

TUGGERANONG AND THARWA OPTIONS WORKSHOP – SEPTEMBER 2007

NEW USES FOR FORMER SCHOOL SITES

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key outcomes of the Tuggeranong and Tharwa Options Workshop convened as part of the consultation process being managed by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) for the ACT Government on the future use of school sites in the District.

The main purpose of the workshop was to discuss the four generic options identified by the Government for re-use of the school sites, to identify other potential options and to consider community needs in Tuggeranong and Tharwa.

The Workshop was undertaken by Purdon Associates as independent facilitators to inform the decision making process for TAMS.

The Workshop was held at the Uniting Church in Wanniasa from 6pm to 9pm on Monday 24 September, 2007. Information about the workshops was made available through personal invitations which were sent to all stakeholder groups and individuals on the TAMS contact list, media advertisements and the project website. About 45 participants attended, including representatives from a wide range of community interests as well as residents living in the vicinity of the sites identified for closure in Tuggeranong and Tharwa.

The workshop comprised two sessions exploring:

- The background and purpose of the project and a discussion of existing and emerging community needs within the local area.
- Discussion of the strengths and weakness of four different generic options for the use of the sites and identification of additional options the community considered should be included in any assessment of the re-use of the sites.

Each session included a briefing from the consultant team, as well as table discussion/reporting in greater detail, in smaller groups.

The following notes summarise the main themes and messages arising from each session. Appendix A provides a full listing of comments and issues recorded on the night.

SESSION 1: COMMUNITY NEEDS

General Comments

Several strong messages were conveyed by way of general comment by workshop participants:

- school facilities should be retained for community use as local demographics may change and there could be a need for the schools to be re-opened in the future.
- public access to the facilities must be maintained and should be primarily used for non-profit organisations and especially for groups which are not funded and for whom affordability is a critical issue.
- the current policy for allocating space managed by TAMS should be reversed so that priority is given to community organisations rather than government agencies.
- public access to the former school facilities should continue so that small communities would not be disadvantaged.
- the community did not have any confidence in the process.



What is Community?

There was limited discussion about what constitutes community but the view was expressed that community already existed and could not be bought but that the government needed to foster community development through the provision of community space.

It was recognised that in order to maintain and encourage community cohesion, community meeting points are required and that existing facilities should be retained.

There were a number of comments that were specific to Tharwa. It was noted that the preschool (which straddles two blocks) is not part of the consultation process and is also still used for community purposes and should therefore not be removed.

Community Needs

It was suggested that there a lack of facilities in Tuggeranong and participants identified a wide range of activities for which the former school sites could be used, including:

- baseball fields
- basketball
- horse-riding
- college
- playgroups groups
- temporary accommodation for volunteers
- Sites for small non-government schools

A range of different types of space were also identified including office space, large capacity rooms, parking areas, warehousing space and facilities for wet area activities. It was also noted that some community organisations needed outdoor areas. Organisations who were represented indicated support for multi-use and shared use of facilities

There was general recognition that there was a need for more aged care facilities in the community, especially facilities to meet the high needs end (residential aged care) and that older people were moving from surrounding areas to Tuggeranong to be cared for. On the other hand participants stated that any such facilities should not isolate older people or 'box-in' people. It was suggested that aged care facilities should be located in appropriate locations where they fit within the surrounding local context and that former school sites may not always be appropriate for this purpose.

If such facilities are to be developed they need to be based on the concept of establishing an integrated community for different age groups in which older people, school students and young parents could interact and which did not result in 'ghettos'. Although mentioned less frequently it was noted that there was also a need for retirement housing facilities.

In addition to aged care facilities some participants noted that given the general ageing of the community there was a need for a multi-purpose facility which includes a seniors club, areas for community services, including workshops and garages and caravan storage areas and areas for hobbies and for the interests of a growing ageing community.

Finally in relation to the preference for developing more integrated approaches to aged care the comment was made that innovation requires cleverness, not just dollars

A small number of people stated that there will be an increase in the need for community services and support organisations in Tuggeranong because of its proximity of the ACT Prison.

Other identified needs included:

- indigenous services and support
- cultural groups
- the provision of opportunities for children and young people



In relation to children from closed schools, it was suggested that they needed to see school being used in a way that includes them and validates their experiences.

Emerging Needs

Some participants noted that it was important to consider emerging needs and not only existing needs. Possible emerging groups that may need to be accommodated are groups that could establish relating to climate change, transport, public housing tenant support groups, mental health support groups.

As part of the discussion several comments were made, which were generally supported and which represent important themes for the future process:

- the needs of local residents most affected by closures need to be taken into account
- the social contribution of the facilities should be valued more than the potential fiscal contribution, and
- former school sites should facilitate a vibrant, vital and sustaining community.

In the context of the above comments, there was a general concern about the focus on financial issues and the need to deliver a return to Government. It was stated that innovation requires cleverness and that this project has to be bigger than dollars.

Specific Comments on Tharwa

Participants from Tharwa would prefer that the school was re-opened in some form. Notwithstanding this, there was strong support for the view that the Tharwa community needs a place for community events school and that the school should be retained as a community facility with for community uses as it offered a unique bush community. Ideally community activities should have a focus on health, drop-in centre, medical services, Yoga, mothers playgroup, the CWA and also be the site of the community fair.

It was also suggested that the school could be a site for special education (e.g. river system management, Water-Watch). In relation to health and other services Several participants considered that the former school would provide a suitable venue from which to deliver sessional health and other services to Tharwa where they were not located, thus helping to offset the issues associated with the no-operation of the Tharwa bridge.

SESSION 2 - GENERIC OPTIONS

General comments

Several participants indicated at the commencement of this session that they considered that all schools should be retained for community use as demographics may change and the schools could be required in the future. In order to achieve this, participants considered that flexibility should be maintained in the future use of community facilities. Participants did not want to lose community facility land that could then not be “claimed back” by the community.

Some participants also expressed the view that the re-use of sites should not be the same across Canberra and that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ response was not appropriate.

Participants also stated that it was difficult to consider the generic options at a general level without reference to specific sites. They considered that the issues to be taken into account were site specific and it was difficult to comment at a generic level. Further it was stated that local communities should come up with their own options.

There was also consideration of the issue of management of community facilities and their allocation to different groups. In particular the question of who determines priorities between different groups and the merits of not-for-profit groups should also be assessed.

In line with the view that the sites should be retained in case they were required as schools in the future and the desire to maintain flexibility, many participants considered that Option 1 was the only option that should be considered.



In relation to the options the following comments were made:

- the schools require major work and expenditure in order to be adequate for future use by groups as many buildings are run down and in poor condition
- if there is little or no open space in suburb the school oval should be retained as open space, however if open space is available then it would be reasonable to develop this area in return for other trade-offs
- if part of any site is proposed for development, then proposed uses must be compatible with neighbourhood as well as community uses in remaining building(s).
- in order to achieve improved facilities overall it will be necessary to develop some sites and the funds used to improve others. On this basis one site could be used wholly for not for profit community space, one site could be used for comprehensive redevelopment, one for commercial community space and a fourth for aged care with a mixture of each in each area
- the risk of agreeing to the sale of part of a site is that the balance will be acquired/redeveloped in the long term resulting in the loss of more community land
- whilst a partial development/retention such as has occurred at Pearce could be acceptable the success of this option depends on funding to work effectively
- demolition of existing community resources makes it difficult to regenerate community assets
- the sites should not be developed for housing
- irrespective of the option, the maintenance and financial viability of community buildings and grounds should be supported and should not necessarily have to be self-supporting
- innovation is important and the options should establish a social framework and social inclusion.
- the integrity of the existing space must be maintained.

The workshop also suggested two variations on the options:

- a potential Generic Option 5 which would involve retaining the school building and allowing community organisations occupying the building to use the outdoor space for their activities rather than incorporating it into the open space system.
- demolishing all existing buildings on a site and redeveloping with purpose built community facilities

More generally some participants considered that:

- the process should not create false expectations among community groups.
- a community development approach to re-use of the sites rather than a SILO approach is required



Appendix A – Table Notes

Session 1: Community Needs

General Comments

- Demographics trends should be shown since 2000 not since 1986.
- Government had already made 'commitments' but it is not clear what is a 'preference', rather than a commitment.
- Need to clarify reference to 4 sites.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

- All schools should be retained for community use as demographics may change and there could be a need for the schools to be used as schools in years to come.
- Playgroups seek community space. Opportunities needed for teenagers and children.
- Tharwa Preschool is not included as a site
- Part of the school site should be removed as it is still used for community purposes
- Tharwa school should be retained for community uses with a focus on health, drop-in centre, medical services, Yoga, mothers playgroup, community fair site, CWA etc
- School sites should be used for Baseball fields, basketball, horse-riding and college.
- The needs of local residents most affected by closures need to be taken into account
- Sites should provide space for volunteers (e.g. Quilters, Catchment groups, Conservation volunteers, band and other Not-for-profit groups). These Not-for-profit Community groups have no funds therefore affordability is a critical issue.
 - Office space for groups plus large capacity rooms
 - Need room for car parking
 - Multi-use and shared use
 - Facilities for wet area activities
- Tharwa could be a site for special education (e.g. river system management, Water-Watch)
- Temporary Accommodation was needed (e.g. Backpackers) to cater for volunteers.
- Sites for small schools (private or non-government) was needed
- Not-for-profit office space and warehousing space
- Flexibility in the future use of community facilities
- Don't want a one-size-fits-all response across Canberra
- Establish an integrated community for different age groups – aged care and school students and young parents all in touch
- Valuing the social contribution more than the fiscal contribution
- Don't want to lose community facility land that can't then be "claimed back" by the community
- Sites should facilitate a vibrant, vital and sustaining community.
- The current order of priorities should be reversed – it should NOT be 1st to Government 2nd to Community.
- Concern about need to deliver a return to Government. Innovation requires cleverness. This project has to be bigger than dollars.
- Community meeting points required. Need to retain facilities to encourage community cohesion.



- Office space needed for diverse groups
- Focus should be on Not-for-Profit groups
- More aged care, but not if they are simply 'boxed-in'. people moving from city to Tuggeranong, from the surrounding area to be cared for.
- Innovation requires cleverness, not just dollars.
- Emerging groups that may need to be accommodated are groups that could establish relating to climate change, transport, public housing tenant support groups, mental health support groups.
- Demands for community services will arise in relation to the proximity of the ACT Prison to Tuggeranong.
- There is a clear lack of facilities in Tuggeranong.
- The needs of children need to be considered.
- The ACT Consultation Protocol require a minimum 6 week consultation period. Government should not contravene its own protocol.
- Schools need major work to be adequate for future use by groups.
- Impact of jail will need to requirement for more supporting community organisations
- Need for indigenous services and support
- Children from closed schools need to see school being used in a way that includes them and validates their experiences
- High needs end of aged care essential
- The community needs a place for community events and should be maintained as a community facility
- Recognise space demands at Tharwa and the need for a school in some form.
- Do not isolate specific forms of development, such as aged care, by conversion of a school site with no context.
- You can't buy 'community', it is there already, but the Government needs to provide space to help foster community development.
- Need a multi-general facility which includes a seniors club, areas for community services, including workshops and garages and caravan storage areas. Need to include areas for hobbies and interests for growing aging community.
- Lanyon Youth Centre – space for youth in a supervised facility.
- Aged population needs real estate /housing retirement facilities.
- Not-for-profit space required. Must maintain public access as communities have real immediate needs. Cultural groups need affordable venues. Should not disadvantage small communities and will the current leases be maintained.

SESSION 2: COMMENTS ON GENERIC OPTIONS

General Comments/Questions during Presentation

- What is the definition of a 'community facility'? The community's perceptions is very different to the range of uses permitted under the Territory Plan.
- The focus must be on Not-for-Profit groups.
- Current examples of school site re-use focus on groups who have funding
- Sites must not be lost for future flexible opportunities.
- Financial underpinnings of this process are a concern. It should be about community building not about economic development.



Other comments

- Trade-off of some space is possible if an oval is in immediate area.
- If part use of a site is proposed then use must be compatible with neighbourhood as well as community uses in remaining building.
- There should be no false expectations offered to community groups.
- Tharwa boundaries do not appear correct in material provided due to ongoing community use of part of the site.
- Risk of long term acquisition (loss of more land) if a site is broken up.
- Community development approach is required, not a SILO approach.
- Proposal (Generic Options) are difficult to deal with specifically.
- Who determines the priority listing and merits of Not-for-Profit groups.
- The Social Plan and Inclusion Board should be a consideration not just the Spatial Plan.
- There are issues with groups who establish in community space then have to move.
- Innovation is important; options should establish a social framework and social inclusion.
- If buildings are knocked down there is a risk of losing everything.
- The ultimate issue is the lack of confidence the community has in the process.
- There is a real danger if site options lose flexibility for future uses.
- Generic Option 1 is the only option.
- Discussions should be grass roots up.
- The community is not allowed the time necessary to properly contribute to the process.
- There is a potential Generic Option 5 – keep school building, open space used by occupants for associated outdoor uses.
- Use should be for Not-for-Profit groups
- Integrity of space must remain
- Respect for adjacent uses
- Issues are very site specific and difficult to comment on at generic level.

SUMMARY COMMENTS

- Tharwa site should be automatically 'quarantined' for community use
- Suspicion in relation to the originators of this process
- Concerned residents of West Kambah holding own forum
- Timeframe remains a major concern
- Important to keep all informed in relation to the next phase in the process
- Reporting of consultation outcomes should report on the 'weight' of issues put forward, not just the issues.

