Your local voice

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Weston Creek Community Council Submission

Future use of Weston Creek Primary School and Rivett Primary School sites.

Introduction

This submission by the Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) is made taking into account advice from the Government that the Weston Primary and Rivett Primary schools are not to be reopened as schools in the future. Accordingly, our submission is intended to provide a platform for progressing beyond the arguments surrounding the closure of the Weston Creek and Rivett schools.

The WCCC proposes a development which will greatly enhance the lifestyle of Weston Creek residents into the foreseeable future while being mindful of the balance between the needs of the community, ecological sustainability and the financial constraints/responsibilities of the Government.

The closure of our schools has come at a significant social cost to the Weston Creek community. It is fair and reasonable, therefore, that profits from any redevelopment of school sites within Weston Creek should remain in the community for community use and be returned to the Weston Creek community in the form of enhanced facilities.

Consultation

At its monthly meetings, the WCCC has discussed what might be achieved with the Weston Creek and Rivett school sites. Public attendance is encouraged at these meetings. The WCCC has also discussed the matter with the Weston Creek Community Association (WCCA), Communities @ Work and individually with members of the Weston Creek community (for example, at the Weston Creek Spring festival). It is the intention of the WCCC to continue dialogue with the community as the project develops.

Removal of the Weston Creek and Rivett Primary schools

The primary school buildings at Weston Creek and Rivett are now some 30 years old and were built when there were different standards of heating, cooling and lighting. Dated, empty school buildings do not visually enhance the suburbs and the situation will worsen over time. Vandalism will no doubt become an increasing risk and the viability of the buildings in terms of maintenance is questionable. While some community groups could “make do” with the current school buildings, the WCCC’s position is that Weston Creek community groups deserve better facilities.

With this in mind, the WCCC recommends that both Primary Schools be demolished. As far as is practical, the removal of any buildings and the building of any new community facilities (not necessarily on those sites) should be done in a fashion that retains or replaces the current trees shrubs etc to the extent that it is feasible to do so.

Recommended new facilities at the Weston Primary School site

It is recommended that the Pre School next to the Weston Primary school be retained as it is at present. The WCCC notes that the pre school is well attended and enjoys exceptionally strong community support. The other recommendations for the Weston Primary school site are:

- 50% of the Primary School site to be developed into medium density quality courtyard dwellings.
- The 50% balance of the Primary School site to be converted to landscaped open space.
- The transformation of the entire Weston school oval into a Weston Creek district park with trees, landscaping, and an irrigation pond or wetland fed by Weston Creek. The oval was appropriate when the school was operational, however, there is no longer a need to primarily service the school. The nearby ovals at Holder will be able to service the Weston area.
- The new district park to include an adventure playground, barbeque area and a small multi use entertainment stage together with a covered handball court for local youths (located perhaps on North Western side of oval). Existing facilities such as the Skate Park, Scout Hall and Tennis Courts would remain.
- A cycle way/walking trail to be constructed joining Weston Creek with the Mt. Stromlo recreation reserve.

The need to replace the Weston Creek Community Centre

The initial charter of the WCCC was to consult and make recommendations in respect to community facilities that could be built on the school sites only. However, the WCCC sees the closure of the schools as a unique opportunity to examine not only the possibility of new facilities and the replacement of inadequate existing facilities but also an opportunity to consider the most appropriate location for these facilities. It is the view of the WCCC that the community should not be disadvantaged by an arbitrary narrow approach that dictates that only the current school sites are open to development.

The current building on the east side of Cooleman Court at Whitney Place which houses the Weston Creek community centre is too small and cramped for even its current activities let alone additional activities for which there is a demand and the imminent impact of the North Weston and Molonglo developments. Its appearance is less than inspiring and the WCCC considers that its design renders it unsuitable for renovation. Also, the building has the effect of closing in the park areas adjacent to it on its northern side causing under use of that area

The existing community facilities in Weston Creek are significantly behind what is available in other areas of the ACT. For example, there is a lack of adequate meeting rooms for organizations such as U3A, there is no library or library annex, and indoor recreation areas are inadequate and

extremely dated.

Therefore, the WCCC recommends that the current Weston Creek Community Centre at Whitney Place be demolished and replaced on a new site.

The new site for the Weston Creek Community Centre

After considering the possible available sites, the WCCC has selected and recommends that a new community centre facility be built on the vacant site bordering Hindmarsh Drive, Brierly and Parkinson streets (Block 2, sec 75).

This site has been selected because of its relative size, its direct access from all of the Weston Creek suburbs, its northern aspect and its very close location to public transport, the main shopping facilities and other community facilities including Churches clubs etc. We believe that it is the best site to use to centrally service the needs of the Weston Creek community as a whole.

It is recommended that the new building contain more meeting rooms of different sizes and some more office space. A more attractively designed youth centre, table tennis facilities, additional squash courts, proper basketball facilities, larger public hall, a library annex, and swimming pool are also recommended. It is envisaged that the new Community Centre would be an ecologically sensitive building with a pleasant outlook

Whitney Place Community Centre site and adjacent park area.

When the current community centre at Whitney Place is removed, it is recommended that :

- No more than 50% of the cleared site be commercially developed (retail on southern side and restaurants/cafes on northern side) and that the balance of the site be left vacant to improve access and visual amenity to the parkland to the east of the shopping complex.
- The child playground area adjacent to and to the east of the shopping complex area be enlarged and enhanced. The WCCC envisages an area where parents can meet for coffee, and their children can play on a grassed area and adjacent playground.
- Another irrigation pond and/or wetland be created for that area.

Recommended new facilities at the Rivett Primary School site

- 50% of the Primary School site to be developed into senior accommodation which follows an “ageing in place” philosophy.
- Using part of the above 50% for child care facilities to be built along-side the senior accommodation and to operate in conjunction with the senior accommodation.
- the 50% of the balance of the Primary School site to be converted to landscaped open space

- The entire oval precinct remain and be enhanced with a new children's playground, landscaping and more shelter from weather.
- The incorporation of the warehouse circus at its current site or perhaps at the Weston school site (it is expected that there will not be sufficient room for this stand alone facility at the Parkinson St, Brierly St, Hindmarsh Drive site.)
- the relocation of the Noa's Ark library to the more central new facility at the Parkinson St, Brierly St, Hindmarsh Drive site

Funding

The major expense for which funding will be needed will be for the building of the district park at the site of the Weston school oval and for the new building at the Parkinson St, Brierly St, and Hindmarsh Drive site.

This should be funded partly by the Government using funds from the sale by the Government of:

- Part of the Weston School site
- Part of the site occupied by the current community centre at Whitney Place
- The Rivett school site for senior accommodation and child care facilities

The funding would also be from the cessation of normal running costs associated with running 2 fully operational schools and the cessation of the high maintenance costs associated with the present deteriorating schools and current community centre.

Summary

The WCCC believes that its recommendations will achieve a significant upgrade of the Weston Creek facilities. The proposal will rejuvenate the area and serve all members of the local community well into the future. It is imperative that the Government does not delay its decision on this matter as the deterioration of the unused and partially used facilities will continue and this will have a negative impact on the community as a whole.

T Dalton

Chairman

Weston Creek Community Council

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