

# WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

*- Your Local Voice -*

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## **Building Canberra's Economy**

### **Economic White Paper**

#### **Issues for consideration and debate**

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC), as a result of feedback from Weston Creek residents, has focused on two issues in the draft "Building Canberra's Economy - Economic White Paper". These issues in the draft paper are:

#### **3.3 Sustainable use of ACT land and water**

There is a need to balance the needs of residents with the perceived expectations of the business community and the ACT Government in the use of current non-residential land in the ACT. The community needs to be aware and informed on the direction that ACT Treasury is considering in terms of revenue raising from land sales and savings from reducing the costs of servicing new 'greenfield' residential development areas. In respect of current and future land use the paper reads (pg 15 &16):

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#### **3.3 Sustainable use of the ACT's land and water**

Around 10 percent of the ACT land area was devoted to softwood forestry, with around 14 percent used for urban use. The remainder is made as follows:

- 17% rural leases;
- 2.6% Defence uses;
- 0.3% CSIRO land
- 44% Namadgi National Park;
- 8.1% Canberra Nature Park and other reserves; and
- 4% other land uses.

Source: Department of Urban Services

### **Current and future land use**

As part of the Economic White Paper development process the economic benefits of alternative uses of ACT Forestry's land resource were examined. This work was carried out prior to the 2003 bushfires and now needs to be considered in this light.

This study found there could be significant advantages from altering the use of two areas – Stromlo, only seven kilometres from Civic, and Kowen, adjacent to the airport. The analysis evaluated the introduction of residential housing at Stromlo and rural residential development at Kowen (taking account of the need to avoid airport noise issues). The scenarios assumed that a substantial part of both forest areas would be converted to native forest, or other noncommercial recreation or environmental uses, totalling around 30 percent of the Stromlo area and 40 percent of Kowen. The cost of this regeneration would be recovered from land sale revenues.

#### **Insight 9 Possible residential development in selected softwood plantation areas may provide significant economic and social benefits in the ACT.**

Release of forest land at Stromlo outside National Capital Plan designated areas could provide additional or alternatives options for residential development within the ACT. The central location of this land could offer considerable benefits in terms of reduced infrastructure costs, improved sustainability through reduced transport costs and greenhouse gases, as well as increased land sales revenue.

The rebuilding of Stromlo Observatory and the impact of ambient light from nearby residential areas will also need to be a major consideration in any redevelopment.

The economic and environmental costs of the change in land use appear very small. Prior to the recent bushfire crisis forestry returns were less than \$30 million over a 10 year period, and the lost 'carbon value' of the displaced forest for greenhouse purposes was estimated to be less than \$1 million. Consideration also would need to be given to the impact on the overall ACT forestry industry, possible strategies for the retention of this industry, and associated employment and whether this would be offset by employment associated with residential development in these areas.

#### **Principle 14**

**The recently announced ACT Government review of the Forestry industry and the land use study should examine the economic benefits to be gained by the ACT economy and the ACT Government from the use of part of Stromlo and Kowen forest for residential purposes. In particular the review should examine the savings in infrastructure and environmental costs that could arise from the redevelopment of Stromlo and Kowen forests and the likely employment impacts.**

### **3.4 Spatial Planning Issues**

In regard to spatial planning issues the potential for 'rezoning' for employment and the reason for increasing density (to reduce costs) are issues for debate by the wider community. The concept that Canberra is 'suffering' from historical planning decisions is debatable by a number in the community depending on the agenda for the future of Canberra and an interest in altering planning controls now in place.

In respect of current and future land use the paper reads (pg 17 &18):

### 3.4 Spatial planning issues

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This discussion paper has already touched on a number of issues where the ACT spatial plan has an important influence over patterns of development in the ACT and the surrounding region. It has also noted the tendency of activity – particularly housing development – to shift outside the ACT to meet demand or buyer preference.

Housing choice and affordability is a major contributor to quality of life, as well as being a key attraction of the ACT relative to other major capitals. The ageing of the ACT population will impact on the demand for different types of housing – particularly medium density housing and inner city options that have been historically undersupplied. This trend will be reinforced by the decline in the proportion of households with young children. Only a very small proportion of people over 70 years of age (currently around 8 percent) require accommodation with intensive assistance, such as aged care facilities or nursing homes. Most people also have a strong preference to remain in their current area.

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**Insight 12 Demographic changes imply a need for additional flexibility in the provision of housing in the region that is reflective of current and future lifestyles.**

There has been a tendency in the past to seek to influence employment location through Government policy decisions and direct land use controls. In Canberra's current planning framework this approach cannot be successful and has risks of discouraging development or redirecting employment to 'less regulated areas' such as Barton. There are a range of alternative approaches to influencing employment location including incentives for developers, employers/employees that recognise the dynamic nature of employment and particularly the need to facilitate preferred urban outcomes through developing attractive, vibrant locations for workers.

**Insight 13 The greatest long term benefits to the ACT are likely to be delivered through approaches that seek to make socially preferred employment locations intrinsically attractive to employers and employees, through strategic government policies aimed at improving infrastructure and facilities such as parking, public transport, parkland and community space, shopping and supporting services.**

Shifting employment within the region risks imposing costs without creating a single new job. Working against the underlying factors that influence employment location decisions is unlikely to be effective, and may result in perverse outcomes. This issue, and appropriate policy approaches, will require careful consideration in the development of the Canberra Plan.

The WCCC will be addressing these issues in its respective submissions to **The Review of Non-urban fire impacted areas** and the **Stromlo Forest Review**.

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