

**DOWNER PRIMARY SITE**  
**LOCAL CONSULTATION – 1<sup>ST</sup> SESSION**  
**(22 OCTOBER 2007)**  
**INITIAL SUMMARY**

## **1. Introduction**

On Monday 22 October 2007 a community information display was held from 4.30pm – 7.30pm at the Downer community hall in Downer, to discuss future uses for the former primary school site.

These notes summarise the key outcomes from discussions held throughout the consultation. It should be noted that participation was premised on the qualification 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. The Downer school site has been used for alternative purposes for a number of years, but has also been included in the planning process, in order to develop future uses for the site.

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 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.

A series of plans and information relating to the Downer site formed the display.

The information included:

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

## **4. Attendance**

Approximately 75 people attended the information session.



## 5. Key issues

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

- Planning for the Downer site needs to be holistic and include an assessment of the adjoining site, not just the former school site.
- Previous proposals to move the existing shops to the north-west corner of the site should be revisited, and residents should be given assurance regarding what the shops/commercial district will contain.
- The most commonly expressed unmet needs were those of: a local convenience store, open space and affordable commercial office space.
- There was not consensus as to whether the building should be removed or not, and if so, what the site should be used for. A common response from those participants who held a preference for redevelopment was for aged-care, low density housing or business space.

### 5.1 Focus of Downer

- Many community members voiced that Downer was an active, close-knit community.
- The majority of participants stated the importance of open space and the heritage-listed trees in the Downer community.
- Some participants stated that it was crucial to look at planning for the wider or precinct level, not just at the old school buildings. The site can not be viewed in isolation from the existing buildings and green space adjoining the site and the relationship these have to the wider suburb.
- Some participants stated the need to discuss timing and role of the future use of former school sites project with ACTPLA, particularly in relation to the urban design study and existing DA for the adjoining property, with a view to understanding the relationship of these and the existing green space and shopping aspirations.
- Many stated that Downer does not need highly-dense residential housing.

### 5.2 Current and future community needs

- One common unmet need discussed was assurance from the government regarding the outcomes for the site. Many participants noted that they had already been through an extensive consultation process for the site during the ACTPLA Draft Downer Central Urban Design Study and the Downer Neighbourhood Plan (DNP).
- Most participants stated the importance of open space and how any plans should retain as much as possible (including a playground for children)
- Many responses focussed on the use of open space and trees for community benefit, such as walking or recreational areas, or possibly some community gardens
- There was a strong desire by many for local shopping, particularly for the elderly population
- The most frequently mentioned shops that were noted as an unmet need were a convenience store, as well as the possibility of a café or local restaurant
- There was not consensus about locating retail outlets on the corner of the subject site as this would result in a loss of green space
- Some participants noted that a local medical centre may be a good use of some of the space on the site



- Some participants noted that they would like to see affordable housing on the site. Others disagreed and stated that there was already enough affordable housing in the area and the site did not lend itself to this option.
- A few participants noted that they were content to see the site stay as it was currently used (business centre). Most were open to change and held a preference for some form of new community facilities.
- Another need that was raised was the need for childcare facilities.

### 5.3 Potential use of former school site to meet community needs

- In a submission the Downer Community Association outlined that: a new commercial area, for commercial and shop-top units, would be an appropriate use of some of the site, although the size and location of this would need to be carefully considered.
- Most participants did not state a particular attachment to the current buildings. Many participants stated that the current buildings do not need to be used to meet community needs.
- Some participants discussed the possibility of aged care or residential on the site if it was low density and absolutely not high rise. Others raised scepticism as to whether or not a quality facility would be built to fit with the amenity of the local area, or if any contributions from the development of housing facilities would be used for community purposes at all. Some participants voiced that they did not feel that there was a need for more aged care housing in the local area.
- Community members expressed a variety of opinions as to whether the buildings could continue to be used for community or business purposes. Some stated that the buildings only needed minor refurbishments to continue providing low-cost premises for small business, whereas others felt that the buildings were outdated and needed to be replaced.

### 5.4 Analysis of options

#### *Option 1*

- Some participants noted that this was a good option to retain areas of open space and the amenity of the local area.
- A few participants noted that the existing use as a business centre was an effective use for the site.
- Other participants felt that the site offered greater opportunities than purely as a business centre. Some participants felt that retaining the buildings would severely limit the options to create a new area for shops, mixed community use, provision of aged care facilities or further open space.
- Some participants stated that the only benefit of this option was to retain some open space and that the buildings were too degraded to continue using.

#### *Option 1A*

- Many comments were similar to option 1.
- One participant noted that this was an appropriate option as it allowed a longer time to discuss possible future options for the site.

#### *Option 2*

- Some participants noted support for this option, which could potentially provide a new commercial area, as outlined in the Downer Neighbourhood Plan.



- Other participants stated that this was a poor option as the building did not serve a useful purpose and could be effectively replaced by newer office buildings.

#### *Option 3*

- There were a diverse range of opinions regarding option 3.
- Some felt strongly that this option could help to provide more desirable outcomes for the community, such as through a new shopping area, commercial district or aged care (low-density) accommodation.
- Many stated that this option allowed some creative redevelopment options, whilst retaining some of the building for community/business purposes.
- Other participants strongly disliked this option, as it closed off open space to the local community and there was a distrust regarding what would actually be built on the site.

#### *Option 3A*

- Similar comments were raised as in option 3.
- Some participants felt strongly that this option could help to deliver a good mix of community, business and residential facilities such as a local convenience store and café, business office space and some low density aged care accommodation.
- Other participants were strongly opposed to this option as there would be a loss of open space and some did not trust the government or developers to build the appropriate facilities for the community.

#### *Option 4*

- This option had some similar comments to options 3 and 3A.
- There was an extremely diverse range of opinions on this option. Some felt that this option allowed complete flexibility to provide preferable community facilities on the site, whereas others felt that the option would lead to overdevelopment and loss of open space and amenity of the local site.

#### *Option 4A*

- The responses to this option were also polarised.
- Some participants felt strongly that this would provide much needed open space to the local community and provide flexibility for future planning.
- Other participants strongly voiced that this option would provide nothing to the local community, other than more open space. These participants stated that this would waste a valuable opportunity to provide local shopping and other community facilities.

**These notes reflect key issues and ideas raised during discussions with the consultant team during the course of the 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.**

**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**

