

COOK PRIMARY & PRESCHOOL SITE
LOCAL CONSULTATION – 1ST SESSION
(30 OCTOBER 2007)
INITIAL SUMMARY

1. Introduction

The first local consultation sessions for the Cook site was held on Monday 29 October 2007 at the Holy Covenant Anglican Church, Cook.

These notes summarise the key outcomes from discussions held throughout the consultation. It should be noted that participation in the consultation was premised on the qualification that that it did not signify support for school closure.

2. Background

In 2006 the ACT Government announced that 23 primary schools and preschools would be closed as part of its Schools Revitalisation Policy.

ACT Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) have appointed a consultant team to undertake detailed site specific technical studies and local community consultation in order to identify optimal future uses for each site.

The consultation process is staged and provides opportunity for residents and other interested members of the community to attend local information displays and workshop sessions to provide feedback and discuss issues relevant to each of the former school sites. Technical findings together with feedback received through the consultations will be used by the consultant team to assess and make recommendations to TAMS about future uses for the former school sites.

3. Approach

The consultation session included a community information display held from 4.30pm to 7.30pm together with four focussed workshop sessions held on the hour every hour.

A series of plans and information relating to the Cook site formed the display. These plans were available as 'table packs' for the participants of the workshops.

The information included:

- Metropolitan Context Plan
- Project Timetable Flowchart
- Project Objectives
- Options Workshops (District) Outcomes
- Building Condition Summary
- Population Characteristics
- Social Infrastructure Plan
- Territory Plan Extract (Community Facility)
- Territory Plan Extract Map
- Planning Processes Flowchart
- Typical Development Types'
- Site & Suburb Air Photo
- Site Analysis Plan
- Site Photos
- Development Option Plan



4. Attendance

Approximately 50 people attended the workshops and an additional 5 people called in to view the display, without attending a workshop.

5. Key issues

Key issues

The key issues that were raised at the Cook consultation included:

Focus of Cook

- Cook is a diverse suburb with a lot of medium density housing that is going through demographic change and regeneration. New families are moving to the area and having children.
- The school, shops, playground, church and open space form a central activity precinct or hub that is the focus of the community. The precinct forms a vibrant centre that is actively used by the community, particularly by families and dog walkers and encourages informal interaction within the community.
- The school is valued as an important part of the central activity precinct and there is strong support to reopen it.
- The space is well used
- The ballet school is an important focus of the community. It has a metropolitan catchment and brings people to Cook.

Current and future community needs

- The community values its local shopping centre and there is a critical need to ensure the long term viability of the shops.
- There is a need to retain pedestrian access to the open space to ensure it does not become landlocked and isolated.
- Space is needed for local playgroups and enrolments at local preschools are increasing. Some preschools already have waiting lists. Therefore, there is a need for early childhood education and care services. As the development potential in A10 areas is realised and more high density housing is established there will be a need for a local school.
- The ACT Playgroups Association is based on the school site and coordinates metropolitan wide playgroup services. This is an important service and its future tenure needs to be provided.
- The open space adjoining the site has been upgraded to provide an athletics facility that is well patronised, particularly on weekends. As such, there is a need to retain at least some of the school grounds because they provide alternative outdoor space when the adjoining open space is being used for athletics for picnics and dog walking. There is a need for picnic facilities and BBQs to be established in this area because the area is well used and would benefit from ancillary facilities.
- The school currently provides a meeting space for after-hours community activities. When the school closes there will be a need for a general community meeting space.
- There is a need to retain the memorial grove, which is a locally important feature.
- There is a need to retain the mature vegetation to the west of the site to protect the amenity of adjoining residents



- The ballet school, playgroup association, local play groups and other existing tenants play a crucial role in the local community and provide regional services.

Potential use of former school site to meet community needs

- Many participants stated that their preference was to re-open the school to provide for future community need, but resigned to discussing possible future uses for the site.
- Participants felt the buildings are in good condition and therefore have potential for adaptive reuse for community purposes. The site is proven and has demonstrated it can support services that draw from a metropolitan catchment.
- The school grounds provide a natural drainage area and support a natural spring. Therefore the suitability of future development would need to be assessed.
- Access to the site should not be from the western site boundary because of potential traffic impacts on adjoining residential areas. The traffic impacts associated with any future development would need to be assessed.
- Opportunities to collect stormwater from the site to irrigate the adjoining open space should be assessed.
- The site is located in the centre of the metropolitan area and is well serviced by regional road infrastructure and is on a major bus route, which means that it is accessible and could therefore support a number of uses.
- Potential community based groups that have an interest in the Cook site or in accessing multi-use multi-functional space within the Belconnen region include Carers ACT, U3A, community college, craft/quilting groups, YMCA, theatre/dance groups, Canberra Professional Wrestlers Club, Prime Movers, Canberra Youth Ballet School, men's groups, economic enterprise centre.

Analysis of options

Option 1

- There was some support to rezone part of the school grounds to open space to enable it to be used for athletics, particularly javelin. However, athletics activities already spill onto the site on an as needs basis.

Option 1A

- Some participants stated that the school should be retained in its entirety to enable the school to be reopened in the future to support demographic change.
- Future community uses, such as childcare could utilise part of the school grounds to support service delivery.

Option 2

- Some participants resigned that partial site redevelopment may help to sustain the local shops and felt that additional community facilities, aged care or low density residential would be acceptable. However, the majority of participants stated that there was already a lot of medium and high density housing within the surrounding A10 areas and as such, the site should not be rezoned for residential use.
- A range of views were expressed in regards to constraints that impact the potential to subdivide the site to enable partial redevelopment. Specifically:
 - Participants noted the school hall is a valuable space that could provide rehearsal space for a number of community-based groups and therefore should be retained.



- Participants noted the playground equipment is well used. It is covered with a shade structure (funded by the P&C) and provides good view lines between the shops and the playground which mean that parents can allow their children to play while they pick up groceries. There was widespread support for the playground equipment to be retained.
- Participants noted that the access corridor linking residential areas of Cook with the open space needs to be retained to maintain pedestrian accessibility and ensure the open space continued to be actively used.
- Participants felt the mature vegetation adds to the amenity of the area and should be retained.
- Some participants expressed the view that there is sufficient demand for community facilities in the area and that existing tenants should remain and new tenants found to fill the other buildings on site.
- Some participants felt that the Jameson Centre development provides additional commercial space and did not feel that the site should not be rezoned for commercial use.

Option 3

- As per Option 2.
- There was no consensus around whether all existing school buildings should be retained or which ones should be retained if the site was to be partially developed. With reference to the ballet school there was general consensus that that specific buildings should be retained for ongoing community use.
- Participants acknowledged that the ballet school had a long term presence on the site and had made a significant investment to adapt the building to suit its needs and therefore should be retained.
- Participants suggested the preschool be retained as it was purpose build and suitable for childcare.
- Participants advocated that community demand should be assessed to determine whether all buildings should be retained. Some participants suggested that the two most western blocks (currently used as ballet school and hall) and the preschool building should be retained. Therefore, if school buildings could only be partially retained, the eastern block presents the most opportunity for redevelopment. If the western part of the site is redeveloped, the memorial grove, playground and pedestrian access to the open space should be retained.
- Participants conditioned that any future development would need to be keeping with the amenity of the local area and not detract from the functionality of valuable community assets.

Option 3A

- As per Options 2 and 3.
- Some participants felt that the buildings were in good condition and therefore, it would be inappropriate to demolish them to build a purpose built community facility.

Option 4

- There was no support for total redevelopment of the site.

Option 4A

- There was no support for the entire site to be rezoned for open space.



Alternative options

- Some participants supported the idea of extending the road to subdivide the open space and rezone this land for development to enable the school site to be used for community uses.

These notes reflect key issues and ideas raised during discussions with the consultant team during the course of the Workshops and Information Display and are not intended to reflect all of the comments made, nor does it include any of the comments written on 'Feedback Sheets' provided to persons who attended the session/workshops.

Information from feedback sheets and other submissions will be analysed and incorporated into the site evaluation process by the consultant team and included in the final report to Government.

7 November 2007

