



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES
COMMITTEE

Reference: Disposal of Defence properties

TUESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2001

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SENATE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23 January 2001

Members: Senator Hogg (*Chair*), Senator Sandy Macdonald (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bourne, Hutchins, Lightfoot and West

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Boswell, Brown, Calvert, Chapman, Cook, Coonan, Crane, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Gibbs, Gibson, Harradine, Harris, Knowles, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Payne, Tchen, Tierney and Watson

Senators in attendance: Senators Hogg, Lightfoot and West

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

For inquiry into and report on:

1. The importance and value of the Western Australian Army Museum and the Fremantle Artillery Barracks.
2. Whether the Fremantle Artillery Barracks is the most appropriate and suitable location for the Museum.
3. The reason for the disposal of the Fremantle Artillery Barracks.
4. The disposal of the Fremantle Artillery Barracks and the probity of the disposal process.
5. How the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) decides whether property is surplus to requirements and the management or disposal of surplus property.
6. Sale and lease-back of ADO property.
7. Any other matter related to the above-mentioned issues.

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Committee met at 1.46 p.m.**LUXTON, Mrs Delphine, Secretary, Supporters Protecting Annerley's Culture and Environment****WARFIELD, Mr Gary, Chair/Spokesperson, Supporters Protecting Annerley's Culture and Environment****De VERE, Mr Ray, State President, Queensland Branch, Returned Services League of Australia)****HARDGRAVE, Mr Gary, MP****STEPHENS, Mr Llewellyn Alan (Private capacity)**

CHAIR—I declare open this public meeting of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee inquiring into the disposal of Defence properties. On 5 September 2000, the Senate referred the matter to this committee for inquiry and report by 29 March 2001. The committee completed the first part of its inquiry, which related specifically to the disposal of the Artillery Barracks, Fremantle, when it tabled an interim report on 3 January this year.

In this second part of the inquiry, the committee is focusing on the broader issues in relation to the disposal of Defence properties. This includes consideration of particular properties as case studies. This morning, the committee inspected the Defence property at Annerley with representatives from the Department of Defence, the Brisbane City Council and the Supporters Protecting Annerley's Culture and Environment group. The committee also inspected what was the previous site of the first military hospital at Yeronga and the Witton Barracks at Indooroopilly.

The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. The committee has before it written submissions from Supporters Protecting Annerley's Culture and Environment and from Mr Stephens. Are there any alterations or additions you would like to make to the submissions at this stage?

The committee has also been given today a supplementary submission from Supporters Protecting Annerley's Culture and Environment. Is it the wish of the committee that the supplementary submission be made public? As there is no objection, it is so ordered. I now invite you to make an opening statement and we will then proceed to questions.

Mr Stephens—In view of the terms of reference, I certainly want to emphasise my submission and then talk to that. The Land Acquisition Act has severe limitations for the original owners whom the Commonwealth is required to offer property back to. In my submission, I have stated that as a matter of general principle the interest should, if practicable, be first offered for sale to the former owner. That should be translated into policy so that at least the Commonwealth should make sure that it does consider the wishes of the original owners in relation to the disposal of property, no matter how long ago that was, and it should not be with restrictions such as those contained in the Land Acquisition Act. That is apparent not only in this case but also in a number of other cases that you have examined, where that consultation

process did not occur. The reason in my case is that sometimes the original owners of these blocks are the repositories of a good deal of the history of the site and can talk about its original uses and the sorts of things it was applied for. In giving indications of what the future intentions are, they can at least express wishes which are consonant with not only the history of the site but also with current usage.

Annerley is a very interesting suburb. It was a very posh suburb and it is regaining that position. It is going through an urban revival. The Stephens family has been involved in that area for a long time. I would indicate to you that page 10 of the article, in the second column in the middle, talks about the acquisition of the land. Indeed, my great-grandfather acquired the land on 18 July 1857. His estate sold it to his son who acquired it for £300 in about March 1900, and that information is at the top of page 15. An actual picture of the site is contained on the far right-hand side of page 11 of my submission. That is a Boag picture, so it was taken in 1871 or 1872. Boag was an itinerant photographer who was around Queensland at that time.

Although William Stephens—he is my great-uncle—was not, as far as I know, in the armed forces, my grandfather certainly was. He was a captain in the Queensland Light Horse, and both of William's sons were colonels in the army in the Second World War. My father, as well, fought in New Guinea. Our family has made a contribution towards the defence of the country and would always have the defence of the country at heart in terms of any disposal of the property. Indeed, I think that was the original intention when it was sold. The place was originally used as a firing range for, I think, the use of the general public and also for the Queensland forces. Although I am not aware of exactly what involvement the Queensland people had there, certainly William would have been pleased to see the property turned over to the fledgling Commonwealth forces in 1913. As far as I can say anyway, the proposed uses for the site, which had been raised by the supporters of Annerley, are supported entirely by the Stephens family—those that are surviving who originally owned the property. We commend their efforts and their diligence and wish them well.

Mr Warfield—As I indicated earlier, I represent a resident action group that was formed early last year. As a result of an indication that the property would be disposed of, a number of residents around the area, through 1998-99, had been contacting officers in the defence department to try to find out what would happen with the site. Various indications were given that it may be used by this unit or that unit or have some function during the Olympic Games or whatever.

CHAIR—When were you contacted?

Mr Warfield—There were phone calls through 1998-99. These were just general inquiries from local residents who were trying to determine what would happen with the site, as it had been empty since about 1997—I do not recall an exact date. Those inquiries had not resulted in anything beyond some indication that there may be some defence purpose for it. We were not told at that stage it was on a list to be disposed of. It was left somewhat vague. Early last year it became apparent that the property was up for disposal.

CHAIR—I am sorry to interrupt, but it will make it a little bit easier for us if we establish this point first. Were you told that the property was surplus?

Mr Warfield—The initial indication to us as local residents came through a newspaper report. Shortly afterwards, we received notice from our local federal Liberal member, Gary Hardgrave.

CHAIR—But when you were making these inquiries, did they say it was not surplus or surplus?

Mr Warfield—No, the indication to me was that the site may be used by a commando group associated with training for security for the Olympic Games, but various other options were put to other residents that called in. I think we called a number of people in Defence who were either in the active army or in the property section. We were just trying to find out what might happen. Early last year it became apparent that it would be disposed of. An initial newspaper report gave us some indication of that, and then a letterbox drop in the surrounding area was organised by our federal Liberal member. That alerted some of the local residents. Others missed out on the letterbox drop, so we started communicating the message by word of mouth to try to get people together. We formed our group to try to have some input into this process because, as you would have seen this morning, the neighbouring suburb of Yeronga is not that far away and residents do talk to each other across suburban boundaries. We had an idea of the consultative process that Yeronga had experienced, and I guess we were expecting something along those lines at Annerley.

We had an initial public meeting called on site by Gary Hardgrave with a Defence properties person in attendance—I believe it was Chris Lamont who attended—and there was discussion at that time about the disposal of the property. We indicated at that stage that, if it was going to be developed, we would be after a low density outcome, et cetera. It was indicated to us at that meeting that surveys had been conducted and that there was no heritage value established in the site, so initially we regarded that as a dead-end issue.

So that was the extent of the initial consultation. There was then a second meeting called again by Gary Hardgrave. That one was held in the area outside the front gates, and that was attended also by the Brisbane City Council Deputy Mayor and Chairman of the Planning Committee, Tim Quinn. I believe there was no Defence representative at that second meeting. We again pushed the issue of what our residents' views of the site should be.

Shortly afterwards, we obtained a copy of a letter from lawyers acting on behalf of Defence—I believe it is in the first submission that you received. It is a letter from Clayton Utz lawyers. Around the same time, we obtained a copy of a letter from Senator Abetz confirming that the heritage studies had been conducted and that no heritage value was established. At about that time, we, as local residents, were pursuing a couple of paths. One was the issue of whether Defence could put conditions on the sale that would enable a low density outcome on that site. That ball was batted back and forwards between the Commonwealth, state and local governments, with the Commonwealth saying no and local government saying, yes, they could.

At the same time, local residents who had lived beside the place for a considerable time were beginning to say, 'This is nonsense: the view that there is no heritage value on the site can't be right. Let's get a copy of the report; let's have a think about this.' We gathered more and more support, particularly from elderly residents around the site. As you saw this morning from the housing in the area, it is a relatively old suburb. The local residents were saying, 'We don't

believe this; we think there is heritage value. We should nominate this site for heritage value.’ So that is what occurred.

We lodged a nomination with the Queensland Heritage Council. After a preliminary hearing, it was assessed that it was at least worth while putting it up to their evaluation committee. We, as local residents, then found an increasing wave of support not only from residents in the suburb surrounding the site but also from ex-service personnel who had recruited, trained and served at the site. They began to write to us saying that the site should be preserved as it did have heritage value. We got more and more support and those letters were copied to the heritage council.

One of the things that we believe makes the site significant is that on the one site is captured Australia’s military history through the 1900s. There is pre-World War I, with the old drill hall facing across the parade ground, to a post-World War II/Cold War time with the Korean War, the Malaysian conflict and the Vietnam War. Those two buildings across the parade ground capture Australia’s military history through the 1900s. Another significant aspect for the local Annerley community is that, through that period, there has been substantial involvement of local residents at the site, starting with militia and cadet training pre-World War I, through the CMF, the national service, post-World War II. A lot of people who have served at that site come from the local area. It has been the focus of the suburb for a long time: since 1913. As Llewellyn Stephens has indicated, prior to that it was used by the Stephens family as a firing range from across to Stephens mountain. It has had a military connection for a long period in the community, and a lot of people were disappointed at the thought that that may simply disappear to be replaced with town houses. There is value in preserving it.

We went through the process with the Queensland Heritage Council. We also nominated the site to the Australian Heritage Commission and to the National Trust. The Australian Heritage Commission advised us that they have a reciprocal agreement with the Queensland Heritage Council. I am told that they did a preliminary review that determined that it was at least worthy of proceeding further. But then they basically parked their process as the Queensland Heritage Council was ahead of their process. It went through the evaluation committee with the Queensland Heritage Council to achieve provisional listing.

We are still gaining support: we have support at the moment from the Defence Reserves Association and from other ex-service associations. We have had very strong support from the P&C and principal of the Junction Park School across the road from the site, from the RSL at local, state and national levels, and from ex-servicemen and local residents. We have a groundswell of support to save that site. We achieved provisional listing through the Queensland Heritage Council in late September—the exact dates are in the submissions that you have. The listing was provisional upon the opportunity for the owners, the Department of Defence, to lodge an objection or basically to have their say.

On the second-last day of the period for objections, Defence lodged an objection and then I believe they requested an extension of time. I am told by the Queensland Heritage Council, and in correspondence from the state government, that that has been granted and that they have approximately six months. We are advised that Defence have asked for the extension of time to give them a period to frame the basis of their objection and to prepare proposals for the future use of the site.

We find it remarkable that this is being done this late in the process after a provisional heritage listing. It is our view that this should have been dealt with up front as part of the consultative process. It seems that the core issue is that Defence, in their process, have a trigger that says, 'If it's already listed on the National Estate as a heritage listed site, then proceed down this path,' which is consultation with local residents and interested groups. If it is not, or if it is in the process, then that path does not seem to exist. Consultation does not occur. We basically meet a stone wall on that front.

There have been a few small examples of some cooperation. At a meeting in Gary Hardgrave's office, Defence personnel made access to the site available to us and to the groups that are keen to use the site, and we very much appreciate that. But it is one small step in the exercise. Generally, we have been told, 'It's not our issue. Talk to the local government authorities after it's sold.' It is basically a matter of avoiding consultation. With respect to Yeronga, because they had a heritage listing, they got very extensive consultation that took place over a period of months, with reports prepared and consultants involved. So Yeronga went through all the right processes; Dudley Street went through none of that. It appears the difference is the heritage listing. The gate is: 'Are you heritage listed or not?' We think that is wrong. We think consultation should occur with local residents and interested parties regardless of the National Estate register. We are really disappointed that we have not had that consultative process that Yeronga got. Now we see, virtually at the end of the process, that a provisional heritage listing is in place and that suddenly there are plans being drawn up. I gather that heritage architects have been engaged to prepare proposals for the future use of the site. We believe this should have been done up front.

The other important aspect where the process is deficient is that Defence, in reviewing the nature of the properties they hold, and in order to determine what is surplus to requirements, does not appear to attach any importance to community based groups of a military nature, particularly the cadets. It appears that the Defence decision on whether a property is surplus to requirements does not include the consideration of community groups that have a military focus that could actually benefit the Department of Defence. If you can believe newspaper reports, Defence have spent a small fortune on advertising campaigns to increase their recruitment level and have fallen short of the target, yet they appear to be distancing themselves from supporting groups like cadets. Surely, one way to increase recruitment into the Army is to encourage cadets. Yet, when we write to Senator Abetz seeking to support the preservation of the site and on behalf of groups that want to use it, including cadets, we are told that, after 1976, cadets became a community concern. I will let the cadets speak further on that topic.

Those are the two primary points. The process appears to include consultation if you have a heritage listing and no consultation if you do not, or if you are in the process of seeking one. Community groups, particularly those with a military aspect to their operation, do not appear to be considered when the issue of whether it is surplus to requirements is being considered.

On the basis of support we have, and recent correspondence from John Moore, we are urging the Department of Defence to withdraw their objection to the heritage listing. We have copies of recent correspondence passing between RSL National and the Minister for Defence where John Moore accepts the heritage value of the Fremantle, Point Cook and the Annerley Reserve Depot sites as being worthy of preservation—there is a copy of that letter in the submission—yet at the same time we received correspondence from Senator Abetz telling us quite bluntly that the

property is surplus to requirements and will be put on the market early in the new year for sale basically to the highest bidder. There was no mention in that correspondence from Senator Abetz about the heritage process. Whilst I believe technically they can ignore the Queensland Heritage Council, I do not believe they can ignore the Australian Heritage Commission, with whom it is also listed. I gather that, regardless of what happens, if it ultimately goes through for full listing, the Australian Heritage Commission, I am told, will automatically register it. If the Queensland government process does not continue then presumably the Australian Heritage Commission evaluation process does continue, and we are back with Defence presumably lodging an objection to that and working our way through that exercise. When the independent assessor is appointed at the end of the extension of time period to review the original listing and the objection process, we believe the level of support we are receiving and continue to receive will defeat that objection. We urge Defence, on the basis of the letter from Mr John Moore, to withdraw that objection now and save all of us a lot of time and effort. But if they do not, we are prepared to fight it through.

Very briefly, not only do we seek to have the site preserved through the process Dell has described as serendipitous but also, through the support we have received, we have encountered three primary groups that can use that site in keeping with its original intent—the cadet group, the Victoria Barracks Historical Society and the museum incorporating the Queensland Military Memorial Museum and the Living History Federation Re-enactment Society. These three groups do exactly the sorts of things for which that site was originally intended and can use the site in keeping with its heritage. As residents, we are primarily interested in the social heritage of that site and its interaction with the community, and these three groups can keep that going. It started out in 1913 with militia and cadets parading on the parade ground outside that drill hall. It has been used by national servicemen and CMF post-World War II. So we think we have not only a first-class case to preserve the site but also a first-class case with these groups to actually use it in keeping with the original traditions.

We see four paths forward. Firstly, it has been made very clear to us that the Department of Defence have no intention of retaining the site. They have no use for it and do not wish to keep it. One of the options forward to a successful outcome that we can see is for the ownership of the property to remain with the Commonwealth government but to pass to an alternative department—for example, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, which I believe administers the Australian War Memorial; or the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, which I gather administers museums generally. That department would then lease the site on a 99-year lease at a token value to an association set up with representatives from the three user groups, who would be in charge of running and administering the site—all the expenses, maintenance and upkeep. Nominally, ownership would rest with the Commonwealth, but the working of the site would rest with a not-for-profit association made up of representatives from the cadet parent group, the living history people and the Victoria Barracks people. We think that is quite a positive way forward. It is also probably the simplest way forward. There is an opportunity to create a first-class military memorial site at that centre at Dudley Street with a link to the Australian War Memorial so that Queensland finally has something better than the scattered little military museums that have a tank, a couple of deactivated Owen guns from World War II and a few other bits of things. This could be a really first-class museum concept with the cadets and with the living history people. The other groups will talk further on that.

The second path forward is perhaps a priority sale from Defence to a Queensland government department and then the same arrangement could apply—it could be leased to a not-for-profit association to run it. The third path is ownership passes from the Commonwealth to the Brisbane City Council, as indicated in our initial discussions with Queensland government representatives. We have met with Matt Foley, our local state member, a number of times. Indications are that within this area, community use sites are predominantly owned and operated by the council rather than the state. So out of those two options, either state or council, the more likely perhaps is that ownership passes to council and then council would lease to a group formed to run the site.

We see that the fourth path forward is, in accordance with the opening statement by Llewellyn Stephens, the ownership of the site is passed back to the descendants of the original owners of the property from whom it was compulsorily acquired in 1913. We have strong indications of support from the Stephens family that they would also like to see the site used for community purposes, as we have outlined to you.

Mr Stephens—Could I just say that the structure we would see would be a company limited by guarantee and a charitable trust so that the property was held in perpetuity for the interest groups that leased the property from that corporation. I do not think that any of us see it coming back to a particular member or members of the family.

Mr Warfield—In summing up our experience with the process Defence have used, we have encountered a process of minimal engagement with the local community and interested groups. I do not think the process we have experienced has shown any winners. I do not think Defence or the politicians concerned, Senator Abetz particularly, have enjoyed responding to the endless correspondence we have sent in their direction. We have, as local residents, put, out of our own time and cost, tremendous effort into organising consultation that should have been organised through the defence department's property section. We have done it and we will keep doing it because we believe we have got a valuable outcome if we can achieve this. I do not think the developers—who spent time and money preparing tenders back in mid-last year only to then have the property withdrawn from sale when it passed the first hurdle of the valuation process with the Queensland Heritage Council—enjoyed wasting their time and money doing that either. I do not think anyone has particularly won in the way this process has worked, and I really wonder why there is not a better process. The way Yeronga worked looked like the right way to do this. This, to us, does not.

Mr De Vere—I would just like to make the point that the league was formed primarily to look after the welfare of returned servicemen, but we do have other objectives. One of those is to preserve the military records, memorial historical locations and to generally encourage citizens to honour the memory of those who have served. In line with that latter objective, we offered a letter of support to the SPACE group and referred in particular to a motion that was passed at the national congress in Perth of this year. That resolution read:

That the League approach the Government to voice its disapproval and opposition to the sale of Military (and Historical) Heritage Buildings and installations to developers and furthermore, that this policy is abhorrent and contrary to the very principles for which we as service men and women fought and request that this matter be treated with the greatest urgency and that such buildings be added to the register of the National Estate.

The background of the area is well known to you all so I will not deal with it other than to say that, as a matter of philosophy and as a matter of national policy, the league supports the retention of these buildings, at least in part, for heritage reasons. In December, the national president wrote to John Moore, as you heard, and listed three properties that we were concerned about. They were Point Cook, the Fremantle Artillery Barracks and the Army Reserve depot at Annerley.

I would like to confirm a couple of points that have been made. John Moore identified the fact that these properties, as listed in Major General Phillips's letter, had been identified as being surplus to Defence requirements. I do not know when that decision was made, but we were informed of it in December. John Moore also stated that, as part of any disposal strategy, Defence is obliged to ensure the protection and preservation of any important heritage and environmental values of the properties. It would seem that the process is breaking down here, with the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing—which has already been hinted at. If there is such a policy and such a disposal strategy based on heritage and environmental issues, it is very hard to understand the objection being raised by Defence in this particular case.

I think there have been some moves in the right direction. In the recent white paper, in section 7.52 there was emphasis placed that a greater contribution be asked of the communities from which reserves are drawn and that the government recognises the need to engage an even broader range of stakeholder groups. While this is not particularly relevant to the disposal of property, I think it is relevant to the philosophy that the government is expounding in Defence. In that same document, section 7.64 states:

Also, the Government is committed to expanding the participation of young Australians in the Cadet Scheme and to providing the resources needed to achieve that.

With the emphasis in Defence on community consultation, most of that—as you would be aware, Senator—has come from the people and has been put forward in those recommendations. That is what the people of this country are telling the government that they expect from it. I believe that that message needs to be heeded.

There is no question that the matter of process, which you are mainly concerned about, is not being met in all areas. It has clearly not been met here in Annerley. The report from the Fremantle Artillery Barracks indicates that it was not followed there either to the extent that it should have been and, perhaps, even with a degree of secrecy. If I can make a flippant comment—being an ex-serviceman myself I can proudly say that I was of the warrior ethos—I think that the culture of the bean counter is becoming pre-eminent now and we are seeing this sort of problem. I was heartened to see the recommendations, of which you are well aware, about the artillery barracks in Fremantle and the retention of a museum in that place. The other thing that heartens the RSL, particularly in Queensland, is the sale and disposal of another Defence property—the Kelvin Grove precinct. The Kelvin Grove precinct has been sold and is being developed in consultation with the state government. Broad community support has been sought there. In fact, the RSL has a liaison person who is interested in military history appointed there. All of the relevant buildings that have any significant military heritage are being retained for community use and are being tastefully incorporated into the entire development. That is a good sign.

In summary, I am here to support the SPACE group from a philosophical and political point of view—if I can use that term—a national policy point of view. I believe that they have put up a sensible argument for the future use of the property. They certainly have the support. I have been in communication with the state government who will also offer some support at the appropriate time, once all the nonsense is over.

Mr Hardgrave—I would like to publicly associate myself with the comments of Gary Warfield on behalf of the SPACE group. In the sense of the way the whole process has been undertaken, it has been almost whiplash in public policy. As the local member, the contrast between what has occurred in the past at the Yeronga site and this is extreme. Of course, the heritage listing meant that different processes were followed at the Yeronga site. The long established process of the sale of Defence Force land is that, if there is no heritage value associated with it, the defence department seems to become a vendor and they sell it. Town planning is done by local authorities, not by the Commonwealth, and that has been the approach. I certainly understand that the local authority is responsible for planning, but I still believe that the consultation that needs to be undertaken—that has not been undertaken in this particular case—is what is really at fault here.

Regardless of whether there is a heritage listing involved with the property, I believe that, as the Department of Defence have always been good neighbours to those around these properties, in the last gesture of being a good neighbour they need to talk to the neighbours about what people aspire to see occurring on the site. If it had not been for the fact that I had called a couple of public meetings and then further meetings in my office—and the SPACE group have more than a little taken over that role, because the thing has grown bigger than Topsy—I am not sure that there would ever have been any formal kind of questioning of the local community.

We convened a meeting and we had a second meeting. The view of the first meeting was that they did not want more high-density housing on the site. Essentially, at the heart of the residents' concerns is that they do not want to see what has been a good site to the local community become a bad site, with more of the high density housing that is allowed for on all the land around the site under the town plan. When this site goes back into the town plan—if and when it is sold—the developers would be rightly able to argue for high density housing, which is in complete contrast to what the local residents aspire to for the site. If there had been consultation, the sorts of aspirations that have developed over the last few months would have become very obvious. Defence could have played a lead role rather than—pardon the pun—a defensive role in the discovery of those ideas. It could have been always remembered as a good neighbour, providing for something that was long-lasting and reasonable by the views of those around the site.

It is the role of the local authority to plan the end use of the site, but I believe it is also completely the responsibility of the Department of Defence to discover the aspirations of the neighbourhood. In that regard, obviously, if there are not provisions within the Defence Act with regard to disposal of land for that consultation regardless of heritage value, then there needs to be a change to the act. I will leave it at that, because I think others have a lot more to say.

Mrs Luxton—This is very much a situation in which we see a good use for the site as it is. Originally, we were trying to stop a development of town houses, et cetera, which would be very bad for the suburb. Initially, we did not know about these three groups. Then all of a

sudden, as if it were meant to be, we found that these three groups all had good uses for the buildings and the site. It just seems that the perfect solution to the whole thing is not to demolish those buildings that have had so much history through them—so many people were recruited there, for one thing. It is a good use for the buildings and the site, in the military tradition. We would like to see that happen and the sooner the better.

CHAIR—Thanks for the opening comments. What sorts of costs are involved to your organisation, if any?

Mr Warfield—I spent \$50-odd on photocopying yesterday, just in one day, to prepare for this. We each would have spent a few hundred dollars on the exercise so far. With respect to phone calls, it is not possible to call Canberra cheaply in the middle of the day in order to talk to Defence property personnel or Australian Heritage Commission people, or to chase politicians down there. These things all come at a cost; after every couple of months, when you get your phone bill, you see that it is about three times what it used to be. But so be it.

Mrs Luxton—I have posted about 40 letters in the last 10 months.

Mr Warfield—Postage, photocopying costs—and just the time spent.

CHAIR—What about the heritage listing? Did that cost anything—the application?

Mr Warfield—From recollection, no. I do not recall a fee for that. We have recently been advised that there is a fee for freedom of information requests. We went to some considerable lengths to get a copy of the historical analysis of the site which was conducted by Defence.

CHAIR—Why did you go to considerable lengths?

Mr Warfield—At the first meeting, we were told that the heritage issues had been investigated and it was found that there was no heritage value. At around that time we also obtained a copy of the letter from Senator Abetz that flagged that the surveys had been conducted and that there was no heritage value. We began to question that. We decided at one of our meetings to get hold of this report. We asked for it and we were told initially by Defence property personnel in Canberra that we could have a copy of it. We waited for some weeks and nothing arrived. We chased it up, and eventually we were told that we could not have a copy of it. We have correspondence to the effect that Defence advised that the document was available to tenderers, but that was it.

CHAIR—Was this because the document had become classified or top secret in some way?

Mr Warfield—No, not to our knowledge.

CHAIR—Or was there a fear that it might fall into the hands of an alien government?

Mr Warfield—I suspect the real fear was that we had initially been advised that there was no heritage value and the report states the contrary. We eventually put in a freedom of information request to get that report.

CHAIR—What did that cost?

Mr Warfield—It cost us nothing but we have recently been reminded, I think by Senator Abetz, that we should have paid for that freedom of information request. We got it eventually through Gary Hardgrave's efforts, but we still had to lodge a freedom of information request first, because we were not getting any joy out of Canberra. We have recently been chasing another report, a building condition report, that we were told would be made available to us.

CHAIR—Is that also in the 'top secret' list?

Mr Warfield—We are having trouble getting that. That is subject to the recent correspondence from Senator Abetz, reminding us about the fee for a freedom of information request. There is an indication that we have got to go through freedom of information properly and that there is a fee involved.

Mrs Luxton—He did not mention that. He said to ring—

Mr Warfield—Okay. The phone number—

CHAIR—Could you supply us with a copy of that, please?

Mr Warfield—Right. Having rung the phone number that Senator Abetz gave us, we were informed that there was a fee that must be paid.

Senator WEST—Also, if you know it, could you give us the correct title of the report that you are after?

Mr Warfield—Yes.

Senator WEST—Or the subject matter of that report.

Mr Warfield—That can be difficult when they want the precise title of the report—

Senator WEST—Yes, we know.

Mr Warfield—We know that, generally, it is called the building condition report, but we do not know the precise title, so it can be difficult to find that. However, indications from this morning's tour of the site are that that report will be made available to us. This report clearly indicates to us that there is heritage value on the site; that the site meets the threshold for inclusion in the National Estate. At a meeting at Gary Hardgrave's office, there was a suggestion by one of the Defence property people that there was an interim or preliminary report that said that maybe it did not, but after another drill hall at Sandgate was moved, it lifted this one. Our point is that that is not what Senator Abetz's earlier letter said. Senator Abetz's letter said that the heritage studies had been completed and that there was no heritage value. It did not say, 'We're in the process of evaluating,' or 'We've got a preliminary report that indicates there is none.' It said, 'It's completed and there is none.' Apparently, they got the final report a short time after that letter was written.

Mrs Luxton—Two days after the public meeting.

Mr Warfield—The report says that there is heritage value in it and that is one of the things that, to an extent, has stirred us up on this issue. Whether it is accidental or not, I do not know, but that is our experience with that process—a less than helpful process. It appears there was no effort to assist us or to engage in consultation. If anything, it was a case of push us aside. We are not seeing much support. As I have said earlier, there have been occasional positive steps from Defence. For example, after the meeting at Gary Hardgrave's office, Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Thorburn and Chris Lamont from Defence property section took the interested groups and representatives from our group on a tour of the site. We thought that was a positive step, but it is a long way short of what we would regard as a full consultative process.

CHAIR—All right. The point I am trying to get to is that your organisation is predominantly a voluntary organisation—

Mr Warfield—It is entirely a voluntary organisation—

CHAIR—with a very little resources other than the goodwill of the local member, which I acknowledge. I am not trying to downplay that, but as an organisation you have very few resources and the way you have put your story to us, in effect, is that you are trying to fight government with all the resources they have at their disposal, whereas you have the goodwill and limited resources at your disposal. Is that a reasonable way—

Mr Warfield—That is a reasonable assessment and that is partly why we are very annoyed at the extension of time request that Defence put in, having lodged an objection two days before the end of the period and then, we understand, having immediately requested an extension of time. When we have, in our view to the Heritage Council, basically met out time lines. It meant working all night and we did it. We met our time line to get submissions in to them, and so on.

Mrs Luxton—By mid-September we had to have ours in.

Mr Warfield—But Defence put an objection in and then got a six-month extension of time to develop some proposal for future use. We do not see that as an even situation with the resources that Defence have at their disposal. That comes back to the original point: all of that could have been done right at the front. We are a long way down the track now. We are moving to successful heritage listing of the full site. We are pressing Defence to withdraw the objection on the basis of John Moore's correspondence with the Major General Peter Phillips, National President of the RSL. That correspondence indicates a belief that the site has significant heritage value. So we are pressing ahead vigorously down that path and we are gaining more and more support. So in one way the extension of time Defence asked for has helped us because we have got in contact with more people that, because we were rushed, we had not managed to get in touch with—the Defence Reserves Association, for example, and there is the military nurses association that we are talking to—

CHAIR—And this hearing is taking place which is publicising your cause.

Mr Warfield—So we are using this extension of time to gain more and more support.

CHAIR—Can you tell me what the expected value, you believe, the site has in purely cash terms?

Mr Warfield—I have no idea of its property value.

CHAIR—You have not heard a figure?

Mrs Luxton—Somebody told me that knocking it down and building on it would probably be worth \$1 million or \$1.2 million, but I have no idea—

CHAIR—That is fine.

Mr Warfield—I think an indicator is that the property was withdrawn for sale after it passed the first hurdle of the Queensland Heritage Council. Defence withdrew the property because it did not come up to market value once it got through that initial heritage process. So I would think that with a full heritage listing the property has relatively little commercial value to Defence. In the meeting with Gary Hardgrave's office that was alluded to with Defence property personnel present. With a full heritage listing it is more an issue for Defence of the maintenance and upkeep costs rather than the value of the site. Our proposal would give Defence an opportunity to avoid those ongoing maintenance costs. If it passes to another department, that gets it off Defence's list of properties for which they are responsible, and through them to a long-term lease at a token value to a community based not-for-profit association, that association will take on board the responsibility for the ongoing running costs and maintenance of that property. We have had indications of commercial support from the Queensland government and the Brisbane City Council to achieve that, plus we have had indications from the user groups, particularly the Victoria Barracks Historical Society, that their supporters would come on board with funds or services to minimise the ongoing running costs—they are already staffed by volunteers who make a considerable effort within the organisation. So I think we can solve Defence's concern of ongoing running and maintenance costs of the site if it is passed to another Commonwealth department and then leased to an association. Alternatively, it could perhaps go from the Commonwealth government to the Brisbane City Council and from there to a lease.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Mr Hardgrave, when was it that you were officially notified by Defence that Annerley would be up for sale?

Mr Hardgrave—Senator, our colleague Eric Abetz wrote to me to alert me that the sale was imminent—that there was a need to sell the property—about May or June last year. I cannot remember the exact date.

Mr Warfield—It was the 20th of the fourth.

Mr Hardgrave—I am told it was 20 April. So there you go—it was April-May of last year.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Do you have a copy of that letter?

Mr Hardgrave—I do.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Could you make it available to the committee?

Mr Hardgrave—I could indeed, yes.

Mr Warfield—It would be in your second submission.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—We have got a copy of it then.

Mr Warfield—I believe that is the letter that you are referring to. It was a letter from Eric Abetz to Gary Hardgrave advising him of the proposed disposal of the depot. That is also the letter in which Senator Abetz stated that the heritage study concluded that the property was not of heritage significance. That should be attachment B in your updated submission.

Mr Hardgrave—So from that, Senator, if I may, I then embarked upon alerting the local community that something was happening. The signal to me was that there was a sale to happen and I felt, as the local member, that the local residents needed to be able to put a view that they could then collectively put to the local planning authority to make sure that their aspirations for the site were listened to by the council. That was where I was coming from with my first meeting.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—When was there a significant reaction to the announcement that you made to the community?

Mr Hardgrave—People were desperately concerned—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Who were the people in this case?

Mr Hardgrave—There was a large meeting of about 40 or 50 local residents. I letterbox dropped about 450 homes in and around the site and in a good geographic spread as well. We had about 50 people at the meeting and representatives of the Defence Force were there. The discussion centred on the fact that, basically, the site was of no significance, that it was going to be a greenfield site, bulldozed over and made available to whoever purchased it for whatever was the best result.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Was that in the letter that Senator Abetz had written?

Mr Hardgrave—No, but that was the implication of discussions I had following that, so that when I conducted that meeting I was able to give as clear an answer as I could to any question that was asked. From there, of course, contacting the local councillor—who was also the chairman of the planning committee—to let him know that local residents had a view that the last thing they wanted to see was more high density housing, which, by their reckoning, had impacted upon their suburb enough, and that they did not want to see that occurring on the site. We had a following meeting—also attended by that particular councillor, Councillor Quinn—and the whole thing rattled on from there with the council wanting us to town plan the site and all these sort of things.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—So insofar as you are able, can you tell the committee where was the significant emphasis from that group of people: was it from the fact that the area may have had high-density housing on it, or was it because of the loss of something that had a particular and rather poignant heritage value?

Mr Hardgrave—I think that in the group of residents the big concern was that Defence had been a good neighbour and they did not want to lose what had been a passive, non-intrusive site—something that had no negatives—for something that they believed would have negatives. In fact, some people were saying, ‘Why don’t we turn it into a park? Give us some open space.’ In that particular part of Brisbane there is very little urban open space that is readily accessible to people—either you have to cross major roads or it is down the street and up the road kind of access to parks. People wanted to see a good result on the site. That was based on the fact that essentially the heritage question was no longer a question, based on the advice we had. Later on we found that there was newer information. In fact, later on I found out that the council and state governments and others had been dealing with the prospective sale for years prior to my getting the letter saying that it was coming. I guess it has been on the books for a long time. The site has been vacant since 1997 and something was going to change. I understand that the state government and the council were talking about it perhaps becoming a housing commission site. They bought the Kelvin Grove site, I believe, instead.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—At what stage was the heritage value of the facility made apparent?

Mr Hardgrave—That came about as a result of the initiative of the local residents. If the SPACE group, to my mind, had not actually agitated for and applied for heritage status as a process initially of trying to stop this runaway tram of sale—they basically ran out of options and said, ‘Let’s discover if there is some heritage associated with it’—the heritage value would not have been made apparent. All of the other matters seem to have come out through the discovery of that application and that in fact the federal government’s own final report—we were looking at the interim report when Eric Abetz wrote to me—reflected that there was some heritage interest. At the very least there was huge sentimental attachment. If you talk to the local RSL club members, everybody has a story about that site. It was a major community site for many years. It was an important local icon in that regard.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Mr De Vere, with respect to the iconic value that it had to your members, how would you place it in terms of other disposable or non-disposable Defence assets on a scale of one to 10?

Mr De Vere—It is very difficult at short notice to place it on a scale like that but it certainly has a value. I guess as much as anything, going back firstly to our philosophy, it is not based on an individual site. It is based on the principle of retaining military heritage. Over many years we have seen a number of Defence sites disposed of, particularly in Sydney—North Head, South Head, Middle Head and so it goes on. They have great commercial value but they also had, in a number of cases, great heritage value. The league, and indeed many other ex-service organisations, saw that as selling your soul to some extent. The military heritage is disappearing. We have had a cultural cringe in this country over many years about not having any tradition, any heritage or any culture and now we are getting rid of one aspect of it. That has been the underlying theme. As Gary said also, in local areas Australia has a very strong ethos of voluntaryism. We find that people do not join the Army Reserve: people join the local unit. It is

identified with the community. Here we have a site that the local community have identified with and I think your question could perhaps be better answered by someone from the local sub-branch as to what sort of value they might place on it. I would place a high-value on it simply as a point of principle.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But that value is centred around the local community rather than as a Defence asset with heritage value that could be appreciated by RSL members—ex servicemen—throughout Queensland.

Mr De Vere—It is focused, yes, on the local community because of what it means but I think it has a wider application when you look at the proposed use. It fits in, as I pointed out earlier, with the findings and recommendations of the white paper about the interaction with community and the additional support within the local community as an extension of defence—simply, as Gary talked about, the good neighbour policy. If you want to encourage people into the Defence Force, you have to have some window they can look through to see some part of the Defence Force. Cadets offer that, the military museum offers that and the re-enactment group offers all of those points.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But the RSL is unequivocal in respect of its being retained for its heritage value as a manifestation of the contribution that young men and women from Queensland have made to the defence forces.

Mr De Vere—Our letter and resolution to government was basically that these aspects should be looked at. No doubt there are some defence sites that have virtually no heritage value and no significant military place. There are some rather run-down old warehouses in certain parts of this country that I do not believe anybody would get too excited about from a sentimental or a heritage point of view. But Annerley is definitely not in that category.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—No, it is not.

Mr De Vere—I believe Gary made the point about the two types of drill halls there, one of which is in excellent condition and dates back to 1913, predating our involvement in World War I. We do not have a great many buildings, particularly in this case, and I think having two drill halls is unique—as has been pointed out. They encapsulate a significant period of Australian military history.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—If the government, through one method or another, was to vest the whole precinct in the state of Queensland, what role do you think the RSL would play—if any—in the ongoing running and maintenance of the facilities?

Mr De Vere—That is a difficult question to answer off the top of my head. I think the roles have been defined by the SPACE group and the RSL would not wish to intrude on them. We would be able to provide considerable support, for example by identifying the site to members of the ex-service communities throughout Queensland via our newspapers, newsletters and our network of sub-branches and so forth. That would provide considerable publicity for the museum and lobbying to government. I have had some experience of doing that on behalf of the museum coordinator over a number of years.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—How many members—not necessarily financial or active members—are in the RSL in Queensland?

Mr De Vere—There were approximately 47,200 financial members as at the end of last year. As I keep telling people, the RSL is the biggest voluntary financial organisation in the country: it is bigger than any political party or any single union. In terms of paid-up membership, it is nearly as big as the Catholic Church.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I do not think the president of the Queensland branch sits in the same category as the head of the Catholic Church.

Mr De Vere—I hope not.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I do not mean to take anything away from you.

Mr De Vere—To answer the second part of your question, it is a guesstimate. In terms of active membership, about 10 to 15 per cent play what I would describe as an ‘active role’. I think many people have joined the league because they have an entitlement and, to some extent, I think they see it as an insurance policy based on our lobbying power.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—My point is that a lot of the ex-service men and women who are entitled to join the RSL, for one reason or another, do not. That is not just the aggregated number of men and women who have served this country in the armed services.

Mr De Vere—No. To give you some idea of scale, in Queensland some 30 per cent of the people from World War II who are eligible to join the league have done so. Roughly 55 per cent—probably closer to 60 per cent—of those who served in Vietnam have joined the league. They are the biggest single group. Of course the rules of the league have changed, and for a number of years the league has accepted ex-servicemen and women whether or not they have served overseas. In fact there are 87 separate ex-service organisations in Queensland, many of which are purely social organisations such as the XYZ battalion association.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Thank you, Mr De Vere. Because of the time limitation, I just want to ask Mr Warfield two very brief questions. Do you have a business plan for running the precinct should it get to the point where your organisation is able to; and if you do, how do you expect recurrent costs for maintenance and other ongoing costs for electricity, water, sewerage, et cetera, to be met?

Mr Warfield—Firstly, I do not see that the SPACE group does have a primary role in running the site. It is not in our charter, if you like. Our objective is to preserve the site and see it put to a use that is compatible with the views of the Annerley community. We believe there should be a separate association established, a not-for-profit incorporated body, made up of representatives from those groups concerned and that that group should prepare its business plan. We have had preliminary discussions with people from the Victoria Barracks Historical Society and with the Living History Federation people to look at how that would be done. I think it is quite achievable. I do not see it as huge difficulty. But it is not a primary issue for the SPACE group. We see a separate organisation such as the Queensland or Annerley military heritage centre being set up to run the site, to administer the site, and to look after the costs.

I think Leo Walsh, for the Victoria Barracks Historical Society, could give you some indication of the ways the Victoria Barracks Historical Society is run when he speaks after 4 o'clock. That society has a separate subsidiary called the Queensland Military Memorial Museum, and perhaps one option is an offshoot of the Victoria Barracks Historical Society called the Queensland Military Heritage Centre, which is set up at Dudley Street. The board of that group is made up of representatives from the Victoria Barracks society, the Living History Federation and the cadet parent group. We do not see the SPACE group as running that site.

Earlier you asked Ray De Vere about the heritage issues of the site. We have not particularly included in our submissions to you details of the heritage of the site. That has been lodged with the Queensland Heritage Council and with the Australian Heritage Commission. But we could table a document produced by Lieutenant Colonel Noel Haysom, whom you met this morning, which is a brief history of the Annerley Army Depot, if that is of assistance.

CHAIR—Whilst none of the secretariat is here currently, we will accept that document.

Senator WEST—You outlined what you saw as the four options for disposal that you thought were satisfactory. Have you canvassed those options with any organisations?

Mr Warfield—We have discussed that with the Brisbane City Council in a couple of meetings with Tim Quinn, the Deputy Mayor. While certainly no guarantees have been given, it has also been indicated that we should not rule that out as a possibility, as one way forward. We have discussed that on two occasions with Matt Foley, the local state member. Matt has indicated that the standard approach to community owned sites is more that ownership would rest with council rather than with state government. But where the state government does hold some sites, they tend to transfer that over to council. Perhaps Jim Soorley could speak further on that.

Senator WEST—But Defence have not?

Mr Warfield—No, to my knowledge Defence have not participated in that process. We have basically done that ourselves. Through the Victoria Barracks Historical Society, we have made contacts in Canberra, looking at just how we might proceed with Veterans' Affairs maybe. But it is relatively early days yet. We are basically doing this as residents in our own spare time, when we get the opportunity to push this along. I think the simplest path—and it is just an observation as an outsider—is for the site to remain in Commonwealth ownership.

Obviously, Defence are keen to dispose of it in order to get it off their books. A transfer to another Commonwealth department such as Veterans' Affairs might be the way to go. Because of their connection with the Australian War Memorial, there seems to be some synergy there. Then there could be a lease-out from that department to a not-for-profit organisation which could be set up to run the site. It should be a long-term lease so that the group has confidence that they are not going to have to shift from there next year, so that there is some stability, and it should be at a token value. Quite frankly, with a heritage listing, I do not think the site has much commercial value, and that was alluded to by Defence property personnel in the meeting with Gary Hardgrave. Their primary issue is the ongoing cost of the site to them—the maintenance and running costs. That would no longer be an issue for them. The association that would run the site is already looking at and receiving indications of support to cover the costs of running

that site. Brisbane City Council has indicated to us that there is some support available. Matt Foley has indicated to us that there are avenues of funding support for ongoing running costs through the Queensland government, but we have not gone to the nth degree of investigating those.

Senator WEST—And you have not got the reaction of the Department of Defence?

Mr Warfield—No, they have basically been pretty much out of that loop, as we have made clear. There has been no consultative process of any substance. We are doing it. One other brief point that I would like to make is that—

CHAIR—It will have to be brief.

Mr Warfield—Okay; it is a good one in order to introduce the next speaker. We have had support along the path from our local federal Liberal member. I suspect, from the responses we get from Senator Abetz, that on many occasions he is knocking his head against a brick wall down there, either with the Defence bureaucracy or at Senator Abetz's level; I am not sure.

CHAIR—Senator Abetz, unfortunately, by next Monday, will have moved on.

Mr Warfield—We have heard that. The other point I would like to make is that, whilst we have had support from Gary Hardgrave, we have also had support from Tim Quinn, the local Brisbane City Council Deputy Mayor, at times only to the extent of making photocopying facilities available to us, but at other times to give us thoughts on how council might treat this or that. We are moving forward and doing the best we can. The next step for us is to get this objection withdrawn.

CHAIR—I thank you for your presentation. We will break for five minutes and then we will hear from Jim Soorley.

Proceedings suspended from 3.02 p.m. to 3.13 p.m..

[3.13 p.m.]

SOORLEY, Councillor James, Lord Mayor, Brisbane City Council

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private you should ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I have a submission from the Brisbane City Council, No. 59, which has been received by the committee. Are there any alterations, additions or deletions to the submission at this stage? If not, I now invite you to make an opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

Councillor Soorley—I am not going to repeat anything in the submission. As senators, you can digest that fairly simple submission. I would like to make a few generic comments about the process that the defence department has been using for the sale of properties in general.

CHAIR—Are these properties in Brisbane?

Councillor Soorley—Yes. The same principles will apply whether it is in Brisbane or anywhere else. If you are going to sell property for development purposes, whether you are a private individual, local council, state or Commonwealth, the first principle of any developer buying property is that they need security. They do not give a damn about the price or any other interest that politicians might have. They want security. They will pay X for a piece of land, know they can sell it for X plus 20 per cent per annum if they have got it and that is what they are interested in.

From the Commonwealth government's point of view, where you are selling assets, if you want to maximise your return, which is one of the principles of the sale of assets, the first principle is to give the development industry, which might want to buy, some security. If they buy it for a certain amount, their development costs will be X, they will have to hold it for so long and get a certain return. The current process by the Commonwealth government with the sale of assets is based on false premises and a myth. If you can go out there and pretend to sell a block of land that can be used for whatever you think you might want to be able to buy it for, the defence department works on the principle that it will get more money for the asset. That is simply false. If the defence department is going to sell an asset, there will be a greater return to the defence department if it is sold with a sense of security to the development industry. X percentage of it is for parkland, X percentage is for environmental use, X percentage is for heritage and the percentage that is left can be sold at this intensity of development. That is how you will get the greatest return on the disposal of the asset.

In terms of a general principle, the attempt by the defence department to mislead, to create smokescreens and to tell the development industry that they can do whatever they like is actually not giving the maximum return to the defence department. I guess the first principle—and we all sell assets, at a government level, on a regular basis; we do it—is to create some security and surety for the purchaser. That is the way that you will get a maximum return. One of the first principles is to try to create an overall planning scope of what can and cannot be done on the land, and that is how you will get a maximum return.

I turn to the second principle. The Commonwealth government regularly pretends that it does not have to deal with the law in terms of planning. With respect to the documents we have seen from Gary Hardgrave, who is the local federal member, regarding the case before us, the law must apply. The Brisbane City Council cannot say, 'In this case where the Commonwealth is going to sell a piece of land, the city plan does not apply.' It is a myth and it is dishonest for a local politician to say, 'The Commonwealth can sell this piece of land and it's up to the Brisbane City Council after the event to put the planning controls and zoning issues on it that the Commonwealth wants.' In the particular case here in Dudley Park, that is what we saw. The Commonwealth said, 'We'll sell it; we don't give a damn what you want to do with it.' The local federal member then said, 'No, that's fine. I don't have to lobby the Commonwealth. It's up to the Brisbane City Council.' The Brisbane City Council, after you have sold it, simply must apply the zoning requirements of the city plan. We do not have any scope.

I will give a good example that Commonwealth politicians might understand a little better. If someone applies for a disability pension, there are rules, regulations and policies that apply which decide whether you are eligible. If I apply to the Commonwealth saying that I am disabled and that I want a disability pension, you do not have a lot of choice. You meet the criteria, you meet the standards and you get it or you do not. If some bureaucrat makes the wrong decision, there are appeal processes that are actually determined by courts and law, and it is exactly the same with planning law. So if the Commonwealth sells a piece of land that has no zoning on it, the council then has to apply a zoning. The zoning we have to apply must conform with the city plan. To have a local politician say, 'Sell this site which has no zoning requirements and try to get as much as you can'—as the Commonwealth government—and that it is then up to the Brisbane City Council to say, 'No, you can't have it zoned residential RB3 or RB4 under the old plan, or low to medium density under the new plan,' is dishonest and deceitful, because we must apply the town plan as it is. If you meet the criteria, you get it. If we make the wrong decision, whoever bought it can go to court.

The defence department are in the process of selling a lot of land out at Wacol. They are running around saying to people, 'This has all sort of potential. Bulldoze the trees. It is worth a million dollars.' It is not. We have said very clearly to the defence department that there are environmental constraints on the land at Wacol, and the environmental constraints on that land are clearly enunciated in the city plan. It is part of a green corridor. We have spent millions of dollars purchasing part of the green corridor. But the defence department thinks that they can mislead and convince developers that they can do whatever they like on that site and they will not have to wear the consequences. So we actually have a flawed process, and the flawed process was certainly obvious in the case that we have just heard from the community group. It was flawed in the sense that the defence department tried to hide the fact that there were heritage constraints and the local member tried to hide the fact that there were heritage constraints. The council simply said, 'This is the way forward.'

What needs to be put in place is a disciplined process. We all know that whenever the government wants to sell a piece of land everyone thinks they should get it for nothing. They think the government sector selling it should not only give it away but pay for the maintenance of it for the next 100 years. I do not support that point of view. I think levels of government have a right and a responsibility to dispose of assets but to dispose of them in a way that is responsible, firstly, to the broader community and, secondly, to the local community. So the best way forward for any government department that wishes to dispose of land is to first and

foremost engage with the local government authority and the community and to work up an overall master plan that says, 'The community is entitled to this bit. Here are some heritage issues. What are the overall planning requirements? What is the best use of this land?' I think that process needs to be put into place.

When the Commonwealth sold a piece of defence department land at Yeronga about seven years ago that was what we were able to do. We were able to work with the department beforehand and say, 'There is a wonderful old house here that is heritage listed. It has to be preserved. The overall residential character is residential A. The best way to get a return on this is to set up a master plan in advance.' We were able to do that with the Commonwealth. All developers knew the options that they had and that is the way the Commonwealth got security and maximised their return. The local community was happy; the Commonwealth was happy; the people who bought there were happy; the developer was happy. If you put it all on the table and deal with the issues honestly and up front, you can resolve these issues. But when you have a department, whether it is yours or our state's, trying to hide things, then you get local politicians who for their own selfish reasons start to do a bit of grandstanding and you just get chaos. So the process that is currently used is flawed.

My suggestions to the Commonwealth in the disposal of any assets are these. Establish a process where you engage with the legal requirements of the local authority and the city plan. Do that up front and then engage with the community. Sometimes the community's expectations are totally unreal and false and sometimes they are very reasonable, but they always have an insight that needs to be put on the table. Once that is done and an overall master planning process where the Commonwealth says, 'This is the way that it will be sold,' is determined and the local government gives the same message to prospective purchasers—'If you buy that block of land, this is what you can and cannot do on it'—then the local community will be happy and I think you will find that it is a win for everyone. So they are the principles I wanted to highlight.

I think the current way the defence department is going is an utter farce, and it is not maximising the return to the Commonwealth. It is certainly not empowering local communities to have a say in what you are doing. It is very difficult for local government, and it is also difficult for the development industry. Therefore, everyone is losing.

CHAIR—Thanks very much. Just on the issue of Wacol, it is not something that we had on our plate today, but it raises the issue. I know the site. It is a fairly extensive site. What are the constraints in place there in terms of the town plan? If you cannot give us that directly now you can take that on notice and get back to us so that we can have some sort of example, given the vastness of the site. It would also be helpful if you can give us some indication as to what sorts of discussions have taken place with Defence on the disposal of that land.

Councillor Soorley—It is a part of the green corridor to the south of the city. We have spent about \$20 million purchasing land at Karawatha. We are still in the process of purchasing land to ensure that between Logan and Brisbane, two very intense developments, there is a green corridor. It is one of the most significant ecosystems left in south-east Queensland. We are out there paying a lot of money to get the corridor to ensure that the flora and fauna has an ecosystem that is sustainable. The Wacol land goes on in terms of Greenbank, which is a very significant part of that overall corridor and habitat. We have said that some development can

take place but that there are significant environmental constraints. I am sure council officers can get the actual documentation of the discussions between us and the defence department for you. Our overall concept and master planning is very clear.

They are currently talking to developers. They are currently ignoring that process in those discussions with developers. The developers all come to us eventually anyway. They ask the Commonwealth, 'What restraints are on this?' and they are told, 'There are none. You can do whatever you like.' Then they come and sit down with us and we say 'If you buy that you are going to have major problems.' It is a flawed process. If they actually sat down with us and said, 'Let us do the overall master plan for this piece of land so that it does comply with the city plan and our overall strategic plan,' then they will know what can be developed and what cannot, and we will get a better outcome all round. We get the best outcome for the community in the sense that the significant environmental land is preserved and protected, and you get the better outcome because you know that where development can take place you will know the intensity and maximise your return. We can make sure that council officers document those discussions for you.

CHAIR—All right. Are the practices that are followed by your council different from those that might be followed by a council in New South Wales, or Victoria, or by another council in Queensland? In other words, is Defence having to deal with different sets of regimes with different councils? A point was made to us this morning that dealing with councils in New South Wales in terms of rezoning is different from dealing with the Brisbane City Council. Can you clarify the situation there please?

Councillor Soorley—In New South Wales basically the only people who can rezone a block of land are the government. Councils there have very little say in terms of the ability to rezone, whereas here the power for rezoning is basically delegated to local authorities. It must conform with the overall strategic plan and the current plan of the day. In New South Wales and Victoria, for example, it is the minister who actually makes the final decision, whereas here it is the local government authorities that make that decision. They can be appealed to a court, but it is really delegated to the local council.

So there is some difference between Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and there is probably some difference between Brisbane and other local authorities, but it is minimal really. If you are doing business in Queensland, it is basically the same. The local council must develop a strategic plan and then a zoning document which clearly sets it out, but anyone who owns a piece of private land can appeal to have land rezoned for a different use under the new planning scheme. Of course, Commonwealth land has no zoning prescriptions on it at all while it is in the hands of the Commonwealth. The day you sell it, we have the right to put some planning requirements on it.

CHAIR—What sort of liaison is there, therefore, between the Defence Estate Organisation, the Department of Defence and the Brisbane City Council? Is there a formal arrangement where there is liaison between the two organisations? Has there ever been any formal liaison?

Councillor Soorley—It is at the whim of the minister and the government of the day. The drill hall at Sandgate, which was a very significant heritage drill hall, was sold and we found out about it after the event. That facility was basically saved by Kedron-Wavell RSL and the

community group, who negotiated with the purchaser to move it from Sandgate to a historic precinct at Kedron-Wavell. We did not get any advance warning of that. There were no discussions with us. Really, there is no formal process in place in any government department. It is no better with the state, I might say. Sometimes the state is just as bad, because we are the bottom feeders. You are the top feeders, the states are the middle feeders and we are the bottom feeders.

CHAIR—I like that. You can come along more often!

Councillor Soorley—But that is the reality of the law. It really depends on the whim of the bureaucrat and the minister and I guess on any policy settings. Our experience with the sale of Yeronga was a very good one because we all sat down and got in there together. I think you will find that the Department of Defence maximised their return. When it came to the tender process, the eight or nine developers who said, 'We want to buy this,' knew what they could put on it. They will always push their margins to the limit because they know they can get in, get out and get their return. But if there is doubt, insecurity, three years in the planning court and so on they will say, 'It's too big a risk. We will pull back on our price.' It really depends on the minister of the day.

CHAIR—All right. If there is no formal liaison between the Brisbane City Council, Defence Estate and the Department of Defence, why did the Yeronga exercise work so well and why has the Dudley Street exercise not gone so well? Is it personality driven? Is it issue driven? Is it property driven? What is the driving factor?

Councillor Soorley—It was a Labor federal government dealing with a Labor council at the time, and they knew that we would be able to create some scenes. A Liberal federal government dealing with a Labor council could not give a damn. It is basically a political process. It depends on a whole lot of factors at the time, and that is why I think it needs to be formalised. We say the same to the state—that, when they are disposing of land, there needs to be a process put into place where there are planning principles, the community are more involved and there is some dialogue and discussion. The community will not always get what they want, but there is a process where community input, planning input and the seller's input are put on the table and dealt with in a logical and systematic way.

CHAIR—I will raise one further issue and then I will pass it over to Senator West. It is the issue of community expectations in these issues. As you say, the community will not always get what they want. My experience thus far is that sometimes community expectations can grow absolutely rampant and go wild and there is no hope of ever achieving what the community might want. How does one achieve a balance between what some communities expect the outcome of the process to be and what the reality of the process will be and get a reasonable result for all?

Councillor Soorley—I think community expectations go wild, to use your language, when people are being alienated and kept out of the process. I have always found that if you let people sit down and hear the differences of opinion, even the conflicting points of view, you can, by and large, actually move on to a consensus. Not everyone will be happy with the outcome but they will at least understand the reasons why they lost one or won one. So we have been engaged in over 50 local area planning processes across the city, and we have done about two-

thirds of Brisbane. We have actually gone out to the community and said, 'Okay, for the next six months we're going to do a local area planning process and we want your input.' There is a formal process for getting their input. We actually put planners in residence out there in the communities, in the shopping centres. They sit there and they talk to people as they come and go. If you actually engage in a process that the community assesses to be honest, I think you can get an outcome where they might not necessarily agree with this bit or that bit but they will say that, overall, they are happy with the package and that they understand why 'that was traded off for this'.

In all cases of those local area plans that we have done across Brisbane, most people can live with the final outcome, because they see that it has been a bit of a trade-off. So if you communicate openly, if you actually invite their input and really listen and engage in a process that is seen to be transparent, I think that at the end of the day the community will be happy. When you start to play games and say, 'It's not really my fault. It's that Soorley down there; he's the guy doing it, and it's this and it's that,' people tend to dig in and want more and more, because they know they are probably not going to get anything anyway because they have not been brought in. If the process is transparent and people are invited to give their perspective and know that they will be heard, I do not think that is an issue.

Senator WEST—Do you have an indication of the number of Defence sites that are within the Brisbane City Council area?

Councillor Soorley—I could not tell you offhand.

Senator WEST—That is fine.

Councillor Soorley—We will take it on notice. Maybe even the defence department does not know.

Senator WEST—I do not know—it would be interesting. Following on from that, are you aware of any others that have been classified as surplus to needs that are listed for possible disposal?

Councillor Soorley—Gona Barracks has just been sold and the state has got involved in that. That is the one at Red Hill. That process was a little better but not as good as it could have been. Probably because the state was one of the major participants in it, it was not so bad. We are aware of Wacol. But I can tell you no more; I will try to find out.

Senator WEST—I am interested to know whether the department has spoken to you about any of the others that they have on the list as being potentially surplus and for sale.

Councillor Soorley—Kelvin Grove, and Witton Barracks at Lambert Street, Indooroopilly.

CHAIR—Yes, we visited that.

Councillor Soorley—Sandgate—the drill hall—has gone. We have talked about Wacol and Dudley Street. Acacia Ridge at Brookbank Road, Willawong—88 hectares—was placed on the market in late 1997. However, due to uncertainties regarding future options for the site we are

still dealing with that. There is Zillmere, a seven-hectare block adjacent to Cabbage Tree Creek, and Bulimba and Meeandah. There are 24 hectares at Bulimba and 60 hectares at Meeandah—market testing. That is the defence department list.

Senator WEST—And they go out and market test those before they come to you—or do they ever come to you?

Councillor Soorley—We have been notified about those. This is a defence department notification.

Senator WEST—When did they notify you about Dudley Street?

Councillor Soorley—I could not tell you exactly. We are often marginalised, to be honest, on those ones. The local member actually called a meeting there and did not notify the deputy mayor—who was the local member—that it was happening, but he knew what was going on. We would have to give you some documents on the process.

Senator WEST—I am just interested in that because obviously, if it is unzoned, that has to fit into your master plan. You have a significant role in the approval of the developments that are going to have to be given approval. I am just trying to get some concrete information as to what involvement the council has had with these ones to illustrate the point.

Councillor Soorley—On Dudley Street we were basically marginalised. There was no attempt to sit down with us and the community and say before it was actually put on the market, ‘Let us work through this. What are the issues? What can we sell for housing? What is heritage listed? What should we keep? What could be of community use?’ That process did not take place.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Lord Mayor, in your view, what should happen to the site? What is your preferred option for the site? You mentioned just a moment ago in answer to Senator West that there should be some housing, et cetera, on the site? Is that your view, that it should be developed at least in part for housing? Is that high density or low density? Does it mean a park? Does it mean some public open space?

Councillor Soorley—I do not think that is for me to sit here and say. What I think should happen is: let us engage in a planning process for the site. What are the heritage issues there? Who is going to deal with them and how are they going to be dealt with? We do not want the site. Let me be very clear about that.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Are you aware of the heritage issues?

Councillor Soorley—I am aware that there is a heritage report that says that the drill hall and something else there are of heritage significance.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—So they are well known.

Councillor Soorley—What is the degree of heritage significance? One of the things I have found over the years is that whenever a development is going to happen it is mysteriously of great heritage significance—it is marvellous how it happens. It has never had any heritage value at all before but when a development is going to happen that someone does not want all of a sudden we find all these great heritage values in it.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—There is a heritage impost on some buildings on the site now. That is indisputable, isn't it?

Councillor Soorley—I do not necessarily agree or disagree with that.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—You are not aware of it?

Councillor Soorley—I would like to see the heritage issues rigorously analysed and, if there is heritage significance there, then those issues should be protected in the disposal of that site.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—If there are heritage issues with respect to the site they should be taken into consideration on the level of heritage—

Councillor Soorley—Absolutely.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—the degree of heritage before the site proceeds further through a kind of a master plan for the site. Is that what you are saying?

Councillor Soorley—The heritage issues should be a part of the master planning of the process. If you are going to do a master plan, heritage is one of the things that you should put on the table.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Who would know whether there are heritage sites on the precinct now if not the Brisbane City Council?

Councillor Soorley—We are not the heritage masters of that site. The Commonwealth should be a part of it and the National Trust and the state environment department, who are responsible for heritage listing.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—You do not keep any form of index with heritage sites over the city?

Councillor Soorley—Historically, we did not. Over the last few years we have begun in our local area planning process to actually list places of heritage significance across Brisbane.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—That does not include Annerley?

Councillor Soorley—It was not our site, so the council has not done a heritage analysis of the site. Our heritage people do that in all our master planning issues across Brisbane. I think it is fair to say there are some heritage values there. I do not think there has been a consensus around the heritage significance in terms of the values of some of that site.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—So the heritage impost, if it is an impost, is yet to be placed over the buildings on the site?

Councillor Soorley—I do not like the term ‘heritage impost’.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—No. I corrected myself. It may not be, but in terms of development there can be—you would agree with that.

Councillor Soorley—Sure. But they can also be of great value. A lot of development—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—They can be of great value to society.

Councillor Soorley—Even to development. There is a lot of development that has taken place that has been done in a historically significant way that actually adds value to the development. That is the process that gets cut off in the current way that Defence sells land.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—With respect to the local member, Mr Hardgrave, what did you mean when you said—if I could draw you out, and this would have been clearly defamatory had you not had the protection of parliament—that he participated in a smokescreen with respect to the site?

Councillor Soorley—It was not defamatory at all. I would challenge that. If you look at some of his correspondence, it is pretty obvious what his smokescreen was. Let me quote, so that we clearly understand it:

It’s sad that Lord Mayor Jim takes it for granted that so many people will believe anything he says.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Is that a smokescreen?

Councillor Soorley—Absolutely. The letter went on:

The Lord Mayor rewarded his massive voter support in Annerley with higher housing density in the 1999 Town Plan—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Did you?

Councillor Soorley—No.

and wants to do it all over again.

He was trying to say, ‘Look, I am clean. I have no responsibility. My government can sell this piece of land. We don’t have to deal with development issues. It will be that nasty little man in city hall who has to wear all responsibility. If it becomes RB3, which will be the rights under the town plan, you blame Soorley.’ He was not saying, ‘Look, maybe the Commonwealth should sit down with the local council, with the community, and work through what is the appropriate master plan for this site.’

Senator LIGHTFOOT—But surely then it is a bit like selling Sydney Harbour Bridge. Caveat emptor applies, for a start. Are you saying that the poor developers of Queensland would

not satisfy themselves as to the potential or actual zoning of that site before they put a bid in for it—that they would have thought, ‘Mr Hardgrave is a great guy and we will accept what he has to say’? For instance, you quoted Mr Hardgrave when you said that he said that you could sell this site and that it has no zoning. Further, you said that the government and the local member, meaning Mr Hardgrave, tried to hide heritage constraints. Either there are heritage imposts on that—or it is zoned heritage—or there are not. You say on one hand that he tried to hide the heritage constraints, when you have just told the committee that there is no heritage zoning over that—that it is not classified as heritage on any of the buildings.

Councillor Soorley—But you are presuming that heritage is black or white. It is not black or white. Heritage is a continuum, from state-listed places of national significance—which it is not—to places that are of significance to the local community. So even in your state of Western Australia, there is a range of heritage listings.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Could you tell me, not about Western Australia perhaps—

Councillor Soorley—No, I am going to answer your other questions first.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Tell the committee whether or not, in fact, there is heritage over that site or the buildings.

Councillor Soorley—No, there is not, because the Commonwealth owned it, and no-one has any ability to put any heritage constraints on the site while you own it.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Okay, well—

Councillor Soorley—Do not cut me off. It does not say, ‘Are there heritage values on the site?’ So there may not be heritage listing, but very clearly there are heritage values. If you are a responsible government, you will deal with the heritage values, whether or not they have been formally stamped under a legal heritage listing.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What do heritage constraints come under?

Councillor Soorley—It would depend on the degree of heritage significance. In this city we are now listing places that we believe are of significance from a heritage perspective, but they do not have the binding of the state listing. So there is a bit of discussion and so on that goes on with the property owner and the city, if any development happens. But if it is on the state list under the environment protection act, then it is nothing to do with us at all—it is actually an issue with the state. So there is this continuum or range of heritage values that are assigned different weight within the law. There is another question that you asked, which I still have not had the chance to answer.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Please go ahead.

Councillor Soorley—It is the issue of this site and the town plan. This site is 11,331 square metres. If the Commonwealth says to a developer, ‘We’re going to sell 11,331 square metres; here it is, you buy it,’ they will say that the town plan applies, not the local federal member’s interpretation of the town plan. If someone buys 11,331 square metres in this city, they are given

rights at law. That would include, for example, on this site, town houses. If the local member said, 'We don't want any town houses here,' and we were to ban town houses, unlike every other state in Australia, if we did not grant those development rights to that purchaser, we would have to pay injurious affection compensation.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Who is 'we'?

Councillor Soorley—The council. With respect to the developer who bought that with an expectation that they could have X development rights, if, after they bought it, they did not get X development rights and we said, 'Sorry, the local community says it must be developed to less intensity,' they could take us to court and win. If we still said no, they would sue us for their lost profit and we would have to pay compensation. That does not exist in Western Australia or in any other state in Australia, but it does in Queensland.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Caveat emptor exists in Queensland, too?

Councillor Soorley—You will have to translate it for me.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Councillor Soorley, you are not going to tell this committee that you are not aware of the term 'caveat emptor'?

Councillor Soorley—No, you translate it for me.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Councillor Soorley, are you telling this committee that you do not understand the Latin phrase 'caveat emptor'—buyer beware?

Councillor Soorley—I failed Latin.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I just gave you the English translation.

Councillor Soorley—It does not apply. There are development rights consigned to property. If people buy it, it is not 'purchaser beware' at all. It is a matter of 'purchaser, I am expecting those rights'. If a local council in this state does not give them, they can be sued for compensation.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—You went on to say that the government and/or Mr Hardgrave were going to convince the developers that they can 'go out there and do what they like'. That is a bit over the fence, isn't it? Are your developers in Brisbane that dumb that they would take the word of anyone other than a professional when it comes to developing a slice of Commonwealth or any other land?

Councillor Soorley—No. What they would say is, 'There's the block of land. What does it say under the town plan? "The town plan will apply." That will therefore give to that block of land development rights.' What I am trying to say is that what the Commonwealth should be saying is, 'There's the block of land. We've negotiated with the local community and the Brisbane City Council and the development rights will be here and here, and the rest of it you can't touch.' We do it all the time.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—You spoke at some length very disparagingly about the local federal member, and I said that I thought you had defamed him, but it is a matter of privilege and you are aware of that. You state in your submission that the local federal member also failed to provide residents with relevant documentation. The federal member that you speak about, Mr Hardgrave, did notify the residents and people outside. Sometimes it is impossible or impractical for some reason to notify every single member. You can do it through the media or through a letterbox drop, et cetera, but sometimes, even in local government elections, you may have failed to notify every member.

Councillor Soorley—Never.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—You are superhuman, Councillor Soorley!

Councillor Soorley—Absolutely!

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I would have to get a second opinion on that.

Councillor Soorley—Ask Gary Hardgrave.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—The evidence that the federal member gave the committee was that he did notify people as soon as he was notified by the federal government—by Senator Eric Abetz, who was then parliamentary secretary for defence, and still is until Monday. Eric Abetz notified the local member that this was coming up for sale. I think that very shortly, and certainly in a reasonable amount of time, the local federal member did notify those people, and it has been an ongoing assistance. As much as I can gather from the evidence given by the people who preceded you here this afternoon, he was most helpful in the assistance he gave with respect to the certain disposal of that particular Defence asset. So, on that basis, I just wonder whether you think that what you have said in your submission is fair.

Councillor Soorley—Absolutely fair. It is very noble that you defend your Liberal colleague.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I am defending the truth.

Councillor Soorley—No, the truth is that, if you ask these community groups how long it took to get the heritage report from the local member, they will tell you it took some time and many requests. If you want to call them back—and they are still here—they will be the first to tell you that he promised it and it did not come. They asked and asked and then finally he had to give it to them, but it was a very long, slow process, like going to the dentist, to get the heritage report to the local community. In fact, I think you might find that Tim Quinn ultimately gave it to them first.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—You made a statement that the Commonwealth government pretends it does not have to conform to the law of the land. If it were not silly, it would be outrageous that the Commonwealth government pretends, in your view, that it does not have to conform to the law. Do you want to rearrange that?

Councillor Soorley—No, not really. When it comes to the town plan you actually treat it with contempt. I will put it in that language for you. We cannot put a zoning or a land use

planning on your land. If you really want to be serious as a Commonwealth government, you would say, 'Please ensure that there is appropriate land use planning guidelines on our property.' That would be the first principle, but you refuse to allow any local authority to do it.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—With respect, the Commonwealth government is not responsible for zoning land in any of this nonsense.

Councillor Soorley—No, but the Crown regularly exempts itself from everything else that everyone else has to comply with. My statement is not silly at all. Crown privilege—the Crown regularly exempts itself—is your right, but does it give good planning outcomes; does it give good outcomes to the community? If you listen to these people, they will tell you it does not. If you were serious you would have said, 'We ought to sell this; let's put a zoning on it,' and the first thing we would have done was consult the community and we would have worked into a process with them. We would not have used Crown privilege; we would have actually said, 'We're going to work out what is appropriate land use for this piece of land'. Then you could sell it and it would have been fair to you—you would have got more money for it—it would have been very fair to the community and it certainly would have been fair to the local government authority.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I have heard in Western Australia, Lord Mayor—

Councillor Soorley—I am sure you have heard many things in Western Australia.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—that Queensland is like another country, and I do not think that was an inaccurate statement.

Councillor Soorley—Welcome to the state of enlightenment. You should come more often. We might be able to assist you over there in Western Australia.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—I think that is some of the assistance we could probably do without, Lord Mayor, but thank you for the offer anyway.

Senator WEST—Mind you, those of us who have come from some of the other mainland states say that both your states are a law unto themselves.

CHAIR—For the sake of our report, could I pursue one issue that you mentioned? In talking about buildings being on the state heritage register, if a building—

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Excuse me, Mr Chairman, I thought they were not on any register?

CHAIR—I understood you to say that there were buildings on the state heritage register.

Councillor Soorley—In general, not on this site.

CHAIR—No, I am not referring to this site.

Councillor Soorley—No, I am not referring to this site.

CHAIR—In the general sense?

Councillor Soorley—Buildings in the city.

CHAIR—Yes.

Councillor Soorley—This building next door is on the state—

CHAIR—So if buildings are listed on the state register, does the Queensland government have a role in the development or the use of that property?

Councillor Soorley—Not if it is privately owned.

Senator WEST—It can be privately owned and be on the state register?

Councillor Soorley—Yes, absolutely. One of the issues that has been going on in Brisbane for about five years is where the Catholic Church bought a building called Hescott House next to the cathedral. It is currently on the state register as a heritage building. It was owned by the private sector, bought by the Catholic Church and the state heritage listing then puts restrictions on development. That has been in the court for about five years. The Catholic Church has just won the right to remove that building through all sorts of complex legal arguments. There are literally dozens of properties around the city of Brisbane that are privately owned and that are on the state heritage list. We have no say in those. They are controlled by the EPA in terms of overall principles.

CHAIR—If the property at Annerley is put on the register, will the state government need to be involved when it is disposed of?

Councillor Soorley—No, it need not be involved. I would not want to make a black and white statement, but I would be very surprised if any building on that site meets the criteria to go on the state heritage list. I think that would be a fairly clear statement.

CHAIR—We understand that it is on the provisional list?

Councillor Soorley—Yes, but that is an interim process.

CHAIR—Yes. Given that it is on the provisional list, you would still be surprised?

Councillor Soorley—If it met the criteria. Some of them might; some of them might not. If they do meet the state heritage listing criteria, the environment department basically has overriding activity in terms of any development that takes place.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

Councillor Soorley—Thank you.

CAMPBELL, Mr Dennis, Treasurer, 12th Regional Cadet Unit Parent Support Group

CATCHPOLE, Mr Malcolm, Member, Queensland Living History Federation

WALSH, Mr Leo, Curator and Special Projects Officer, Victoria Barracks Historical Society of Brisbane

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give any part of your evidence in private you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. Do we have any formal written submissions from your groups?

Mr Walsh—I have just distributed some to you. I have placed three photographic albums in front, which you may or may not wish to refer to, that basically give an idea of the types of activities and items that the society is involved with.

CHAIR—We will not take those into formal evidence.

Mr Walsh—No, they are for your own information.

CHAIR—We will treat that as a tabled document rather than as a submission. I do not think there are any other written submissions. The document headed ‘Concept of the Queensland Military Memorial Museum’ will be a document tabled by the Victoria Barracks Historical Society. We now ask you for brief opening statements. I just want to draw your attention to the time because if you want to see how ruthless the chair of a committee can be, then you will see it at 4.45 this afternoon. Just bear that in mind. Use your time wisely, tell us what your story is, and then give the other senators—I do not think you will get too much from me this afternoon—a chance to ask a couple of questions.

Mr Walsh—I represent the Victoria Barracks Historical Society of Brisbane. The society was formed in 1983. For some time it was at Victoria Barracks in Brisbane, but it lost its accommodation there in June 1998. It is now established with the Australian Legion of Ex-Servicemen and Women at Church Street in Fortitude Valley. It has a very large collection of about 6,500 items. It has membership from all over Australia.

My bona fides, which I believe I should establish for the benefit of the committee, began with the Air Training Corps as a young lad, then the Royal Australian Navy, the Citizen Military Forces, the Regular Army, and then the Army Reserve. I am still a serving member of the Australian Army Reserve, a Warrant Officer Class 2, Royal Australian Infantry. I have attended two certificate courses at the museum studies unit at the University of Sydney, a certificate course at the Australian War Memorial, and I have a graduate diploma in community museum management.

The museum to which I belong is dedicated to the men and women of Queensland who served the colony of Queensland and the Commonwealth of Australia in peace and war. It is not a war memorial as such. It is also dedicated to the allied forces in war. We believe that the Dudley Street depot, with its own history and heritage, and with the thousands of South Queensland area people who have passed through there, offers a heritage site for a Queensland

military memorial museum. The 1954 drill hall would be ideal. It has got the armoury. We have a good research library. Our librarian is fully qualified and is at this time doing his doctorate. He has two staff—an assistant librarian and a research member. We have received a grant from the Jupiters Casino Community Benevolent Fund and acquired a personal computer with the capability of burning photographs and documents onto CDs, and that is going straight to the library for its use only.

Our collection, as I said, numbers around 6,500 items. In the area where we are we can only display around 2,000 items in very cramped conditions. It is not open to people in wheelchairs, and it is difficult for people with disabilities. The Dudley Street site is wide open for wheelchair access. The potential of Dudley Street and the uniqueness of Dudley Street is superb for the purpose. The society does not see Dudley Street as a straight military heritage centre; it sees it also as a community centre. We did not see it this morning during the visit but upstairs there is an officers and sergeants mess. Technically, all those fittings belong to the officers and sergeants of the units that serve there—they do not belong to Defence. Technically, Defence cannot remove them because they do not own them. The sergeants and officers, when they went to Enoggera, went to already established messes anyway, so everything is there.

We believe that could be utilised by local, community, non-profit organisations to hold meetings and functions. A lot of them cannot afford some of the halls that are available; they are getting very expensive. The society is a non-profit organisation and it is recognised as being both non-profit and charitable. We have around 169 members, 36 of whom are corporate and they include many ex-service organisations, RSL sub-branches—the RSL Queensland branch is a member—the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Australian War Memorial library. So we are not just coming in off the ground and saying that we know it all because we do not know it all but we have the benefit of people who do.

We have not worked out exactly what could occur at Dudley Street because we have not had the benefit of being allowed to spend a lot of time there. In fact, this morning's visit with this committee is only one of two visits and it was the longest. But, in the short period we have seen it, the potential is enormous—not just for us, but for the other three groups. From the society's point of view, we envisage a body corporate consisting of members of all the interested groups and SPACE, because they know the local people and would keep whoever was there in touch with the local people and they would overcome any problems. We believe maintenance could be conducted by the interested groups. A sawmill has already promised us any amount of hardwood timber, cut to size, for any refurbishment. We have promises of painters, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, engineers—the whole works and jerks.

The 1913 building is naturally heritage: I have not seen too many like it around—and I have been around quite a few places. The 1954 building is unique in its own right, regardless of what Defence says. To my knowledge there are three of that style in the south Queensland area: Queensland University Regiment is one and the other is at Frasers Paddock at Enoggera. The one at Annerley has six roller shutter doors specifically so that the guns, limbers and towing vehicles could be parked inside as a gun park. That alone makes it unique because the others do not have those six roller shutter doors.

There is a relatively new RAEME workshop. Although it may not be considered heritage in itself, it can be used to house heritage items. This society owns five bronze muzzle-loading

smooth bore guns. They were originally ordnance of the Queensland Volunteer Artillery in 1870. We have restored them, built the carriages for them and we fire them on occasions such as Federation Day. We have also been offered a substantial number of heritage vehicles. The whole site is heritage. It was an induction and medical centre for the AIF in World War I and World War II, and it is my understanding that the whole site was covered in tentage while people underwent that induction and that they spent time there before going to allocated units.

The parade ground could be used for community fetes and fairs as well as for the cadets and the re-enactment groups. The potential, as I have said, is enormous. As I pointed out to you this morning, the drill hall area is roughly 10 times the size of what we have at this time. The society has organisational ability: in 1991 we organised 37 unit museums, private organisations and private individuals to conduct the military heritage exhibition at the Queensland Museum. That went for six weeks and 47,000 people passed through the exhibition, yet it received very little publicity. We have organised things like Back to Barracks for Australia Remembers. It is our belief that we can get on very well with the other two groups involved, as well as SPACE, and that this area should be preserved as a community centre and as a heritage area.

Mr Campbell—We, the 12th Regional Cadet Unit Parent Support Group, welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the Senate references committee because we are vitally interested in the disposal of the former Army Reserve depot at Dudley Street. We understand that one of the terms of reference of this committee is to make recommendations on how the Australia Defence Organisation decides whether property is surplus to its requirements. We believe the ADO has not given proper consideration to the military worth of the facilities at Dudley Street and they should be retained, at least in the short term, for use by cadets and perhaps by other organisations such as those represented by Leo and Malcolm. Furthermore, sufficient recognition has not been given to the significant social and community benefits that could derive from its continued use by community groups such as ours.

In preparing my presentation, I am mindful of the words of our Prime Minister, John Howard, when he released the defence white paper on 6 November 2000. He said:

In peaceful times it is sometimes easy to forget how essential is a strong military capability.

He went on to say:

We recognise a responsibility to recruit and retain the best people possible, to equip and train them to world standards and to ensure that all is done so that they may successfully face whatever tasks lie ahead.

How does this relate to our cadet unit, whose facilities are school basements, disused storerooms and playgrounds that are dangerous and unsafe at night?

At the end of last year, John Topley released his report *Cadets: the future*. In it he makes numerous observations, two of which I would like to mention here today. The first is that cadets are an economical source of members for the three services. He points out in his report that there are 25,757 cadets in 427 units throughout Australia and that approximately 30 per cent of those cadets join the ADF—that is, the Australian Defence Force. Nearly a quarter of our active uniformed personnel are ex-cadets, with the same number in the reserve.

To pause at this point, figures obtained from Lieutenant Colonel Woodroffe's report on cost imputation indicate that Defence provides \$400 per year for each cadet throughout Australia. It

varies from state to state, but it is about that number. By comparison, it was reported in the public press in November last year that a \$33 million advertising campaign cost the equivalent of \$34,375 for each new recruit who signed up.

The other point that is made in Topley's report is that cadets have many social benefits. He says:

At its best, Cadets provides comprehensive personal challenge and growth, enhanced self-esteem and self-discipline, stable social involvement, adventurous enjoyment in a Service setting, valued military-related and general skills and high standing in the community.

Despite positive references to the military and to the social benefits of the cadets scheme, the Topley report also makes several disturbing observations. The first of those is that there is little evidence of strategic review, direction or management, very little interservice collaboration and no adequate apparatus for performing these functions. The second point is that it is remarkable that cadets has survived in the face of such marked change over 24 years to the ADF.

In releasing this report in December 2000, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Senator Eric Abetz, notwithstanding its somewhat damning contents, commended its findings and recommendations for major reforms involving cadet resources. Several weeks before this, however, referring to Dudley Street in a letter to Mrs Dell Luxton, he stated:

- Defence is not responsible for the provision of (Cadet) accommodation.
- Defence is presently conducting a planning study to assess possible future use options.
- On completion of the planning study, Defence will put the Annerley property on the open market.

We find it extraordinary that the senator's letter apparently anticipates that the planning study will find no future use for Annerley, despite the obvious needs of cadets identified in a report that he commissioned. I cannot help being rather cynical that anything positive will be forthcoming, particularly when reading media reports on massive Defence mismanagement and the growing exodus of service personnel. Even the Defence Force's own webpage speaks of failure to meet recruitment targets—by 70 per cent, depending on what you read.

In the five minutes available to me today, it is impossible to canvass all of the issues relating to the way that the ADO makes decisions about its property assets. Perhaps it should be more serious about consultation with interested parties and the community in general. I, for one, have personal views about the impending sale of Wacol, yet have no obvious forum in which to express them. Maybe the ADO can ask its own people what their opinions are, rather than relying so heavily on the findings of civilian consultants. For instance, I came across reference to one serviceman whose views had never been sought in 25 years of service. The ADO would also do well to look at the way it responds to authoritative reports such as *Cadets: the future* when it considers disposing of assets. There needs to be a commitment and the willingness to act upon the recommendations of properly commissioned reports. Defence and the government also need to differentiate between outcomes that are in the best long-term interest of our country and those that are politically and/or bureaucratically expedient in the short term.

Finally, I believe that what is surplus or unnecessary should not be measured purely in economic terms but also from a national interest and a community perspective. I thank the committee for my being able to express these views.

Mr Catchpole—The Queensland Living History Federation would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to address it today. I will, with the indulgence of the committee, read a very brief prepared statement.

The federation is an association of historical research, re-enactment and preservation groups which were formed together with the aim of bringing an enhanced appreciation and understanding of aspects of our heritage and history to new generations of Australians in accessible and exciting ways. There are approximately 400 individuals in the 18 member groups of the federation. We cover many different periods of history, from ancient through to modern times. A number of the groups are affiliated with museums. These include, obviously, the Victoria Barracks Historical Society, the 11th Light Horse at Caboolture and the 1st Central Queensland Light Horse in Rockhampton.

As re-enactment groups, we are extensively involved in public education and public performance. Consequently, we have a strong and ever growing demand for training space. In 1999, when the federation became aware that Defence was intending to dispose of the Dudley Street Drill Hall, we immediately made contact with the defence department to register our interest in the site. The interest centred around the reuse of the existing buildings in a manner in which they had always been, and were intended to be, used. At this time we questioned whether a proper heritage conservation study had been done prior to the decision to dispose of the property. The federation received a response from the department assuring us that all due care had been taken in determining the historical significance of the site and that, as we had requested, we would be fully informed of any public consultation resulting from the proposed sale and redevelopment. That was the last contact the federation had with the department. There was no notification of any public consultation process. The federation had a reasonable expectation of being afforded an opportunity to participate in and comment on any issues which would normally be raised in a community consultation process.

Early in 2000, we made contact with SPACE, the Annerley community group with an interest in the preservation of the site. We support this organisation's concerted efforts to have the heritage and community significance of the Dudley Street Drill Hall addressed. It is obvious that the extensive research carried out by the local community and the local government authority found that the site is historically significant, a fact that the Department of Defence appears to have neglected in its rush to dispose of the site. The Queensland Living History Federation is keenly interested in using the buildings and the spaces on the site. Many of our 18 member groups are actively seeking training venues. The old drill hall, built specifically for training purposes, would be an ideal community based resource. Our use would be entirely compatible and consistent with the nature of the facility and would not impact on the fabric of any of the structures. The federation hopes that the committee will also recognise that, beyond its substantial historical significance, the site has a wider social value to the local and broader community through the involvement of organisations such as our own.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Thank you, gentlemen, for your contribution. This is not a plug but it may be seen as one. The federal government is not immune to the heritage value of our

buildings that are manifestly a great symbol of the sacrifice that our young men and women have made over the last 100 years or so. What the federal government has done for New South Wales with the granting of a significant area of North Head land around the Sydney Harbour and Manly, in South Australia with respect to the Torrens Parade Ground and, more recently, in Western Australia with respect to the Fremantle Artillery Barracks is to listen to the arguments and assess the possibility and the significance of transferring those to the state using various funding methods and to accede to what you are saying. But the documentation, the words and the framing of what you want needs to be put together in such a manner that it is acceptable to the stringent guidelines that obviously are there to protect the assets that are for all Australians. If you are in pursuit of the retention of Annerley as you have said and you feel very strongly, I feel moderately confident about the federal government. I can make no commitment on the federal government's part nor do I pretend to and I do not want to give that impression, but I do know that it is composed of similar people to we who are sitting around this table today. They are not immune to what you have requested.

Having said that, I wonder whether you, Mr Walsh, perhaps could tell us where you see the precinct at Annerley falling in the category of most important service facility or barracks in Queensland? Do you see it right at the top? Is it half-way down? Could you give it a score from one to 10? Could you give the committee some idea of its importance?

Mr Walsh—I will go for a nine on your scale. It is very difficult to assess. The main reason I do that is that, from its inception in 1913, except for the two periods when used as an induction centre by the AIF of both world wars, the barracks has been used by cadets, the militia, the Citizens Military Force and the Army Reserve. It is a citizen's depot. Therefore, most of the people are from around this area: Brisbane and South Queensland. They would have served there. The Queensland Mounted Infantry was there; Artillery and Service Corps have been there; the Intelligence Corps was there at one stage. A RAEME workshop has been built there and hardly used.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—RAEME stands for Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers?

Mr Walsh—Correct. They work on vehicles, munitions, weapons and that type of thing. Electrical and mechanical leaves a lot to the imagination. They do quite a lot of work. That building has not even been mentioned in the process today because it is four years old and not regarded as heritage. As I explained earlier in the tour when we were visiting the place, it could be used to house heritage items.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Could you tell the committee what special features, if any, the Drill Hall has that it is perhaps unique for surviving halls of that nature in Australia?

Mr Walsh—Is that the 1913 or 1954 one?

Senator LIGHTFOOT—The 1913 one.

Mr Walsh—As I said earlier, I have been in a lot of places around Australia and I have not seen a drill hall of that nature. It is made out of corrugated iron and has got the old type timber

inside, most of it original. I have not seen a roof with the overhead long length that allows the air to get in—or out, I am not sure.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Both perhaps.

Mr Walsh—Perhaps.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—What are the principals composed of, Mr Walsh?

Mr Walsh—The principals of the building?

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes, the principals of the roof?

Mr Walsh—I would not really know because I am not an architect, I am afraid.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Perhaps I could refresh your memory. I had a look at them today; I have never seen them either. They are big angle iron principals that appear to be riveted together on the joints.

Mr Walsh—The girders?

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes, the girders.

Mr Walsh—Inside?

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Yes.

Mr Walsh—Yes, the girders are angle iron; there are no worries about that. Whether they are the originals, I do not know. I have not seen the original plans. I would say at one time there was a ceiling because the inside of the roof does not appear to be painted, whereas the outside is. It would not be a very suitable area for a museum because of the amount of dust that would get in. I may have mentioned earlier that most of the inside is masonite and it has been added later. That could all be cleared out and it would give the Living History Federation, the cadets, an indoor parade ground where they could perform whatever task they wished to in inclement weather if they did not want to use the master parade ground.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Could I shift on then to Mr Campbell? What do you see the barracks have as special attributes that the Commonwealth government should take note of when it considers the submissions that this committee will make?

Mr Campbell—I suppose there are several aspects. One of the things that struck me in talking to service people over the years is the lack of apparent commitment for resourcing the armed forces. With our cadets, for example, we have had offices that had to be vacated because it rained. The facilities we have got are absolutely abysmal.

CHAIR—Where are your current facilities?

Mr Campbell—Prior to Christmas we had three: St James in the valley close to the city, Camp Hill and Nyanda, the Salisbury High School. It is a unit that comprised, prior to Christmas, three separate companies. The defence department and cadet wing saw fit to try to amalgamate them under the one banner, but there is a history there that goes back a little while. I do not know it all that well. However, in answer to the question, I think that what it does do is show that there is a commitment from the defence department and it shows it to the cadets. To be a cadet nowadays amounts to very little more than being a Boy Scout and that is something that I think really goes right through to the defence forces. I think Dudley Street represents a commitment by the government to the value that it places on the defence forces and the mechanism that it uses to derive the best possible benefit.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—And headquarters for the cadet movement in southern Queensland?

Mr Campbell—We have got kids who are parading on lawns at night. It is a wonder that somebody has not broken their leg or damaged themselves because we do not have lighting, we do not have the facilities. We are begging and borrowing from wherever we can to get the facilities that we need for our cadets. It would allow in that instance those three units, or what used to be three units, to come together in one place. I am not suggesting that it should be purely for our own use. The facilities there are quite extensive. I recognise the problems that are associated with it; it is a costly exercise to maintain.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Can I interrupt you there, Mr Campbell? Are you saying that this facility, given the geographical situation of it and the structural situation of the superstructures there, is an ideal entity for the cadet movement and it would enhance the cadet movement?

Mr Campbell—Without a doubt, to answer the last part of your question, it would make the cadet unit function much better than it currently does. It is dysfunctional the way that it is structured. In fact, the predecessor of 12 RCU, formerly called 10 RCU, used to reside there. The officers, who are very reluctant to step forward and put the case for using Dudley Street because of the criticism and the discipline that has been levied on them before when they have spoken out, could virtually move into that facility tomorrow and have all of the facilities that would enable that cadet unit to function as it should as well as solving a number of other problems.

If I am able to table a document that I was handed only today—I did not know it existed—it would partly answer your question about how the cadets see Dudley Street. This looks as though it was written some time ago. They have prepared a paper on how they would see themselves fitting into Dudley Street.

CHAIR—If you identify the document for the sake of the record, we will table it.

Mr Campbell—Sure. The document is titled ‘The 12th Regional Cadet Unit, Camp Hill, Nyanda Street, St James: Investigation of Movement to Dudley Street, Annerley’. It was commissioned by the commanding officer midway through last year when he asked members of his staff to see how practical it was to move into it.

Senator LIGHTFOOT—Mr Catchpole, do you have anything to add to the contribution you made which enhances the prospects of the government being able to make a decision—if it is going to make a decision—on the precinct?

Mr Catchpole—Certainly. At the end of the day, no-one—certainly in this room—is looking for anything other than due process. Currently, certainly from the federation’s perspective, we are happy to participate in whatever way we can in order to make something that is clearly such a valuable community asset that much more viable by our presence. We certainly have not taken this decision lightly. We feel that there is demonstrable and quite clear value in consolidating the types of community groups which we have been speaking about today at that particular facility and we believe that there are further flow-on benefits for the community by pursuing that particular strategy. As long as the particular legislative and regulatory processes are followed, we are quite happy to fall into line behind that and to participate along with the community group and these other groups in operating from that site.

Senator WEST—Can you—the three organisations—indicate when you heard that Dudley Street was surplus to needs and up for sale. Mr Catchpole, I think you said you registered an interest in 1999. I presume that was before you knew that it was surplus to needs?

Mr Catchpole—That is correct. I could provide you with an exact date in a rough time frame.

Senator WEST—How did you find out about it? Did Defence contact your organisation or did you just find out by word of mouth?

Mr Catchpole—No, I believe that early it was a word of mouth issue and the question was asked of the defence department.

Senator WEST—Mr Campbell?

Mr Campbell—The way that I found out about it, as a member of the parent support group, was through a comment that was made by one of the officers at that time. If I can just give you an overview of what happened. One of the facilities we occupy is in a school and the cadets were parading on a sealed, covered area at night with lights. There was a complaint made by a local resident that they were too noisy in issuing commands. That is how they were sent down to the oval at night. This issue of finding alternative accommodation that was more suitable came up in conversation. It was about midway through last year when there was a comment made—it may in fact have originated from Dell Luxton, who is a member of the community action group. But it was not through the defence department, no.

Senator WEST—So none of the organisations found out through the defence department?

Mr Catchpole—No.

Mr Walsh—Our society found out in August last year when Mr Gary Warfield attended a general meeting of the society and informed us what was occurring.

CHAIR—Can I in the last couple of minutes raise the issue of the siting of the property in terms of the museum. When we looked at the Fremantle barracks in Western Australia, a property that is in a tourist precinct, we looked at the alternative siting for the museum, which was Hobbs Hall. My comments at that time were that if you were to put the museum at Hobbs Hall, you might as well put it in the Great Sandy Desert: it would have been just as easily accessible there as it would have been at Hobbs Hall—not that I had any qualifications to judge that. But it seems to me that the site at Dudley Street does not overly lend itself to passing traffic and to people attending a museum. I can understand its role for the cadet unit, as a training area for the Living History Foundation or as a storage site, but I cannot understand its role as a museum site. How would you overcome the difficulties there?

Mr Walsh—I do not see any difficulties.

CHAIR—You don't?

Mr Walsh—No. It is close to Ipswich Road on one side and to public transport on the other side. Just down the bottom of the hill there is a bus for the public. Private parking would be in ground. We have spoken to SPACE about buses of tourists coming. It is not even 10 minutes from the city by the freeway, and you have the Juliette Street exit.

CHAIR—It is about 10 minutes from my office. I drove there this morning so I have some idea of that.

Mr Walsh—All right. It is 10 minutes to get there by bus from the city, by tourist buses or whatever, and there is parking in ground. As I said, we spoke to the folk from SPACE and they said they have had heavy trucks coming and going for the last umpteen years. The buses are not going to make that much difference.

CHAIR—I have a broad question: do you see there being some responsibility on Defence, if the property is surplus to their needs, giving it to yourselves or to some other group, or should it be sold commercially to the group or to the state government or another department? We have looked at Defence's portfolio of properties, and it is quite extensive, to say the least. Those properties that do become surplus to their needs they reasonably can expect to get rid of, and I do not think most people would put too great an obstacle in their path. I understand that there are heritage issues allegedly associated with this site, and let's not get into that. But how should Defence approach these issues? What should they do?

Mr Catchpole—As an architect with the Department of Public Works dealing with this type of disposal of assets situation regularly, I do not think that any of these community groups are for a second suggesting that Defence should just hand this over and that they are this benevolent benefactor somewhere down in Canberra. It is more about demonstrating, on this particular site, that there is a broad based depth of community feeling in relation to how this site could be, has been and should be utilised in the future. The nuts and bolts and the mechanics of how that becomes a transfer to the council, the state government or whatever is something that we would certainly be interested in participating in, and that is probably why we are all sitting here today: the fact that no-one has really said, 'We are interested in heading down that path; let's all sit around a table and thrash something out.' There is a number of mechanisms in relation to, for

example, state government custodianship of that particular site that could be examined. I think at the moment no-one is asking those questions, so we are not in a position to really give you—

CHAIR—No, that is fair enough and that is why I posed the question. There will be an expectation out there in the community that if enough community groups get together and there is a Defence Estate property up for disposal, then there will become some sort of obligation on the part of Defence to naturally hand over that property to interested local community groups. Whilst in theory that may be nice, the practicalities of that become absolutely onerous upon Defence.

Mr Walsh—Our society does not view it as the society owning the property or anybody else owning the property other than federal, state or local government, but leased perhaps to us for the purposes that we have put to you. Our main thing is that in the past we have seen many a heritage building listed, even a heritage site. The police barracks in Brisbane is one. The developers bought it or it was sold to a youth hostel. It is heritage listed. Have a look at it now: it has been left to go derelict. All the developer is waiting for is when it gets to the point where it has got to be knocked down. How many heritage buildings have we seen that with? It has happened. The Woolloongabba Police Station was on the way until the state government got stuck in and had Q-Build do it up and it is now a magnificent looking building.

If we move in there, we would not expect local, state or federal government to be required to maintain it—all right, we would probably be looking at a grant on occasions. One of the reasons we have a problem attracting corporate sponsorship to the Queensland Military Memorial Museum is that we have no long-term accommodation so we cannot say, ‘We are going to be here for a long time’. If we had the place at Dudley Street we could start to attract the corporate dollar, and that would assist with maintenance.

CHAIR—I have one final question about the usage of the site. If it is used by cadets and the Living History Federation after-hours at night—I noticed that there were some residential properties close by—given your comment about local residents complaining about the cadets—

Mr Campbell—Just one person.

CHAIR—Unfortunately, that is all it takes. Are there any impediments to that site being used because it might disturb the peace of local neighbours at night?

Mr Walsh—That has been going on since 1913.

CHAIR—I would not expect it at night.

Mr Walsh—Yes, the Army Reserve parade on Tuesday nights.

CHAIR—Army Reserve, yes.

Mr Walsh—Remember that it is an Army Reserve depot, not Regular Army—and on weekends.

Mr Campbell—I think the point to make from the point of view of cadets is that we have a pressing and urgent need. It may very well be that community attitudes change. At the moment, the community has invited our ongoing and active interest in that particular site—our participation in it—but I know that we cannot guarantee that that will go on. We have an immediate need, and it may be that Dudley Street ultimately will not fulfil it. However, it is there and it will fulfil that need if we are given the opportunity to occupy it.

CHAIR—We thank you and those other people who have presented evidence to the committee today. I think it is an important part of the process that people can come along and have their arguments heard reasonably. I assure you that Defence Estate will appear before us again in Canberra at some time in the future. We have not set down a further hearing date with them. They will undoubtedly look closely at the evidence that has been presented today and will offer a counter view—you have no doubt about that. We will await their evidence at that time and we will take all the evidence into consideration in drafting our report. We genuinely appreciate the effort that you have made today, and I am sure that I speak on behalf of my colleagues Senator Lightfoot and Senator West when I say that we have appreciated the entire day's proceedings.

Committee adjourned at 4.49 p.m.