

Report on Redevelopment of CSIRO/Forestry Precinct, Yarralumla

Prepared by Kim Wells* and Brian Turner

It is proving to be quite a marathon keeping up with fast-paced progress being made by the developer and their team of public consultation expert, building architect, heritage expert, landscape architect, and hearing the views of other major stakeholders such as the Yarralumla Residents Association.

Let me begin by telling you that as far as I can tell from the presentation the developer made at Workshop #3 last Thursday, our heritage buildings, namely Australian Forestry School main building, Museum, Printery, and Forestry House are safe and are to be preserved in toto. Their preliminary plans show even the tennis courts retained. Indeed these parts of the old AFS seem to be in the forefront of, and thus highlighted against, other tentatively proposed new development! However the setting, or curtilage, of heritage buildings need to be respected too as the developer is well aware.

Everyone, including the developer, sees the oval as an integral part of the precinct, though it is ACT not National Capital Authority land, and agree it is an important part of the setting of Forestry House. The developers have meet with those ACT Govt. Dpts. responsible for the oval and have been assured that there is no plan for any change in its status.

I include here Brian Turner's report on Workshop#2 (I did not attend):

REPORT ON THE FORESTRY PLACE WORKSHOP #2; 20/8/20

There were about a dozen members of the public at this workshop; at least half had some involvement with the Yarralumla Residents Association.

Oakstand began their presentation by listing the following points from community feedback:

1. Retention of Heritage buildings
2. Retention of trees
3. Preservation of public open space
4. Consideration of community use/benefit
5. Preservation of some public access
6. Consideration of adequate setbacks, heights and masses of new buildings
7. Integration with suburban Yarralumla
8. Use of urban design best practices
9. Traffic implications

Then followed presentation of digital landscape models using McHarg overlaying in 3D, in the order:

1. Setback zones (e.g., adjacent to Banks St) and the Heritage buildings curtilage layer
2. 3D topography and existing vegetation leading to mapping Potential Developmental Area (40-50% of site)
3. Varying heights of buildings as viewed through the trees from different points on the landscape.

Then followed presentation of 3 “straw-man” options, only the first of which was developed to the stage of location of buildings and infrastructure on the plan.

Option A: A (high) school of about 1200 students, incorporating use of the Forestry School (FS) building for teaching and Forestry House (FH) having the Main Admin Building directly behind it, other new buildings around the site for innovative learning, a 50m swimming pool, etc.

Option B: A research hub, utilising the CSIRO infrastructure as much as possible.

Option C: High level residential, recognising 3 or 4 precincts, each of which could have a different design of residences, conceptually with around 8 townhouses in each.

Much of discussion that followed was centred around traffic considerations. It was stated that traffic in the suburb was already high, that the Brickworks development (*adjacent, but separated by the Bentham St. ridge KW*) would increase it by 15%, so any further increase would need to be low. On this basis alone, Option A was not favoured by those present, but also in consideration of the magnitude of site modification that would be necessary. The developers asserted that a student size of that magnitude would be needed for a school to be economically viable. Oakstand indicated that they would bring a well-developed Option to the next Workshop.

At Workshop (#3), again with about a dozen people present plus the developer's team of around 6 people, we were introduced to the brother of the founder of the Shepherd Foundation who explained how income from the site would be used to fund a Hearing Hub to be accessible to all children, rather like Distance Education. He made the point that while planning for high monetary return was a necessary objective, this must not be at the expense of losing public sympathy for the good work of the Foundation through not listening carefully to the concerns of the public when re-developing the site if that was what was decided.

For the purpose of illustrating what different options might look like on the site, two options were focused on at this workshop, using advanced computer software and, by now, a good understanding of the characteristics of the site, including topography, tree positions and cover, sight lines etc. The first was a 1200-student secondary school, and the second 'lifestyle' residential, both to 12.5 m height about ground surface. The developers seem to have given up thought that a research organization like CSIRO, or indeed CSIRO itself, might be enticed (back) onto the site to use the comprehensive science facilities already there - "Please tell us if you know of any such scientific body which might be interested in re-locating!" was their plea.

Hopefully the developer might soon release some of this preliminary modelling, but, because of the greater flexibility in locating residential blocks (3- 4 stories high) and community facilities on the site, it seemed quite clear that residential would have a lesser physical and visual impact on the site than a school. Bear in mind though, that Yarralumla residents have more than impact on the immediate site to be concerned about: traffic flow in the suburb is one of their main worries.

As they have done already, Oakstand again arranged face-to-face meetings with each of the major stakeholders separately. I was present at their meeting with YRA when the meeting considered, one by one, the set of objectives that the residents would like met in any re-development. With some discussion and clarification, the developer saw nothing insurmountable among those objectives.

At their meeting with us (Peter Kanowski, Brian Turner and me) the focus was on help they hoped foresters and members of Friends of ACT Trees (FACTT) might be able to give in sorting out which trees to preserve and species to use in a tree renewal program they might enter into. Many trees on site, some of them from the original Westbourne Woods plantings, are reaching the end of their lives and a number are unsound. The landscape architect (unfortunately unable to visit from Adelaide where he lives) will be asked to send some guidelines as to size and shape, hardwood or softwood etc. to help make the task easier. Two knowledgeable persons from FACTT (themselves members of IFA also) have already met with the developer's team on site for preliminary discussions.

Another workshop has been added to the many meetings already held: Workshop #4 is scheduled for 24 September.



*Ph 02 62518308

[email: kwells@velocitynet.com.au](mailto:kwells@velocitynet.com.au)