that's why we have pushed the boundaries—it makes economic sense but it also makes environmental sense to have a variety of building heights.

MR SESELJA: Can I ask a question there? You say you could do the same number of units on a lower height, but obviously there'd be costs.

Mr Stewart: Well, it would just be a solid doughnut, basically.

This is the turn - Planning and Environment-11Mar05-04.doc

MR SESELJA: Would it still be viable? Would there be a significant financial cost to go ahead in that way? Are you able to take us quickly through what the impact would be?

Mr Stewart: It becomes just a huge block, to make it viable. You lose the quality, I guess. Mr Bell should comment.

Mr Bell: I think the other aspect of that is that you'd never get it through the planning system—not today.

MR SESELJA: So you think it wouldn't become viable?

Mr Bell: No. The planning system would require us to have high energy ratings on all units. By creating a doughnut, you just wouldn't achieve that.

MR SESELJA: So the only alternative, if you were forced to go down in height, would be to have fewer units?

Mr Stewart: Yes.

Mr Bell: Yes, but then the economics of it would simply disappear.

MR SESELJA: Sure. That's what I'm trying to get a feel for.

Mr Stewart: I should mention, in relation to this, the Waterside Apartments. I don't

know if the committee's familiar with that. This is not a flattering shot, but it won an architectural award recently and, as I said, the high quality sustainable design award from ACTPLA and the Chief Minister. We were the architects for that project. It had a four-storey limit when it began. We worked with ACTPLA to ensure a housing choice. In that case there are townhouses, apartments and lift access units as well as shops, in fact—to get that housing choice. In the same way, we believe that the best result here is actually this configuration.

THE CHAIR: Mr Stewart, what would you say to concerned residents of the Deakin area about the height of the project?

Mr Stewart: I would say this is pushing the boundaries. It's hard. I guess residents generally like places as they are. But in this case, because of its unique position, I think it's worthy of consideration because of the things I've said. I think it helps—I'm a strong supporter of sustainable design and whatever. In the end, it's up to communities to work out what their position is. If they say, "No, these developments shouldn't occur," then there are serious implications on the whole picture of the ACT.

I think each community has to be given a challenge of how to reach what was their peak population so that they have social diversity—families, older people, younger people. I think these are tough decisions. I think to push it to say, "No, we shouldn't have apartments here; you should live at Kingston" or, "You should live in the city," is not right. I think every neighbourhood—Lyneham, Griffith, Narrabundah—should be seriously challenged to establish almost the peak populations that they have enjoyed and provide housing choice and diversity. That's the only way the city can enjoy sustainability in the long term.

In this case a more distributive model is an option but, in the current planning context, we accept the government's desire to preserve neighbourhoods. This is a bold move by the planning minister. In that context we've said, "No, the pressure comes and it has to go up on this site" to meet those objectives. It's very challenging. I don't expect everyone to clap and say that it's lovely, but it's the best possible design we can produce. We are not the greatest architects on earth, but we have the credentials and we professionally believe this is the way to go.

Mr Bell: Perhaps I could add one thing to that. On our buyer profile, in trying to see who is going to want to live here, it's clearly targeted at the owner/occupiers. As such we've provided a fair amount of amenity inside the building, such as a theatre, lounge areas, private dining facilities and concierge if necessary. There are no swimming pools or tennis courts because they're not what body corporates want to have, or have responsibility for. It's designed for the owner/occupier. The size of the units reflects that as well.

We have indications from the public consultation that we've been through—and we've done two days of it now, or one day in particular at the embassy and part of it with the Yarralumla Residents Association, at their last meeting. There are a lot of people who actually want to live here, that don't want to be on a large block but don't want to leave Deakin or Yarralumla. It'll fit that profile very well.

THE CHAIR: With that in mind, do you consider that there would be people from

Deakin purchasing in that complex?

Mr Bell: Absolutely. We know that.

MS PORTER: My question is around the traffic flow and parking. You said before about legal access. Perhaps you might explain that to me a little bit more—where the parking actually is, whether there will be any additional stresses on parking in the surrounding streets, and the traffic flow that you’re anticipating.

Mr Stewart: I should tell the committee that I’m an architect, an urban planner; I’m not a traffic expert. But we have traffic consultants who have prepared an extensive traffic study. I think the term is “increased traffic”. There will be some, but it is well within the “environmental capacity” of the existing system. As the traffic planners, the traffic authorities and the government require, the access is not off Hopetoun Circuit, it is off Grose Street.

We think this will encourage a higher number of walking trips for people going shopping and all those other things—such as to the Deakin health spa or to schools. Other trips in that area will be encouraged. There should be traffic management measures throughout Deakin to stop through traffic. The more the better, I say. You can see from the drawing down there that there’s direct access in every direction onto Adelaide Avenue, which is extremely fortunate.

I just should explain to the committee the other thing I didn’t finish—I’m sorry if I haven’t covered everything. I refer to parking under the buildings. It runs under here and under here. It’s under some landscape here. This is all landscaped on top. To be honest, that’s not deep—you can’t plant big trees in those two areas. But throughout here it’s deep-root planting, which is 35 per cent of the site. If you dig down, there’s nothing there except soil.

There are all these existing trees on the front here. That’s a separate block and is, in fact, ACT land. There are a huge number of trees there which will be retained, as it’s public land. And then there are the verges and whatever to Adelaide Avenue. I should also say, on another matter, that 100 per cent of the apartments are accessible, which means there’s lift access, and 10 per cent as required, as adaptable apartments. As I said, we didn’t include townhouses because we understood there are a number of townhouses planned next door, along the top of the rise there on Adelaide Avenue. Therefore, in a total urban design sense, this provides a range of housing choices for the people in this area.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Stewart. Mr Bell and Mr Smith, do you want to present any more to the committee?

Mr Bell: I’d be happy to answer any more questions you might have. Would you like us to leave our drawings? We’re aware that others will be talking about the proposal this afternoon. We’d be very happy to leave them, if that would assist.

THE CHAIR: Indeed. That would be good. Thank you, Mr Bell.

Mr Bell: Thank you for the opportunity.

THE CHAIR: Gentlemen, thank you very much for attending.

Mr D Wrigley was called

THE CHAIR: Members, we will now move on to agenda item No 3, which is an inquiry again into Draft Variation 244, Duffy, block 2 section 56, Stromlo. We have got a presentation by Mr Derek Wrigley, who is the author of *Making Your Home Sustainable 2004*. Mr Wrigley, come and have a seat. I will introduce you to the members of the committee. My name is Mick Gentleman. This is Zed Seselja and Mary Porter. Welcome. I will read out to you our evidence statement.

Mr Wrigley, you should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. The giving of false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Mr Wrigley, would you like to go ahead with your presentation.

Mr Wrigley: Certainly. Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to talk on this quite important topic, I think, Stromlo. Can I take it that you have read my comments that I submitted earlier?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Wrigley: Thank you. Good. Obviously, because of a lack of access to information, I cannot present a fully professional statement on this. I can just give you my opinion on what I have seen. As more facts come to light, I may have to change one or two of the situations.

Now, Draft Variation 244 has got quite a number of excellent concepts in it regarding sustainability, and that is my particular topic. That is particularly so in relation to the solar aspects on the site of all the houses, the site setbacks to three metres have been put into the statement, and so on.

Unfortunately, with respect to the plan at the back, that is, diagram 2.2, which is right at the back—I have included it in my statement on page 8 and I put a number of comments on it as well—whilst that type of layout might be very suitable for traditional, unsustainable housing, it does not lend itself to the easy placement of sustainable housing. That is partly because the blocks are so narrow and longer than necessary. I will show you a plan later on that I believe can overcome that situation.

Plan 2.2 represents an old type of thinking that we are really going to have to get away from if we are going to think seriously about sustainability. By sustainability in housing, we mean that the houses should operate on as low an energy basis as is possible. We should be utilising the sun and the wind much more than we are doing at the moment. They are natural energies, they are free energies and they enable people, in the right sort of house, to live much more comfortably and much more cheaply. Those are very important points, I think, in terms of sustainable housing.

Now, what I would like to do is to show you some diagrams on the overhead projector. I will issue you with these. They are what I am going to show on a projector. Perhaps it

will be a little bit easier for you to follow it.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Wrigley.

Mr Wrigley: Do you see that perfectly okay?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Wrigley: I have drawn in the large blue rectangle what is drawn on diagram 2.2. It is a fairly typical sort of block. On that I have shown what I have designed as a solar house, a two-bedroom solar house. This is the three bedroom and there is the four-bedroom house. I have superimposed them for convenience. That is all.

You can see that a two-bedroom house fits on perfectly easily. There is no problem. If that block is oriented correctly to the north, then that house on that site will be okay. The moment you angle that block away from north, which is what you will see here—here is north and this little wedge here indicates the range of movement that you have for placing that house to get optimum efficiency from the sun. Do not forget, if you are wanting to put photovoltaics or solar water absorbers on your roof, then you have a very limited range in which to put them for efficiency. Otherwise you are wasting your money in putting them on.

So you can see the difficulty you are going to have with, say, a three-bedroom house on that narrow type of block. You are exceeding the side boundaries. It is possible, of course, to put that carport right out the back, but getting to it would be quite a problem. So there are severe limitations with sustainable housing on those narrow blocks.

What I am going to propose is something a little bit more flexible. Incidentally, that large blue rectangle is just over 1,000 square metres, so it is a fairly traditional sort of block. I have drawn the same area—this is even slightly less, 1,007—as a square block. Now, laying out a square block or a rectangular block gives you very strict limitations in terms of orientation when you are placing them side-by-side. What I would like to suggest is that we adopt a much more free style of planning, more along the lines of the Radburn principle, which is quite old by now, so there is nothing new about it. That is shown by the red line.

Now, the red line, the red area, is exactly the same area as the blue one underneath, but it gives you much more flexibility in the placing of those houses. It gives you much more flexibility in the placing of that house within that block. You can orient it much more accurately. Do not forget that the placing of sustainable housing in relation to north is very critical. You only have a small range of movement.

I should explain this diagram. This is an eco-solar house that I have designed. It is using a berm, that is, a banking up of earth against a wall. There are three sides, allowing for a two-car carport in this instance, with a small service yard. You can service the waterless toilet, assuming that we will be putting waterless toilets in all these houses, for sustainability reasons. There is, of course, a sewer in the site, but I see no need to use it because, again, I think that is old-fashioned, Victorian thinking. We have to get away from that if we are going to achieve sustainability. There are many waterless toilets on the market now. They are improving all the time and I think we shall be adopting these

quite readily.

This plan shows you the same sort of thing, but with a four-bedroom house. You can see that there is room for it on the same sort of block. Here is north. This is the range of movement. It will allow you to angle it and get solar access.

The plan that I would like to show you is sheet 9 in my submission. Sheet 8 was the one with the draft variation. The block boundaries do not show up terribly clearly in this, I am afraid, but I am suggesting that the road might come down here to Warragamba Avenue. We will keep the common in the middle. It is quite a fair size. Every one of those houses can be serviced by an access road. I have suggested that from this main road that is going through, we have some access tracks around the perimeter. They would be simple three-metre gravel driveways that would serve as access, as firebreaks, access for fire trucks and things of that kind.

It is space that is not otherwise that useable. It is not taking up good space in the centre. I have kept the 40 metre wide barrier between Cotter Road and the development. In doing it this way, you see that each house—there are 40 houses on the list, just as there are on the 2.2 diagram—has got a very good northerly aspect, and you can vary it 30 degrees to the west. It allows for a clubhouse here, and that is where you have your communal composting or whatever other services that you want. I would like to suggest that we have very minimal access to Cotter Road. One entrance is more than adequate, really, on what could be a very busy road and that might relieve some of the pressure.

So there is an access road here and there around the back. There is one going there to service those houses, another one here for the clubhouse and to that house particularly, which is otherwise difficult to get at. That gives a very good alternative to the plan that is shown on outline plan 2.2. Incidentally, the scale on the draft variation plan is, I think, incorrect if you look at it carefully. It is double the size that it should be. I have corrected it on my drawings.

That is dealing with block sizes, proportions and orientation. The other aspect that is now becoming, I think, old fashioned, is the fact that all houses must face the street. I do not believe that this is really necessary any longer. With a free approach like this, we can have more privacy for the occupants, and that is highly desirable, of course, in any house. You can achieve the best possible solar access and you can arrange your views accordingly.

Fences are another matter that I have dealt with. I have lived for many years without fences around my house and it has not proved in any way to be a disadvantage, even with young children and pets. They can learn to live in that sort of situation. Fences are expensive and in a fire, they get damaged anyway. The sewerage system I have touched on, with waterless toilets and with grey water being disposed of on the block itself. There is no need to use the existing sewerage system at all. Other services like telephone, gas and so on are very flexible services and they could fit into this sort of system without any trouble at all.

Then there is preservation of large existing trees. Obviously I have not had time to do any plotting of trees. That is a matter of detail that we are going to have to come to. There are not very many trees on this site. Nevertheless, they could influence this

diagram when we come to lay it out. Shadows from large trees are a real problem, and I think that this is a problem that the whole of Canberra is going to come to very shortly when everybody wants to put photovoltaics or solar water absorbers on their rooves. There is no question that we are going to have to do things of this kind in the future if we want to achieve that sort of autonomy. I have gone over time, have I?

THE CHAIR: No. Keep going.

Mr Wrigley: What is the situation with respect to showing you commercial-in-confidence drawings?

THE CHAIR: It is a public hearing at the moment.

Mr Wrigley: You do say they are your property, but they are my copyright. Is that correct?

The Secretary: That is right.

Mr Wrigley: Is there any problem in showing you these? I still need to deal with some companies outside in confidence.

THE CHAIR: I understand. I think we should move to in-camera proceedings to have a look at those photos.

The Secretary: I think so.

Public hearing suspended from 10.54 to 10.59 am.

THE CHAIR: At this point, Mr Wrigley, should we hand the photos back? Then we can go back into the committee?

Mr Wrigley: Right.

MS PORTER: Thank you very much.

Mr Wrigley: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Wrigley, for showing us those photos.

Mr Wrigley: That pretty well ends my presentation. Have you seen my book, by the way?

THE CHAIR: Yes, we have.

Mr Wrigley: You have seen it? I was going to give you a copy.

THE CHAIR: If it is a better copy, I will take it.

MR SESELJA: I would love to take a copy.

MS PORTER: We do not have a coloured one. I would love a coloured one.

Mr Wrigley: That describes a retrofit job, but if we translate what is in there to a new house, then you have got the same sort of situation. I am very confident that that sort of thing could take place at Stromlo.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wrigley, I have got a couple of questions for you.

Mr Wrigley: Yes, sure.

THE CHAIR: One is on your comment about the waterless toilet. Also you led into the sewerage system that is currently in place at Stromlo.

Mr Wrigley: Yes.

THE CHAIR: If we have a waterless toilet, what do we do with the shower and waste from the sinks?

Mr Wrigley: Well, that is grey water and that can go off into sumps in the garden. I am doing that at the moment and there is no great problem with that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The other question was: what are your thoughts on the amenity of these designed houses in comparison to a rural style design that was previously in place?

Mr Wrigley: It depends on what you mean by “rural style”, I think. Are you talking verandas all the way around?

THE CHAIR: Well, no. At Stromlo we had a semi-rural design development, I believe, or a village-style development with fairly straightforward timber housing, weatherboard housing. This is quite a departure from that.

Mr Wrigley: I am not too sure about that. I did not see the originals. That is one point I have not touched on, the three houses that are left here.

MS PORTER: Yes. I wanted to ask you a question about that.

Mr Wrigley: I will come to that in a second. It depends what you mean by “rural style”. Most of the housing that has been built up until now has been fairly inefficient from a point of view of thermal usage. They are leaky. They leak heat out in wintertime. They let the summer sun in, and so on. They are not well designed at all. I have aimed to correct all that stuff. I know from my own house that our house never gets over 26 inside in summer, and we have no air conditioning. So I know it can be done.

In the wintertime the sun comes in the north. If you look at the bottom photograph on the front cover, those three reflector panels there put one and a half megawatt hours of heat into one room over the heating season, six months. Now, that room has the equivalent of a one-bar radiator operating in the house all day, free. It only cost \$300 to put the reflectors up.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wrigley, I understand the process and it is a fabulous idea, but my question was more to the amenity of the area, of the rural village outlook that occurred at Stromlo.

Mr Wrigley: Yes. Look, to me it would be quite acceptable. I think the public taste is changing. What was rural style is, I think, changing in people's minds. I have deliberately kept this house moderately conservative, this eco house, from the point of view that I do not want to scare the clients off. It is a valid point, I think. In architectural magazines you get lots of glossy photographs of way-out designs, which irritate me because they are giving the wrong impression to the public. Good sustainable architecture does not have to be way out. If you look at my house in Mawson, and I invite you to come around if you want to, it is a traditional developer's house.

THE CHAIR: A Willemsen design, was it not?

Mr Wrigley: It is a Willemsen house, and he did some very good work. I have spent the last nine years retrofitting it. It was good to start with; it is even better now. He did not put enough insulation in, put it in the wrong places and things like that, and there is very little mass in it. That is still a weakness because it is expensive to correct it. But I have taken all of it aboard and, in this new design, tried to rectify that sort of situation. I am very confident that this sort of thing is quite feasible today. From an appearance point of view, it is in people's minds as to what the amenity of the area is. If you are thinking of going back to the 1920s, I do not think the public would want that, would they?

THE CHAIR: There are some heritage considerations at Stromlo.

Mr Wrigley: Yes. Well, I might just mention the three houses that are there already. I have only had a quick run past in the car, so judge my comments from that, please. They are typical of that period, certainly, and from that point of view have some sort of heritage value. But in trying to plan around those two houses, which are roughly around here, they got in the way of the planning. Just how far do you go? I think the better bet would be to cut the houses up, transport them to somewhere else where they would be more suitable and perhaps arrange a demonstration village or set up of a number of those houses, because there are others, I believe, and do it that way.

The other house at the corner is not so bad. It does not interfere terribly much. It would be a pity to spoil a good development just for the sake of two houses that are not architecturally significant anyway. They are typical of that period. They are timber-framed buildings. They would be very difficult to retrofit properly and by the time you have retrofitted them to an efficient standard, they would probably look different anyway. I do not quite know how far you can go on that sort of thing.

It would be a social problem, I think, for the people living in those two houses. They would say, "Well, why couldn't we have the opportunity to have some of these new houses because they're much better to live in?" You might have social divisiveness creeping in. I do not know. There may be problems like that. I think it would be better to put them somewhere else. I am not saying demolish them in any way, but just put them somewhere else.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Wrigley. Members, do you have any questions for

Mr Wrigley?

MS PORTER: No.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wrigley, thank you very much for coming to our meeting today and giving us your generous time.

MS PORTER: Yes. Thank you very much.

Mr Wrigley: I hope it comes to a satisfactory conclusion.

MS PORTER: Whereabouts in Mawson is your house?

Mr Wrigley: In Shackleton Circuit.

The committee adjourned at 11.07 am.