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Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

**Reference: Development of off-base housing for Defence at Adamstown, Newcastle,
New South Wales**

FRIDAY, 7 MARCH 2003

NEWCASTLE

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Friday, 7 March 2003

Members: Mrs Moylan (*Chair*), Mr O'Connor (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Colbeck, Ferguson and Forshaw and Mr Jenkins, Mr Lindsay, Mr Lloyd and Mr Ripoll

Senators and members in attendance: Senators Colbeck, Ferguson and Forshaw and Mr Lindsay, Mrs Moylan, Mr O'Connor and Mr Ripoll

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Development of off-base housing for Defence at Adamstown, Newcastle.

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Committee met at 10.37 a.m.

BEAR, Mr Richard James, General Manager, Development and Sales, Defence Housing Authority

CHAMBERS, Mr Matthew John, Regional Manager, Hunter Valley Housing Management Centre, Defence Housing Authority

FARNSWORTH, Wing Commander Ian, Base Commander, RAAF Base Williamtown, Royal Australian Air Force, Defence Housing Authority

LYON, Mr Keith, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Defence Housing Authority

MILES, Mr Philip Andrew, National Manager, Development, Defence Housing Authority

SHARP, Ms Irena, Project Manager, Defence Housing Authority

TWINEY, Mr Peter Michael, Director, Masson Wilson Twiney

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing into the proposed development of off-base housing for Defence at Adamstown Newcastle, New South Wales and welcome you all to this hearing. The project was referred to the Public Works committee on 11 December 2002 for consideration and report to the parliament. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969:

- (3) In considering and reporting on a public work, the Committee shall have regard to—
- (a) the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - (b) the necessity for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
 - (c) the most effective use that can be made, in the carrying out of the work, of the moneys to be expended on the work;
 - (d) where the work purports to be of a revenue-producing character, the amount of revenue that it may reasonably be expected to produce; and
 - (e) the present and prospective public value of the work.

The committee was appreciative of Defence Housing Authority's cooperation this morning in arranging for us to have a briefing on site and for us to look at the proposed site.

We are now going to hear evidence from the Defence Housing Authority, the Adamstown Residents Action Group, the Adamstown Community Forum, Defence Families of Australia and the Merewether Golf Club. I now call on representatives of the Defence Housing Authority who, I understand, have been sworn in by the executive assistant. I welcome you all.

The committee has received a submission and a supplementary submission from the Defence Housing Authority. These submissions will be made available in a volume of submissions for

the inquiry. They are also available on the committee's web site. Do you wish to make any amendments to the submission you have made to the committee?

Mr Lyon—No.

CHAIR—I invite you now to make a brief opening statement to your submission, after which we will proceed to questions.

Mr Lyon—I will be very brief. Essentially, this is a 72-house development on a site that the Defence Housing Authority was able to directly purchase from the defence department. For us, it is a very important development because we have insufficient numbers of houses within the Newcastle city area. It is important for us to be able to provide housing for those members of the Defence Force who have particularly a need to live closer to the city. In terms of retention, spouse employment is an important factor, as is children's education. We are excited about this development, which will add an important string to our ability to supply the ADF.

CHAIR—I will start off with the questions. I noticed in reading through the engineer's report that there were issues about what might or might not be in the land that could be of concern. Will the Defence Housing Authority be undertaking the validation testing that is recommended in the soil and contamination report, following the removal of the coal/tar base bitumen in particular?

Ms Sharp—Yes. We have actually decided to undertake the investigation prior to the removal of the slabs because we found a way of coring through the slabs and then taking samples from underneath. The preliminary reports that have come through have cleared it. There is no accumulation underneath the slabs that could pose any threat to the development from now on.

CHAIR—There seemed to be two issues in relation to the land and perhaps future difficulties or problems. One was in relation to soil contamination and most of that looks reasonable, apart from this one recommendation. The other was in relation to the fact that someone somewhere mentioned a termite mound. I think that was in the valuation, in fact. Is there a termite mound there? Does that create problems some time down the track?

Mr Chambers—Termites are an issue right across the community. It is not simply on that site. They are an increasing problem since organochlorides were banned about five or six years ago. That will obviously be treated. All of the houses will have a whole-of-life treatment against termites. If they are there now and they are cleared, there is no guarantee they will not be back again in years to come.

CHAIR—Thank you. There are quite a lot of other questions.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I have been reading the correspondence to the general manager of Newcastle City Council from the Adamstown Residents Action Group, the author of which is John Davies. He indicates in that letter, which is an exhibit for us to examine that:

While both bodies—

and he is referring to the Defence Housing Authority and the council—

might consider that consultation with the community is occurring, residents unanimously are of the view that none of the concerns expressed by residents on the 21st October or again on the 28th October are being incorporated into the DCP process.

That leads me to ask a number of questions. Do you consider to have had proper regard for the concerns raised by the residents and in particular those raised formerly by the residents action group? In what way did you deal with those matters?

Ms Sharp—We certainly have been present at the public consultation hearings. All the issues that were raised during those public consultations were further discussed with the Newcastle City Council through written and oral correspondence. We certainly have received their written correspondence, which clarifies that issues raised were dealt with through the development control plan and the development that is proposed is not going to oppose any of those issues or create any bigger issues. We certainly have the support from the Newcastle City Council that all the procedures that we had to go through have been followed.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—For example, they make comment on concerns with the density of traffic that might arise on Brunner Road. What measures will be taken to address those concerns?

Ms Sharp—We have a traffic report that was done for this particular site and certainly this is not the only traffic report that was done since we looked at the site. There were two others which provide the same information with the same resolution on what should be done on site. Those traffic reports were given to the Newcastle City Council. Under their direction, we have been advised that what we are proposing is suitable for the development.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Another question I would like to ask formally relates to the construction of the roundabout. Can a satisfactory roundabout be built without resumption of land from local residents?

Ms Sharp—Absolutely, we are not looking into taking out any land from the existing residences across the road.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—And will the size of the roundabout prevent the passage of buses along Brunner Road?

Ms Sharp—We believe so; that is the advice we have been given by our traffic consultants and it has been supported by the council.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—That matter of the buses is referred to in your submission, is it?

Ms Sharp—Yes.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I am having a look at the design and plan this morning. Clearly there is an open space area which is, I suppose, a good thing. However, the open space area is adjacent to the golf course. Are there concerns about the use of the open space and wayward golf balls, particularly for children who might be playing in the open space? How will that be addressed?

Mr Lyon—That is an issue that we have discussed with the council. The detailed planning arrangements in respect to that open space will necessarily need to address the golf course aspect.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—So what is going to happen in respect to that?

Mr Lyon—It will be essentially tied up in the detailed design arrangements that we will need to finalise. The golf course is obviously responsible for keeping golf balls on the course and that will be addressed in the final details.

Ms Sharp—In the course of the development control plan being put forward and the design of that area, we have had the design reviewed by a golf course architect who supports that the area provided is a sufficient buffer zone to the golf course and the intent in the landscaping of that area will, in fact, provide further control to the golf balls and also detract from any active use of the area.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You referred earlier to the fact that the traffic report was given to the council. Has it been made available to the community and community groups?

Ms Sharp—During the public consultation that we have undertaken, of which there were two, we were not told that those reports were to form part of that public consultation. However, the exhibition period of the development control plan is actually the formal exhibition period of all the documents that have been created to date and that is the time when all the reports are going to be on display at the council and open for viewing by public and other authorities.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—So the community groups have not received the traffic report?

Mr Bear—They have been provided to the committee and they are displayed on your web site as a public document.

CHAIR—Is there some problem in making them available?

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—In your response to some of the comments made by the residents action group, your view is that there are no substantive issues raised. But it would seem important that, in terms of consulting properly, you would provide reports that you rely upon to refute their assertions.

Ms Sharp—That is certainly why the exhibition period is very important. It takes 28 days and it is open to public as well as other authorities to review the documentation that we have done so far.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—When does that start and finish?

Ms Sharp—That starts on Monday, 10 March and finishes on 7 April.

Senator COLBECK—Is that a fixed period?

Ms Sharp—No, it is a minimum 28-day period.

Senator COLBECK—What are the potential extensions that might occur from that? What could be the time frame for achieving planning approval?

Mr Chambers—Normally, it is a statutory period of 28 days for the exhibition of a draft plan. During that time, anybody can comment. If there were significant issues raised and somebody required or asked for an extension, council could provide an extension. The likelihood of that is anybody's guess, but I think it is probably unlikely. Council would then consider the submissions that they have received. A report would then come to the councillors to either adopt or otherwise the development control plan.

Senator COLBECK—Is council obliged to make a decision on the proposal within 28 days?

Mr Chambers—No, they are not.

Senator COLBECK—Is there a time frame within which council is obliged to make a decision on the proposal?

Mr Chambers—Not on a development control plan.

Mr Bear—That is where the uncertainties come in that we were talking about.

Mr Chambers—Just to clarify, as opposed to a development application, which a developer would normally lodge, where there is a statutory period of 42 days for council to make a determination, with a development control plan, it is council's development control plan—it is not ours—and they are consulting with the community. What we have now is the community consultation period. It is important to understand that the consultation that we had with the community in October and December was done at our behest so that we could find out what the issues were from the community so that they could be incorporated into the draft. The actual period of community consultation starts from Monday when the plan is exhibited.

Senator FERGUSON—I want to clear up one or two things about the golf course. Mr Lyon, I wish I could keep all my balls on the golf course but I cannot. Where it is adjacent it is a short par three hole anyway, isn't it?

Mr Chambers—Yes, it is.

Senator FERGUSON—As I understand it, the houses do not go up as far as the full length of that par three hole anyway—they stop well short of the green.

Mr Chambers—Probably about 50 per cent of the distance.

Senator FERGUSON—So the likelihood of—

Senator FORSHAW—About your driving range.

Senator FERGUSON—I have been hit from 50 metres and it is not too bad. However, it is only a short distance. In other words, it would be a mishit of a very short nature that is likely to go over the fence and they would have to slice it a fair way anyway.

Mr Chambers—That is correct.

Senator FERGUSON—So you consider that the danger from activities on the golf course is almost nonexistent.

Ms Sharp—Certainly this additional report, which was supported by the golf course architect who analysed the proposal, suggested that the area that is most likely to have the golf balls go into be heavily vegetated to help that and prevent them from going any further.

Senator FERGUSON—So, in general terms, is the golf club supportive of the project?

Ms Sharp—That is my understanding, yes. Through the consultation that we have had with them so far and through the provision of the water to the golf course, we see that there are benefits for both the golf course and the DHA if this development goes ahead.

Senator FERGUSON—From the other people who have made submissions to us, I understand that the council itself is very supportive of the development—

Mr Lyon—The council has not decided formally. What we have done—and I will table a letter from the council—is work closely with council officers in following the processes that are required to achieve the approvals that are required. That has included consultation, but the council will not make a decision on this until the processes are completed.

Senator FERGUSON—So you do not know whether the council is supportive or not.

Mr Lyon—Until the council makes a decision, the answer is exactly that. At this stage, the council has approved the development control plan to go out to community consultation. That is the first step that in the process that is required.

Senator FERGUSON—Defence Force families are very supportive of the project?

Mr Lyon—Yes, we have a letter from a Defence Force family. I think the wing commander can give you more information.

Wing Cmdr Farnsworth—I can endorse that comment. DHA seems to be responding to our needs, which is very good. We would certainly enjoy adding to the bulk of houses in the Newcastle area. There seems to be a mismatch with the number of houses in other areas compared with Newcastle. I would love to come and live at Adamstown or central Newcastle. It is the sort of housing we need for mature members who have secondary school age children, university students or spouses who need employment.

Senator FERGUSON—And you would be quite happy to drive 45 or 60 minutes to work?

Wing Cmdr Farnsworth—It is probably more like 30 to 45 minutes, from what I have seen. That is equivalent to the sort of drive that we experience going to the Nelson Bay area—we have the most houses in the Nelson Bay area—and also to the Maitland area. It is pretty well equivalent.

Mr Chambers—The geography of Williamtown is such that, being an airbase, the nearest residential development is about seven or eight kilometres away, and the next nearest residential development is a good 20 kilometres away. Before you get to the first suburb of Newcastle, you are 15 kilometres from the base. Because the area around the air base is either water-bored or subject to inundation, you have got very limited opportunities.

Senator FERGUSON—What about the issue that was raised by one of the groups in relation to threatened species of flora and fauna? Have you had consultation about that?

Ms Sharp—Yes. We have done an extensive analysis of the area regarding flora and fauna. Most plant species were identified as, most likely, having been planted—not native to the area. The explanation for the two species of fauna is that, because of the limited vegetation on the site, it is highly unlikely that those species are nesting on site; they are nesting somewhere else and therefore they are just passing through the area. Therefore, they were not considered as a threatened species on this site.

Senator FERGUSON—And there is a national park just across—

Ms Sharp—Yes. And the golf course.

Mr LINDSAY—I refer to the first submission that you made to the committee. You discuss a number of possible options on how to deliver the accommodation requirements and you conclude that constructed housing, delivered through bulk procurement contracts, is the most effective provisioning option. Can you explain why that is the case?

Mr Lyon—Yes. When we are able to get access to a site and do the construction ourselves, the authority is able to take advantage of the development profit element, which it is unable to do if we directly purchase a house or acquire it in another way. One of the tests that we apply in this—and we will provide more information to the committee—is the development margin that we expect to make.

Mr LINDSAY—On the matter of Aboriginal assessment, at 10.3 you say that the study concluded that there were no significant historic heritage constraints to the proposal; but the reports that were provided did say that, while there was nothing on the surface, Aboriginal heritage could exist. Is that a significant problem?

Ms Sharp—We have commissioned further investigation on site within the area that was identified in that report and the outcome of the sample testing done was that no Aboriginal heritage items were found.

Mr Chambers—I think five or six 303 cases were found and, as you might be aware, that area was used as a rifle range back in the 1940s.

Mr LINDSAY—In two places in your submission you say that a financial analysis confirms that overall the construction project is feasible within a certain budget. Evidence that you have given privately indicates that that is not correct. Do you agree?

Mr Lyon—It is correct in terms of the coverage of the construction. What that does not provide is the cost of land and other financing costs associated with the development.

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to community consultation and the golf club, you have said that the club has no objections to the development—but it actually does. In its report it says that it does not want an easement onto the golf course. Do you agree with that?

Ms Sharp—In our consultation with the golf club, there was no objection to the development itself. The issue that we are looking at at the moment is the green area, or the buffer zone, and the use of that area and the transfer of water onto the existing golf club dam. The easement you mentioned is the easement we have been discussing for getting the water off our site into the dam of the golf club.

Mr LINDSAY—But if the golf club is saying that they do not want it, how are you going to do it?

Ms Sharp—We have been talking about this—

Mr LINDSAY—They have formally written to the committee.

Mr Chambers—I think what they are addressing there is that the golf club would actually like us to transfer ownership of the piece of land that we are talking about as a green space, as a buffer, and then they would fence it and that would prohibit any movement onto that site and therefore give greater protection to the golf course. I understand that that is the issue.

Senator FORSHAW—So the golfers can retrieve their golf balls.

Mr LINDSAY—Their issue is the pedestrian access, should it be provided.

Mr Bear—Our submission said that pedestrian access and links would be provided throughout the site. They have said, ‘We trust this does not mean access from the site to the golf course’—and it does not mean that.

Senator FORSHAW—It might sound like an obvious point, but it is an important point given that, as any golfer knows, if you hit your ball over the fence, if you can find a way to go and get it, you will. That would mean that there would be no access at all for golfers to leave the course and get onto the site in some way.

Mr Bear—That is correct.

Ms Sharp—As they do not now.

Senator FORSHAW—They don’t now? I did not get to see the actual—

Mr LINDSAY—This is a development that will be only defence families. You know my background in Townsville and what happens when you produce developments that are only defence families. Have you considered that particular problem?

Mr Lyon—Yes, quite carefully. As a general rule, we seek to spread members of the ADF and their families throughout the community. But on some occasions it is simply not possible to do that because you cannot provide housing in another way. We have had a small number of proposals where there have been concentrated developments that the committee has considered. They have been quite successful. There were 50 townhouses in Stirling in the ACT and the Carey Street development, which we have just completed. There was another major development just outside the Enoggera base for similar reasons. Our preference is not to do this but we envisage that, because of the shortage of land in the Newcastle area, there really is not an acceptable alternative.

Mr LINDSAY—The Adamstown Residents Action Group suggested that the way you are subdividing the site does not produce the optimum return or value for the land. What is your response to that?

Mr Lyon—I think I would agree with that in this sense. What we are seeking to optimise is the amenity value for the families concerned. I believe this site would allow a developer to have higher density than what we are actually proposing. So from that point of view I think there is some truth in those comments.

Mr LINDSAY—Okay. In Mr Bear's response to their submission, which was a two-page document, there was no response to them raising issues in relation to traffic. Is there some reason for that?

Mr Bear—There is no specific reason.

Mr Chambers—A briefing that was prepared by council officers for the councillors of Newcastle addressed the issues of traffic that had been raised in the community consultations. In their view—council officers and traffic engineers—the traffic is not being generated from the Adamstown suburb; it is being generated from outside the suburb and it is traffic flowing along Bruncker Road and using other access roads as short cuts. If you look at the graph of the demographics of Adamstown, the population has been declining. Our development, based on 2½ people per house, would not bring the population of Adamstown back up to pre-1996 levels.

Mr LINDSAY—Finally, when we talked earlier about sale and lease back, you talked about limiting the Commonwealth's equity in housing. You talked about the possibility of some sale and lease back. You said that it is a very cost-effective way of providing housing in this industry. What limits the amount of property you sell for lease back?

Mr Lyon—There are three factors. The first is we have identified some of our stock as being strategic stock that is located in areas where we simply could not replace the land. That is primarily housing very close to military bases—places like Holsworthy, Wattle Grove. That is very close to housing at Holsworthy in Sydney. The second area relates to land that may not be close to bases but is located in areas where land is also very difficult to acquire. For example, at this stage we have decided to put on sale and lease back only half the housing at Stirling in the ACT, which is the development we went through. The third factor is that DHA needs to

maintain about \$1.2 billion of equity in its business. We prefer to hold that in areas where there is a long-term demand and it is commercially sensible.

Mr LINDSAY—This is a very intensive development. Some of the blocks are called executive properties, which I guess is officer accommodation. Do you see any problem in having officer accommodation in with other ranks accommodation?

Wing Cmdr Farnsworth—No. Close proximity traditionally occurred on base. Certainly the trend these days is for much more mixing of ranks—combined messes are the go—and I do not see an issue at all.

Senator COLBECK—I am still a bit concerned about the approval process through council. Is it possible for you to present to us at another time a proposed critical path or program of some sort that would give us an indication of your time lines for the processes that you are looking to undertake? You indicated before a potential tender period which, at this point in time, would have to be subject to quite a few conditions; so I would appreciate provision of that.

Mr Lyon—Yes, we will provide that.

CHAIR—Senator Colbeck, I think that ought to come in as part of the proper feasibility study, because the time it takes to develop will obviously affect the final figures in relation to feasibility.

Senator COLBECK—That is one of the other reasons why I want to have a look at that—because it impacted on questions I asked earlier in the private session. What involvement or what level of consultation have you had with local government with respect to the traffic management issues that would arise?

Ms Sharp—It was mainly through the Newcastle City Council and their traffic engineers, and they would then discuss those issues directly with the RTA. From their point of view, traffic was identified as an issue which is of great concern for Adamstown as a whole suburb rather than an implication of the site going into Adamstown.

Senator COLBECK—So the intersection treatments that you are looking to implement as part of the proposal would have been developed in consultation with the city council?

Ms Sharp—Absolutely.

Senator COLBECK—What about issues of access to things like the clinic that is just across the road from the site?

Ms Sharp—At the moment both sides of Bruncker Road have provision for parking. Our development on our side of Bruncker Road will not impose on that, due to the orientation of the buildings and townhouses. They are only going to have pedestrian access; all of the vehicular access is going to be within the development, at the back of those houses. So we are not looking at eliminating parking on Bruncker Road.

Senator COLBECK—What about the effects on access to sites, though, from traffic mitigation at the second access?

Ms Sharp—We may lose one or two parking spots.

Senator COLBECK—I am not talking about parking spots; I am talking about access to properties—the clinic, say, whose access is very close to the intersection, or a house directly opposite the intersection whose access could potentially be affected if, for example, a centre median strip were put in that location.

Mr Lyon—We are getting into some areas where we would prefer the committee to call an expert who has helped us to develop this.

Senator COLBECK—I am concerned about site access provisions for properties across the road from the second access, particularly the clinic and the residence that is almost directly opposite, and how access to those might be impacted on by traffic mitigation provisions.

Mr Twiney—The detailed design of these arrangements has not been made yet. At the secondary access, the intention would be for there to be a short median within the road to make the access left in and left out only. The location of that would be placed so as to minimise any effect on any driveways on the other side of the road. I think we may lose one or two parking spaces on the development side of the road, but it will have very little effect on the other side of the road. At the roundabout, again, there might be the loss of one or two parking spaces immediately to the north of the roundabout on the other side of the road, but the actual access to that area will be very little affected.

Senator COLBECK—So you are satisfied that you can design the traffic issues around that second access so that access to the clinic would not be severely impeded from both directions?

Mr Twiney—That is correct.

Senator FORSHAW—The proposal is for 72 dwellings—apartments, houses or combinations thereof. How did you arrive at that figure? Obviously the architects designed the proposal, but what, for instance, would be the limit on the number of dwellings that would be allowed on this site under council planning laws?

Ms Sharp—We looked at a number of scenarios from over 100 dwellings to 60 dwellings. This particular scenario was most attractive because it allowed us to provide the kind of housing our tenants prefer, which is single-storey predominantly detached housing with larger backyards. We were not looking to maximise the potential development of this site but to provide for our tenants' needs. As part of alternative accommodation, we have included some townhouses in the development as well.

Mr Chambers—Perhaps I could just add that the Newcastle local environmental plan would allow you to construct something in the order of 125 dwellings on that site.

Senator FORSHAW—But that would be mostly multistorey development, wouldn't it?

Ms Sharp—Townhouse type development, yes.

Senator FORSHAW—Which would then be catering presumably for a different lifestyle, maybe an older population or something like that. Looking at the drawings you have provided, some of the dwellings seem to have a reasonable amount of backyard space and others not much at all. Can you give us some indication of why there is no consistency, at least in the single-dwelling accommodation, in the amount of backyard space or open space within each dwelling?

Ms Sharp—We are looking to provide a variety of dwellings with a variety of land sizes around them. Courtyard type houses are preferred by some members, because maintenance issues concerning the backyard are not as intrusive. The development itself and the breakdown of the size of the lots that we have provided are certainly within the statistics shown for Adamstown itself. So some of the properties—I think there are probably 10 out of 72—certainly fit into a smaller sized lot description.

Mr Chambers—About 50 per cent of the lots on the site are between 250 square metres and 500 square metres, and 50 per cent are larger than 500 square metres. Typically these days the lots in a residential subdivision will be around 550 square metres to 600 square metres. In urban areas, closer to the city, the typical lot sizes around Adamstown and Newcastle are much smaller than 550 square metres; the bulk of them are around the 400 square metre to 500 square metre mark. So it is in keeping with the character of the area.

Ms Sharp—The dwelling types will vary and will respond to the size of the blocks. The dwellings proposed for the smaller blocks are what we call courtyard type, which concentrate all the living areas around a central courtyard. The size of the block is not such an issue, because that is the kind of dwelling we are proposing.

Senator FORSHAW—Mr Lyon, did you have a minimum requirement for the number of dwellings that should be able to be put on this site? I would also be interested in an indication of how many people—defence personnel and families—you expect to live in this development. Obviously there are different family sizes, but you must be able to give some indication of the number of people who could be resident there.

Mr Lyon—I am not sure I completely understand your question.

Senator FORSHAW—I want to know how many people will be living in this place and your expectation of the number of children.

Mr Chambers—I guess we are really talking about the demographics of defence families.

Senator FORSHAW—Exactly.

Mr Chambers—I suppose they are not much different from the national demographics these days, and that means 2.5 children. I am not sure where the 0.5 fits.

Senator FORSHAW—Smaller backyards, maybe.

Mr Chambers—In general terms, that is what we would be planning on for each house. It may be so to a lesser or greater extent, but it is difficult to give an answer other than that.

Senator FORSHAW—I do not want to spend a lot of time on this, but I would not have thought it would be that difficult. I know you cannot be certain about the size of each family, but we know that you can do planning estimates and so on. That is why I asked the first question. Did you have some minimum requirement in regard to what you wanted to get out of this development in terms of providing housing for defence personnel, which you say is a problem in this area? Did you need 72 dwellings, 60—what was it?

Mr Chambers—I think the answer is that we did not have a minimum requirement. It was a matter of looking at the site and its constraints to see what would be the optimum development for that site. With our other housing in the region, in localities like Medowie, East Maitland, Raymond Terrace and Salamander Bay, we try to give our tenants some choice. Some families would prefer to live in the city and be on a smaller block because they have high school aged children or want access to employment or whatever. Other families with younger children would much rather be on a 600 square metre block in Medowie, which has a more rural atmosphere. So the simple answer is that I do not think we had a finite number in mind when we started. It was a matter of looking at the site and determining the best outcome for that site.

Senator FORSHAW—You might want to take this on notice. I would like an indication of your expectation about the number of children—obviously it could be a range—likely to be resident on the development.

Mr Lyon—We will provide you with further information on that.

Mr RIPOLL—In terms of the actual density, looking at the map, it does appear quite dense, and I accept what you are saying about keeping in line with the rest of the community, but there is probably also a bit of expectation that there will be some surface there. Given that the open space down the bottom is not actually going to be useable, I am a bit concerned about there being good access or some sort of open space, bigger backyards or something just to give people some room. I do not necessarily need a comment on that one because it has already been discussed.

There are some issues that I had, though. With regard to the size of the streets, they are going to be reasonably small, tight streets, which is quite common again in new developments. Given that we are talking about average families, Defence Force people more than likely will have two cars per household, maybe three in some cases. There will be problems if the people have friends over and there will be problems just with the normal activities that you will find in any community. You are going to find navigating the streets a bit tight. So maybe we could have a comment from the traffic people or anybody in terms of how we are going to get all these cars in and out and parked.

Mr Chambers—All the houses will have double garages, and the setbacks will be six metres so that you can actually get stacked parking in there as well.

Ms Sharp—Certainly the roads are conforming with the AMCORD standards. The size of 5.5 allows for one vehicle to be parked and another vehicle to be driven around it.

Mr Twiney—It is just worth commenting that the idea is to have quite a lot of on-street car parking available for visitors, to make going through the roads fairly torturous in order to keep the speeds low, so that there is a low-speed environment throughout the whole of the estate. It is a very deliberate feature of the road design.

Mr RIPOLL—There are only two access points in and out, one where the roundabout will be and the other one where there is a left in and left out only. This is all the one community; they are roughly all going to leave for work at the same time, give or take a little bit of flexibility there. At the end of the day, most of them are going to want to go and do things roughly at the same time. Most will head towards one of those exits and it might actually be a problem trying to get out even on a roundabout if you have busy traffic on the road. Brunner Road is a main road, and I think you are going to be sitting there for a long time. Once you get three or four cars built up, it will take a fair while to get out.

Mr Twiney—There will be some delay, particularly for the right turn out of the estate. But the analysis that we have done shows that we have a thing called a level of service of the operation of the intersection: A is very good; F is very bad. The modelling shows that it is a level of service B.

Mr RIPOLL—I thought you were going to say it was a G.

Mr Twiney—So it is not the absolute best, but it is worth getting it into context that the overall site, when fully developed, will be expected to generate something like 60 vehicle trips in a peak hour. Currently, Brunner Road carries about 1,200 vehicles an hour in the peak. So it is a comparatively minor change but, you are right, there is a bit of delay for the right turn.

Mr RIPOLL—That occurs to me from just looking at it. The only other query that I have in relation to that would be the possibility, along Military Road, of another exit point out there, giving it three exit points. I wonder whether that would be a possibility if the funding were investigated.

Mr Twiney—My understanding is that Military Road is a private road and it is fairly unusual to have access over a private road. There would be need for rights of ways and so on.

Mr RIPOLL—Who owns the road?

Mr Chambers—The Department of Defence. It is their entry into the multiuser depot.

Mr RIPOLL—But it is not fenced off. It is a private road and the defence department own it, but you do not have to open a gate to get out. It is not such a private road that it is on private ground, that it is within a fenced area.

Mr Chambers—No.

Mr RIPOLL—It is accessible. People can drive down there, have a bit of a look and drive back out?

Mr Chambers—It is. There is a gate further down where the depot starts, where the car park starts. But Defence wish to keep that road for traffic in and out of the depot because they have trucks and heavy vehicles coming in and out of there and they do not want that to be used as access to the development.

Mr RIPOLL—I just think it would be something worth while having a look at. If you have a look at the parallel road to Brunner Road, by just removing one lot, you could actually have a road that goes straight out onto Military Road, given that it is going to be a Defence establishment here anyway.

Mr Chambers—But then you would have Rifle Street, which is used by local traffic, and Military Road staggered rather than having a roundabout, and I think that was the issue, was it not, as well?

Mr Twiney—Certainly, if you went that way, you probably would not have the roundabout solution that we have put forward. You might think about an alternative solution for the Military Road access. I think it is one or the other. I do not think you would have both.

Mr RIPOLL—That is fine. Finally, in terms of this open space again: there seems to be a real question about the safety of using that open space in terms of golf balls. On the one hand, some people are saying that there is no safety issue, because of the distance and because you are not going to have many balls going into that area. On the other hand, other people are saying that it is best not to use it for anything because it is dangerous. I am not sure whether it is dangerous or not, but I would like to see something placed down there. Barriers can easily be erected to prevent balls coming across—especially if it is only a short area—just to make that useable. There is not going to be much point having an open space if it is not useable. And of course there are issues of liability and so forth.

Mr Lyon—We will take that suggestion on board.

Senator FERGUSON—Does defence housing have a policy of giving preference to families with children to three- and four-bedroom homes?

Mr Lyon—The policy is set by the Department of Defence. The minimum size for our standard house now is a three-bedroom house for married members. We do offer some two-bedroom units or townhouses in other locations, but they are selected purely on the basis of choice by the ADF member.

Mr Chambers—There is a determination in the defence policy as to whether a member qualifies for a three-bedroom entitlement or a four-bedroom entitlement. It is determined by the family structure.

Wing Cmdr Farnsworth—And seniority.

Senator FERGUSON—Is it likely, for instance, in building this new development, that a four-bedroom home would be offered to a couple without children?

Mr Chambers—It is possible. In the first instance, we would be looking to offer that house to a family with children. If there was not a family with children wanting to live in that area, then we would step back and offer it to somebody who might have only one or two children. While that is the policy and the way we look to allocate houses, defence families prefer wherever possible, because they are mobile and they are often away from their family support, to have a spare bedroom so that parents and the like can come and stay.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[11.35 a.m.]

DAVIES, Mr John Thomas, Honorary Secretary, Adamstown Residents Action Group

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your original submission?

Mr Davies—I have and it is being passed around.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr Davies—Thank you very much. I will read the submission, it should only take a moment or two. The submission by the Adamstown Residents Action Group seeks to encourage the committee to critically examine the DHA's current proposal in the light of the committee's terms of reference. I will not go through those specifically, but I have listed them and they are the elements that I believe are relevant for us. Broadly, the community's concern over this proposal boils down to three specific areas but the principal issue is density. Some of these are covered in the earlier submission but they are worth while going through again. We are conscious that this is a site that some housing will be placed on. In fact, our group has put forward a proposal of what we think would be appropriate for the site, so you have got that contained on it. While residents are not opposed to some housing development, we are concerned about the 72 residences on the site. In particular we are concerned about the ongoing impact on the community. It occurs to me that when we looked at the DHA proposal, it constantly focused on the site rather than looked at it in the context of how it fitted into the community and its impact.

This development will impact on already strained traffic flows in Brunker Road, principally during peak hour. It is not uncommon for peak hour traffic to bank up past Rifle Street and back to South Street. Unfortunately I do not have a map to confirm that, but that is past Military Road. There is also a risk of injury to the public from the intended access proposals. While claiming to be a development for defence housing—and while I have listened to some of the comments today, I have also attended two meetings at which defence housing has indicated that its aim is initially 100 per cent but within five years to reduce its numbers to 30 per cent—it provides no open space and it leaves it to the local region to accommodate the new residents' recreational needs by way of a park. The only park that was identified in their proposal was Connell Park, which is shared with a high-voltage transformer and switchgear. I believe that transformer is a 33,000-volt transformer and I can tell you I would not be happy with my children playing in that park.

We are surprised that a body claiming to have so professionally developed its proposals should ignore such simple and obvious safety issues given its claimed concern for the welfare of defence families. This same lack of regard for safety is demonstrated by DHA's assertion that the golf club presents no threats to residents. The fact is this debate has been going on since 1998. Whether it was defence housing or the Department of Defence, the proposal was put forward to develop this site in December 1997 and I was surprised that people are finding that the residents are now complaining. We have been debating this issue for some time.

I will leave it to the Merewether Golf Club to comment about the open land. Suffice it to say, however, that since the first development proposal in 1998, I have personally heard and seen numerous submissions made in the presence of defence personnel by the Merewether Golf Club stressing the concerns there.

Within the development, the DHA—and I will not go through this point in detail, I have made the point about the roads—has confirmed today that its 12.5 metre road reserve, which is noted in the DCP for council, in fact means a 5.2 metre wide road. We note that a 5.2 metre wide road would not allow a car to drive between two parked cars. It is insufficient for the purposes of 180 residents, which is in fact in the DHA's proposal to council. But, if we listen to today's proposal, they really mean 324 residents based on the numbers quoted.

Effectively, residents lack confidence in what we have been told and what we have seen. In terms of access to the estate, Bruncker Road is already highly stressed—everyone knows that. I make the point that our view is that Military Road should be used, with a set of lights installed. Our reasons for that are that it would help to slow and regulate the traffic on Bruncker Road and improve flows of traffic from Rifle Street. The council officers have a word for this side traffic—they call them rat runners, which seems a rather peculiar way of describing drivers. We currently have a lot of traffic going through our side roads, and Rifle Street currently can get quite congested in the morning.

Having lights would help to improve and regulate the flow. It would provide safe access for residents in the new estate, and I note the point that 72 houses with one car leaving the estate each morning means quite a traffic jam somewhere in the system. It would also improve the access onto Bruncker Road for the convoys of Defence transports that regularly take learner drivers onto Bruncker Road. It is not uncommon for us to see a fleet of six or seven 30-tonne trucks weaving their way through Bruncker Road. Having lights there would actually improve safety for defence personnel. We also endorse a second access into Hope Street and out into Lockyer Street, which is not shown on any of the documents from DHA.

The issue regarding the green space is really that, from our point of view, we are seeking a buffer strip along the east-west boundaries—a nature strip that takes the ridge line. Residents do not wish to see a wall of townhouses down Bruncker Road. Again, that highlights the density issues. The Newcastle City Council have a ridge line policy. Obviously, if the officers are willing to accept this proposal, they are prepared to accept it over their own ridge line policy. I have heard the Newcastle City Council's strategic planner say that the ridge line policy would not allow us to build the cathedral that you can see on the hill up there if we were doing it today. In this case here, you probably have the last ridge before you get to the flat areas of Newcastle. I am sure those of you who inspect it would note the heights that it commands. Our view is that a green space should be provided down along Bruncker Road, as there should be between this new development and the Department of Housing properties in Richard Street.

Obviously, all of these family homes have a lot of children. As we said, the local green area down the way—let us not call it a park, although it is called Connell Park—is not really appropriate for large numbers of children to start playing in, given the sorts of utilities that are located on it. We would argue that an open space of probably half a hectare should be allocated. We are not designers—the drawings we have provided to you provide open space, and we have scaled them as best we can off the DHA proposal—so I offer my apologies if they do not measure up. But that is the way we think it could be taken.

Finally, we wish to make the following comments on the economics of the proposal. While the DHA may consider its ownership of the land by virtue of the transfer from the Department of Defence an irresistible reason to subdivide and make profit, the residents consider that the recent property boom is nearing an end. Newcastle already has Honeysuckle yet to be fully realised, while in Adamstown we have significant 2A land on the Humes site in Bailey Street, the new subdivision in Muraban Street, along with the inevitable growth in housing stock from the impact of urban consolidation. DHA are risking significant sums of public money in this scheme, producing, at the end of the day, a very ordinary development. In a tight market residents ask why a more differentiated approach to the land is being ignored. If you visit the site, you will realise that it has potential as a very high-quality estate that will enhance the region and deliver better returns.

The proposal prepared and submitted today, which is the sketch on the back, has arisen from community discussion and provides for 50 to 56 good sized blocks—around 650 square metre blocks—with views to the east and south that would complement the area around the golf club. If you visited that area, you would see that on the opposite side, on the eastern side, is a street called Henry Street. Properties in that area realise up to \$1 million. We view that the state could realise from subdivision and sale of the blocks some \$14 million to \$15 million with good open space and reduced densities.

We really would not want it sold off to a developer, because we would probably have to take the fight to him on the same issues. If the Department of Defence were to plan it as a prestige estate with open spaces, there is ample land in there that could be sold off at a premium. We believe that the cost to the defence department of roads and infrastructure will be well below the \$14 million or \$15 million return—and therefore they should have a profit. If they were to do that, they could spread their acquisition of properties throughout the region and perhaps stagger their investment to get advantage from falling property prices.

We talk about continuing to develop these cells of Department of Defence people. Since September 11 and Bali, and the letters we have received from the Prime Minister advising that we need to be more conscious of security, why is it that DHA are prepared to concentrate into one area one of our most valuable assets—Department of Defence officers—making them potentially a target for any wayward terrorist or whatever who wanted to make a statement? It seems to me that you should not risk all your major assets in one area.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Thanks, Mr Davies, for a very comprehensive submission. Your submission allowed me to ask questions of DHA earlier. My first question is not about your submission but about the body you represent, the Adamstown Residents Action Group. How representative of the community is that group? How many members do you have?

Mr Davies—It is potentially open to anybody within Adamstown who wants to be part of it. We have consistently got between 10 to 15 people at our meetings. As I am sure you would realise, most residents groups swell to huge dimensions when a major issue comes up and generally tick along with those people who are prepared to put the time in. We formed in 1998 as a result of the proposal to subdivide the land, which in particular left residents with concerns about the land to the south—that land you referred to as a national park, which in fact is not a national park.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I did not think I made any reference to it being a national park.

Mr Davies—Sorry. Somebody made a comment about a national park.

Senator FERGUSON—I asked about it.

Mr Davies—When the group was formed, we had 1,100 signatures from residents in the area supporting our case. We are registered with the council as a residents group.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You made some comments about a substation on Connell Park.

Mr Davies—Yes.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—And you mentioned concerns you have about the potential dangers to users of the park.

Mr Davies—Children in particular.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Is there any evidence that you could provide this committee that would be able to substantiate the assertion that that station would endanger children or anyone?

Mr Davies—The evidence I would give has been pretty well debated—and I am sure that the government has committees that look at these issues—and that is the issue of electromagnetic radiation and having high-voltage lines in the vicinity of children. The major lines that run through that area are 132kV lines. The substation is less than that. So, firstly, there is the electromagnetic issues from having children close to those facilities and, secondly, with children and idle hands mischief will always occur.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—When we drove past it today, it seemed to me that it has been there for some time.

Mr Davies—It has—no question.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Aside from this matter, has your action group ever raised concerns about that before?

Mr Davies—No, not previously. As you rightfully say, it has been there a long time. A lot of infrastructure items out there have been there a long time. People know they are there and they accommodate them.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—There was some evidence put that the traffic density is not as great now as it was in 1996. I think that was asserted, though I did not follow it up.

Mr Davies—I am surprised. If you look at the statistics on car ownership in Adamstown, I am sure it would parallel the rest of the nation. If you go back to 1971, you find that our

population has been pretty static—in fact, I think some people have quoted it as falling—and our car numbers have gone up threefold.

Mr RIPOLL—I have a question which goes to your drafting—and it actually does not look too bad to me; it looks all right. Coming out of Military Road, you would only have one way out onto Bruncker Road. So you would have the same problem that existed whether there were lights or a roundabout.

Mr Davies—No. If this proposal were taken up and you put lights on Bruncker Road, you could drive either way—you could go north or south onto Bruncker Road.

Mr RIPOLL—With respect to the Hope Street exit that you have, where would that end up going? We drove past there, but I am not familiar with—

Mr Davies—This is not a scaled drawing.

Mr RIPOLL—That is okay; it is fine.

Mr Davies—I guess all we are saying there is that, if you had an exit through Hope Street, you would then drive left into Richard Street and then onto Lockyer Street and that would give you another access, which would probably also be desirable for safety reasons. If something prevented one road being used, at least there would be access for fire brigades, ambulances et cetera.

Mr RIPOLL—And you do not think there would be any resistance to the Hope Street exit from the existing residents?

Mr Davies—We are very conscious that there is at least one resident there who might have some concerns about it. I think the general view was that it was okay as long as all the traffic did not go through there—that there was a sharing. With residents groups, we come up with what, on balance, people think is a good idea. That is how we arrived at that.

Mr RIPOLL—You also show the other end of Military Road. Where does that go? Does that go into a road?

Mr Davies—The other end of Military Road actually goes down to the base. There is a parking area to the south of that curve that you can see and then onto the base.

Mr RIPOLL—So that does not take you onto a public road?

Mr Davies—No.

Mr RIPOLL—So that would not be used by any traffic?

Mr Davies—It would only be used by traffic from the base, which is generally heavy trucks and the like that they bring through.

Senator FERGUSON—Mr Davies, we went for quite a drive this morning and I do not recall seeing anywhere a green buffer zone in front of a housing development.

Mr Davies—Disappointing.

Senator FERGUSON—Maybe we did not go down the right streets, but I did not see any. Are there many areas where there are green buffer zones in front of developments?

Mr Davies—I guess there are not that many. I can think of one. You probably did not go out to Fletcher. Fletcher is a new estate to the west of Newcastle. If you enter the Fletcher Estate, the road has bushland probably of the order—and I am only guessing this—of 75 metres wide. You enter through a fairly grand entrance area and all the development is behind that bushland.

Senator FERGUSON—What is the price for a block there?

Mr Davies—I am not qualified to comment on that.

Senator FERGUSON—Do any children play in Connell Park at present?

Mr Davies—From time to time I have seen them down there.

Senator FERGUSON—But you would not let your children play there?

Mr Davies—No.

Senator FERGUSON—So there is not much point in having a park there, is there?

Mr Davies—It uses the name ‘park’ but the reason it is there is that there is naturally a requirement for a buffer zone around a substation. It happens to have some grass that grew up on it and the children have said, ‘That’s a good idea; we’ll play some cricket there.’ Nobody told them not to play cricket, and the council eventually called it a park. I think that is exactly what happened.

Senator FERGUSON—Aren’t there some playground amenities? We drove past it and I thought I saw playground amenities there as well.

Mr Davies—Yes, that is right.

Senator FORSHAW—They were put in when you were a kid.

Mr Davies—Absolutely; very old.

Senator FERGUSON—I guess the other question is: what is the present population of Adamstown—around 5,000?

Mr Davies—There are 1,450 residences in what is called Adamstown. In terms of actual numbers, it probably is around 5,000—of that sort of ilk.

Senator FERGUSON—What sorts of numbers did your group swell to when this proposal was first put forward?

Mr Davies—As I said, we had 1,100 signatures supporting our actions, which we presented to the Newcastle City Council and we also advised the then minister.

Senator FERGUSON—How many of those 1,100 actually attended the meetings?

Mr Davies—We had meetings of more than 100 people. When this was first taken to council, Adamstown residents filled all the galleries of the Newcastle City Council and out into the halls. We did not take a count, but it was well over 100.

Senator FERGUSON—I gather from your last paragraph that you do not actually believe that defence housing should have any housing developments where officers and ranks live together in more than perhaps one or two houses.

Mr Davies—My view would be that Defence is part of a broader community, not just Defence. I have friends in the Department of Defence. In fact, my neighbour down the road was from the RAAF base. It is good to blend in, in a mixed community. My only observation on that last point was simply one of noting that we are told that we have to be more secure. So surely, we should have strategies which make our major defence assets, the people, a little more secure.

Senator FERGUSON—Do you think they would be more secure if they were spread out? Do you think we have to get rid of all of our defence establishments and spread them through the community?

Mr Davies—That is a policy decision for the government to take. I can only make a comment.

Senator COLBECK—In your submission, you talk about the capacity of that estate realising in the vicinity of \$14 million to \$15 million if it were subdivided into the configuration that you suggest. How do you reconcile that with your earlier assertion that the housing boom is about to end and currently capacity exists within the market but has not been realised?

Mr Davies—The earlier sentence said that you should look to differentiate. Isn't the old expression with real estate, 'Position, position, position'? I am sure that, if you look at that position, it is one of the prime sites in Newcastle. Simply, the observation is that such a very valuable site should be able to realise the premium end of the market. If you look at its location relative to other premium sites in Newcastle, the Henry Street area, on the opposite side of the golf club, our assessment is that blocks there could realise probably \$250,000 a block, perhaps even more.

I certainly make the point that you can downgrade the value of the site by putting too many dwellings on it, by making the roads too narrow, as has already occurred in other estates we understand—the value of the estate has actually been impacted on by the narrow roads that are proposed here—and the like. It is an observation, an opinion, and it is backed up by the fact that we have been residents of Adamstown a long time and we do follow what happens to property prices around the area.

Senator COLBECK—What is your view of the impact of that course of action on the existing stock?

Mr Davies—Of Department of Defence homes?

Senator COLBECK—If the proposal that you put were followed, what is your view of the impact on the existing stock?

Mr Davies—I think the Department of Defence housing, if armed with a kit of \$14 million or maybe even \$10 million, I would be surprised if they could not, through a combination of lease and perhaps purchase, acquire quite adequate properties around the Hunter. As you would probably all be aware, by simply reading the *Financial Review*, most of the property boom or the money spent on it in the last two years has been in investment properties. If you drive around the Hunter, you would notice an inordinately large amount of properties for lease. At some point, that could result in a crash, and even the head of the Reserve Bank has made utterances suggesting that that is possible.

Senator COLBECK—Are there any members of your group with expertise in urban design principles or traffic management?

Mr Davies—One of our members is a valuer and gave us advice in terms of how an estate might be laid out. The chairman of our group—who is not here today—is a civil engineer and does work laying out roads and things like that. We are not pretending or professing to be experts in this subject; we are just making an observation as residents.

Mr LINDSAY—Mr Davies, where do you live in proximity to this development?

Mr Davies—I live in Montrose Avenue, the south of the development. It is rather difficult to describe it without a map.

Mr LINDSAY—How far?

Mr Davies—Within two kilometres.

Mr LINDSAY—Okay. You heard DHA's evidence earlier, I assume, when I asked them about your comments on improving the value realised from the land. Did you accept what they said?

Mr Davies—They used the argument, 'If I put more onto the site, therefore I get more value.' That may well be true. I noted the comment that they intended to do a bulk job on this. We notice, when we look at the design proposals, skillion roofs and other assorted bits of the development which suggest to us that they are taking a fairly low-cost approach to what they put on the land and hoping for a high profit out of it. I noted what they said, but our view would be that they are downgrading the value of the land by what they intend to put on it in terms of assets.

Mr LINDSAY—So you do not accept what they said? You do not accept their rationale? Your action group would prefer another outcome.

Mr Davies—We would prefer another outcome.

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to traffic, your latest evidence today correctly says that, with two cars parked either side, you cannot get somebody through.

Mr Davies—That's right.

Mr LINDSAY—But DHA's evidence is that that is a good thing because it forces traffic to park alternately—so that a car coming down the street has to weave around and it slows the car down. So DHA's solution is smaller road, slower traffic. Are you therefore saying wider road, faster traffic?

Mr Davies—I do not believe in terms of the sketch we put forward that speed is going to be an issue because the opportunity for that is pretty limited. The idea is, 'If we cram more into an area, isn't that good for us all?' I would have to say that it is not. The view is that somehow people are going to stagger their cars. Come to some of our other streets in Adamstown. It is not uncommon to have a party with 50 people there, and 50 people do not sit and stagger their cars. They park on the footpath, and that is what will occur here. It will cause damage and inconvenience to the estate. The question was raised: what about parking for the clinic over the road? I point out to people that you cannot count the car parks on the road because the employees from the clinic park on the footpath and in the drive of the estate. So you are wiping out a lot more than a few car parks.

Mr LINDSAY—In your first formal written submission you talked about landscaping and you said:

The community request that significant trees on the site should be secured ...

When I was out there this morning I had a look, but I do not think I saw any significant trees.

Mr Davies—Well, they are to us.

Mr LINDSAY—All right. So you are saying that what is there is significant.

Mr Davies—What we are saying is that there are some quite established trees out there.

Mr LINDSAY—They are not tall trees, are they?

Mr Davies—No, but we love them just the same. The trees on that site are established. You will see a note there from one of our residents who is now a grandfather and whose family has lived there for over 100 years. He said to me the other day that this committee may make decisions that will change things, but they are left with what they have got to live with and they have become used to the trees, the skyline and the like, and they would like to keep what they have got.

Mr LINDSAY—Would you please tell Mr Stace that we read his letter.

Senator FORSHAW—In your original submission, you refer to the council's 1999 motion calling for development with useable open space, which you describe as 'active open space'.

You go on to say that the area set aside near the golf club is not what you would consider active open space—and I can see your point there. You say, ‘The development needs active open space of around 10 per cent of the total site.’ Where did you get that figure from?

Mr Davies—In terms of new estates, it is my understanding—and this is advice from the only expert in our group—that it would normally be expected that around 10 per cent of a new estate should be provided as open space.

Senator FORSHAW—And you would see that, for instance on your own diagram, there would be some recreational facilities there for the children?

Mr Davies—Yes, active space.

Senator FORSHAW—I want to ask quickly: I appreciate that you are not opposing any development but that you see a smaller scale, a different layout and so on. Has your group considered or have any evidence of what the benefits of a development like this would be in terms of the economy of the area, the business sector and so on? Is that something your group has considered?

Mr Davies—We have talked about that issue. Let me say that the shopping centre in Adamstown is principally a takeaway centre which covers a much broader area. You might be surprised to know—I got the statistics once—that the Domino’s centre in Adamstown is the third highest generator of pizzas in the country. As to whether that sort of development would impact on Adamstown; it probably would to a marginal extent. The newsagent might get some extra business. Principally the main shopping will be at the major Garden City and Charlestown shopping centres, which people do not walk to; they go by car, which means that our streets will yet again have more cars crossing them. You do not go to Adamstown to do your week’s shopping. There is nothing there to buy for a week’s shopping. There is a small supermarket for convenience shopping, but that is about the extent of it.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Davies.

[12.09 p.m.]

LAMBERT, Ms Joan, Chairperson, Adamstown Community Forum

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the Adamstown Community Forum, which will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry and it will also be on the committee's web site. Do you wish to make any amendment to the submission?

Ms Lambert—Only an addition. On Monday evening, we held a combined meeting of the community forum and the residents group to look at issues on which everybody present agreed, and I have submitted the minutes of that meeting as further evidence. The things in those minutes are what everybody agreed to. People who had other issues addressed those with the council. I believe the development control plan is about to go on display and that will be an issue with the council.

CHAIR—Thank you. We did receive a very detailed submission from you. We will invite you to make a brief statement to the submission. You do not need to read the whole submission.

Ms Lambert—I have no plans to repeat what is in my submission and I will try not to repeat what Mr Davies has said, too. I want to comment on some of the things I have heard here today, if that is okay.

CHAIR—Sure.

Ms Lambert—I want to repeat that there is no national park adjacent. The land adjacent to the base, south of the base, is to be transferred to the state eventually, when it is cleared of contamination and when it is fenced. That will be some time. It will then become part of the Glenrock State Recreation Area, not a national park.

With regard to the trees, there may not be many and they may not appear significant but they are certainly very significant to the fauna that feeds on them. We have been through a drought and I have never before seen the bats around Adamstown that we have had this summer. This is the first summer in the 15 years I have lived at Adamstown that bats have had to search for food in suburban gardens and they have also searched for food in those trees that are on that land. A mature tree is worth, in my mind, tens of thousands of dollars. I cannot see any sense in cutting down a mature tree only to replace it with little ones. If you have trees, design your development around them.

I am concerned about the information and misinformation that we have been given as a community forum, that the council has been given and that you have been given. Even with the time that the Defence Housing Authority has put into developing this submission, you have asked questions today that there are no answers to yet, and I think that is fairly inefficient of the DHA staff. I have heard today that there is a plan for sale and lease back of these properties. That is the first I have heard of it. I have attended the two briefings that we have had, and I attended the briefing for the councillors. That has never been mentioned to either the councillors or the residents.

At the first briefing, we were told that the DHA would retain 70 per cent of the housing and 30 per cent would be sold on the private market. That is what we were told. At the second briefing, we were told it would be the reverse. No, we were told at the second one that defence housing would retain the ownership of all the houses. Today, I have heard that there is lease back. I am concerned that we are hearing different stories.

We heard today, too, that the council regulations currently might allow a development of up to 200, but what is allowed may not be the best—in my experience, it usually is not. I would question the assertion that Adamstown has a decreasing population. It traditionally has had, but that is very much in the process of turning around. As older people go into nursing homes and die, they are being replaced by young families. In the short block in which I live—and I live within half a kilometre of the development—there are four townhouses owned by the Department of Housing which have older people in them with no children. In the other houses in that short block, there are 19 children under 18 years of age. So that does not look to me like a suburb that is losing its population; it is increasing. It may not be evident in the statistics that are available, but statistics are always behind the reality.

We were also told that the traffic problems in Bruncker Road are not generated in Adamstown, and that is 90 per cent true. But does it matter where the traffic comes from? The traffic is on Bruncker Road every morning and it backs up behind Rifle Street. There would be more than 60 vehicles going out in the hour from 72 properties. So I am just not quite sure how they are going to get onto Bruncker Road when it is at a standstill now.

John talked about Connell Park. The other issue for Connell Park is that a fair bit of it is poorly drained and unusable after it has rained. There are a few children's amenities there. A lot of them have been removed. It is mostly used by children looking for golf balls and for people walking their dogs. Occasionally you see people using the swings. There is not much there at the moment. There was more there when I first moved to Adamstown but it is not there now.

I am concerned about the quality of the DHA's submission. You might note that none of their plans even shows a northern aspect. I am not quite sure how you folk were able to make a decision about whether it was a good plan or not when you were not even given what was the northern aspect. They are my comments on what I have heard today.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I think you were in the room when we asked DHA some questions about making the traffic study and the flora and fauna report and other reports available for public perusal. Are you satisfied that those reports will be made available during the 28-day period?

Ms Lambert—Yes.

CHAIR—That should cover that concern. The other point that I want to raise before I go to the deputy chair is that you mentioned the presence of a termite colony. Again I ask that question—today I think I wrongly attributed it to somebody else's submission—can you verify the existence of the termite mound and did you take on board the comments?

Ms Lambert—I have no personal knowledge of that. I am told regularly of that by a person I know fairly well who lives in Richard Street, which actually backs on to that subdivision. She is really quite concerned about the termites and she lives in a Department of Housing property.

She has taken it up with them and she has taken it up with, I think, defence housing, although how well she has done it I am not sure. She has probably asked me to do it and I have told her to do it herself.

CHAIR—Do you think it is a valid point that was made this morning though that there may not be termite mounds there today but there could be in future because that is the nature of the terrain, that termites are a fact of life in this part of the world?

Ms Lambert—I am not in a position to make a comment on that.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—With regard to your group’s dealings with DHA and the council, clearly there are differing views about the construction, but can you indicate your concerns as to what you assert is a failure to properly consult?

Ms Lambert—Yes.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—And do not just make references to DHA but also if you have had any dealings with council. Unfortunately, as I understand it, today we do not have council giving evidence.

Ms Lambert—No, we do not. DHA requested that they come to our community forum meeting and we made them welcome. At the first meeting they presented exactly how it is still. The members there raised all the issues that are in both of the submissions and copious notes were taken and we were told they would be considered. They came back to a second community forum—I do not have the dates but they are in first my submission—and we were presented with exactly the same plan. There were more people at this one and there were some angry people at this one, and I apologise for that. I did not chair that meeting because I wanted to have a say too, so a council officer chaired that one. They raised all the issues again. Then there was a public briefing to the council and a councillor whom I know told me about it. I contacted John Davies and we both went. Different information was presented there and actually it was very useful. It was there that we saw the traffic study that acknowledged that the traffic did build up past Rifle Street.

Then we get this submission that says, ‘The consultation process raised no issues.’ I find that insulting. We have given up two of our meetings exclusively to DHA and they have taken copious notes on two occasions, yet we are told that we have raised no significant objections or issues. I am not happy with that. If they are going to consult, please let it be real, not token. We believe—I am not the only one—that that was token consultation to fulfil their obligations to do it, not to take into account our concerns at all. At the council briefing councillors did raise issues as well. It was only a briefing, and obviously for the council the big issue is now. I am really concerned about the process, in that a draft development control plan should be prepared by council, not by the developer. I see that as putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. There has been a lot of consultation with council officers, there has been none with councillors and the consultation with the community has been of no value, as I see it. They are my major concerns.

Senator FERGUSON—Ms Lambert, I have just been re-reading your submission and the notes you have given us today. The only thing that concerns me is that it appears from your submission that you do not want defence personnel living in the area.

Ms Lambert—The terms of reference basically asked, ‘Is this good value for taxpayers’ money?’ That is how I read them. I am not convinced that it is good value for taxpayers’ money. My thought was that, by selling the land, you would get a big packet of money that would allow you to buy existing housing stock closer to the base and cut down on travelling time. That would also spread defence personnel through the city of Newcastle. Instead of having 300 in one five-hectare lot, you would spread them through many of the suburbs of Newcastle where they could integrate into the community. I have had some experience with defence personnel too. My experience is that, where you put them together, they tend to stay together and not integrate into the community.

Senator FERGUSON—Having reviewed a number of Defence Housing Authority projects in the past few years, I can say that most communities welcome defence personnel with open arms. This is the first time I have read—as you have said in your submission—that, because it is 30 kilometres to Williamtown and they would spend some time travelling, they should not be here; they should be somewhere else.

Ms Lambert—I think it would be to their benefit.

Senator FERGUSON—But isn’t that for them to decide?

Ms Lambert—That is what somebody said at our meeting on Wednesday night. I am also concerned about the environment. Motor vehicle emissions are our biggest source of pollution in Newcastle, and this will significantly add to it.

Senator FERGUSON—Motor vehicle pollution is one of the big problems in Sydney, too, but half of the people who work in Sydney would not if they did not spend at least three hours each day going to and fro, or 1½ hours there and 1½ hours back.

Senator FORSHAW—Not under the current government.

Senator FERGUSON—I take that point. You said, ‘Are we getting the best for taxpayers’ money?’ The Defence Housing Authority have an obligation to provide housing for defence personnel, and they have chosen this particular site. With all the experience they have had in the past of housing defence personnel, they believe that this is an ideal place. I think that travelling, whether it be 35, 45 or 55 minutes each day, is up to the individual. They will not apply to live there unless they are prepared to do it.

Ms Lambert—They have chosen that site because they own it; they have not purchased the site. I think you would have a very different proposal before you if they had had to purchase the site.

Senator FERGUSON—Yes, and sites have been sold in the past because they were not considered suitable.

Ms Lambert—They have purchased it from another government department. I personally have no objection to defence personnel. I would prefer, if the proposal were to go ahead, that it be much less dense and that the Defence Housing Authority retain ownership of all or most of the premises. I am not so happy about selling and leasing back, because then control of the land goes away from the Defence Housing Authority. I quite like the idea of 70 per cent defence

housing and 30 per cent private ownership. We were told in the first briefing we had that within five years it would scale down to 30 per cent defence housing and 70 per cent private ownership.

Senator FERGUSON—But that does not mean that defence personnel will not be living there; that is the point.

Ms Lambert—Yes, but that was not the impression we were given.

Senator FERGUSON—Lease-back arrangements, yes.

Ms Lambert—The community has not been told about the lease-back arrangement until today.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Wing Commander Ian Farnsworth indicated in his evidence that one of the reasons they would want to live there was for choice of schools and spouse employment opportunities. You may have been present when he was commenting on that.

Ms Lambert—Yes, I heard that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Would you like to respond to that point?

Ms Lambert—That is very correct. Adamstown is a very good place to live; I am the first to admit it. I wouldn't move for anything. If my house burnt down, I would probably rebuild it—slightly differently, but I wouldn't move from where I am. And I have only been there 15 years; I am a relative newcomer. It is a very good place to live. There is no doubt about that. I wouldn't argue about the amenity. It is a good place to live. That is why I live there.

Senator FORSHAW—That would seem to somewhat contradict your earlier comment that having a whole lot of defence personnel in one location is not as good as spreading them throughout the community. If they can become part of the community, the fact that they are living next door to other defence personnel, to my mind, does not really matter at the end of the day. I have seen this happen in other areas, such as Wattle Grove in Sydney.

Ms Lambert—It has been my experience that defence personnel usually do not stay for long periods of time. They tend to mix with each other and they do not become as integrated into their community as people who plan to live there for the rest of their lives, which is most of us.

Senator FORSHAW—You are putting an argument that is often put, and it is not one that is particularly derogatory of defence personnel. I understand the context in which you put it. This is what the debate is often about. It is about how we deal with a situation where a lot of defence personnel have to move around, but at the same time we are trying to encourage more contact and more involvement with communities. It is trying to find that balance.

Ms Lambert—Yes, it is a difficult task you have.

CHAIR—In your submission, on the second page, you list some of the reasons why residents became angry at the meeting. Point 5 says that DHA and their consultants 'ignored the concerns

of our lord mayor'. I am a bit curious about this because your submission was dated 27 January but our secretariat invited the Newcastle City Council to make a submission today. If there continued to be concerns why are they not here today giving evidence and making a submission about those concerns? That is what this committee provides the opportunity for.

Ms Lambert—At the first community consultation the lord mayor was there because it was the first opportunity he had to look at this proposal. He raised the issue of the useable open space. He said, 'That buffer zone is not acceptable as useable open space. We need better.'

CHAIR—Perhaps we will ask DHA a question about that when they return. I just wondered whether some of those matters have been resolved since the end of January because it seems odd to me. If they were of great concern, the Newcastle City Council would have sent an officer here today to give testimony.

Ms Lambert—I think we need to distinguish between the council officers and the councillors. I know several councillors and they knew nothing of this inquiry until I told them. I guess your letter has gone to the general manager. How many other people within the council she has told about that invitation I would not know. The councillors I have spoken to recently did not know this inquiry was on. So any comment would have come from council officers, not from the councillors, who will be making the ultimate decision.

CHAIR—It was advertised in the local paper on 11 January.

Ms Lambert—It was; that is true.

CHAIR—One would presume that the officer at the council would have advised the mayor if the mayor had previously raised concerns.

Ms Lambert—My only suggestion is that the mayor will save his concerns for dealing with the development control plan.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Ms Lambert, for your evidence.

[12.30 p.m.]

MURCHIE, Mrs Kylie Micheyllie, Senior Representative, Williamtown Region, Defence Families of Australia

CHAIR—Welcome. We have received a submission from Defence Families of Australia, which will be made available in a volume of submissions and also on the committee's web site. Do you propose any amendments to your original submission?

Mrs Murchie—No.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make a brief statement on your submission.

Mrs Murchie—In response to the lady who just spoke, I have been living in this area for 10 years and we have a lot of friends who have been here for several years, not just come and gone over a two-year period. I do feel that I am part of a community and the people I deal with on a daily basis are part of the wider community. I have been a volunteer for many years, so I have integrated, as has my family. I am not just a defence spouse; I have something to offer the community. We have our own house, so we are not in need of a married quarter, but there are desperate shortages at the moment of accommodation available to serving members. There is temporary or rental accommodation available but it is not a very popular choice, so a married quarter would be an ideal opportunity in the area.

Not everybody wants to live in Medowie, Williamtown or the bay. Newcastle has a lot to offer in regard to availability of child care and before and after school care. There are limited opportunities at Medowie and in the bay. There are no high schools at Medowie and only one, I believe, at Nelson Bay, so if you have school age children—as many serving members do—they need to either travel somewhere on a bus or make alternative arrangements to get there. So it would make perfect sense for those who have children with, say, musical talent or some sort of special need, as certain members of our defence community do, to live in town. This would be an ideal location. I would have loved the opportunity to live here when we first moved here 10 years ago. That was not available, and we had to have rental accommodation. We now own our own place, so it is not applicable to me, but living together in a community like this certainly provides support. Car pooling is one option.

Somebody talked earlier about traffic congestion. I believe that would be a problem if everybody came to the road at the same time, but I live on a street with over 50 defence families out at Nelson Bay and I never have to wait for more than two or three cars, and it is a very busy road just like Brunner Road. Another fact to consider is that the starting times are between 7 o'clock and 7.30 or staggered with shiftwork. The majority of non-defence people start about 8.30 or 9 o'clock, so they are going in one direction, we are going in another and there is a 1½ hour difference in time. Sporting activities, universities, TAFE, physios, doctors and hospitals are all readily available in Newcastle and not available in the surrounding areas. I believe that we deserve the choice and the flexibility any other community member has to choose where we live. My husband is a serving member, but that does not mean that I have to live where my husband works. I would like to have the opportunity to live where I feel comfortable living. If

he has to travel to work, that is the way it is. I do not see that he should be the one—do you know what I mean?

CHAIR—We know exactly what you mean.

Mrs Murchie—Whether the car is going one way or another, the car is still going.

CHAIR—Hopefully.

Mrs Murchie—I am fortunate that I work at the base, so I do not have those difficulties. But to have my children I had to come into the John Hunter Hospital. I get in here once a month or once every two months—not very often. If we had been presented with the opportunity to live in married quarters in town, that would have been excellent—or a townhouse before we had children. I would have loved and welcomed the opportunity. I have been working for nine years on the base and I have just recently clocked up 10,000 clients coming through to my business. I have spoken to every single one of them on a personal level and I feel I am representative of their needs, wants, attitudes and opinions overall. Obviously I cannot speak for everybody but, over the last couple of months, I have discussed this proposal with several of my clients and, without fail, every single one of them has said, ‘Great. Let me know when it is available; I’ll move in tomorrow.’ I fully support—along with Defence Families of Australia—the building of this housing estate. I think it would be wonderful.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—I probably should know the answer, but what is Defence Families of Australia? How long has it been around and how is it composed?

Mrs Murchie—I am not exactly sure how long it has been around. I think it has been around for about 17 years. I have volunteered for about three years in a smaller capacity. Late last year they asked me to step up. Because I am involved with so many defence community members, I do get a lot of grievances. Basically they are working to improve the service conditions and quality of life for members of Defence and their families specifically. Often if there is a problem, the serving member—be it a husband or a wife—goes through the chain of command. Sometimes that gets lost along the way and the answer that they get is not sufficient. If they feel that they have exhausted their avenues—they have been to the chaplain, the Defence Community Organisation or—

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Sorry to interrupt. Could I describe it as a voluntary spouse association? Is it more than that?

Mrs Murchie—We have several volunteers. The majority of the people who are representing at a regional level or a local level are volunteers. They are spouses like me. It is a condition of being a representative that you are a spouse, so you are conversant with service life. It is tri-service—Army, Air Force and Navy.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Are there some paid positions?

Mrs Murchie—There are two paid positions. I believe there is a national convenor, who is elected by—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I have her name—Judy Swann.

Mrs Murchie—Judy actually left us last week on a posting. I think Kate Hudson is our new delegate. That is a paid position that is chosen by the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence. They liaise with the Defence Housing Authority and people who are involved at a higher level or organisational level with Defence. Basically, service members or spouses can come to us and say, 'I'm not happy with this; who do I go to?' We sort it out from a policy level and say, 'These are your rights or entitlements and this is what we can do about it.' When we get a certain number of people who say, 'We don't have enough housing. We want to live in town,' we go to DHA or whoever it is. That is basically what we do.

Senator FERGUSON—Mrs Murchie, you said that you have children of your own.

Mrs Murchie—Yes.

Senator FERGUSON—Primary school or high school?

Mrs Murchie—A two-year-old and a four-year-old. My son has just started school.

Senator FERGUSON—How far do they have to go to get to school?

Mrs Murchie—Seven hundred metres.

Senator FERGUSON—What about for high school or secondary school?

Mrs Murchie—In 12 years time my son will be attending the high school at Tomaree. He is actually a very gifted child, so I believe we will have to travel into Newcastle to get him the education suitable to his needs.

Senator FERGUSON—I do not know whether we are allowed, but I am going to ask you for an opinion. One of our previous witnesses suggested that it was not a very good idea for defence personnel to all be living in the one area. You said that you lived with some 50 or 70 families where you were.

Mrs Murchie—About 600 metres from my house is one of these little establishments—there are two, actually—and there is another one just around the corner. When my husband is deployed for two or three months at a time, when he is away or when something happens and I need support, I find it very comforting to know that there is someone in a service uniform and I can knock on any door and feel that I have a support network.

If I cannot get off-base on time to pick up my child from school or child care, there is a myriad of people right there who understand that we cannot always know what time we are finishing work or starting work. At six o'clock in the morning, who are you going to call? You cannot really knock on your 70-year-old next-door neighbour's door—as lovely as they are. I know I can count on the military people and say: 'I work on the base, can you give me a lift to work?' or 'Can you give my husband a lift to work?' or 'Can you do this?' or 'Can you do that?' I feel very confident that any serving member would be only too happy to support me.

Senator FERGUSON—You do not feel as though you are under any greater threat now than you were last year or the years before that?

Mrs Murchie—Absolutely not.

Senator COLBECK—Could you give us an idea of the sorts of densities that exist in those housing sites that are close to where you live?

Mrs Murchie—Of the people that I know, there is a single mother with one child in one. Straight across the road there is a two-parent family with two children. There is another family with two children who have left home—grown-up children who have gone to Sydney. I cannot be sure what the other members have but I know that they do have children. Some of my friends have no children and some of them who live in married quarters and townhouses have two or three children. My brother is living in married quarters. Up until last week, they did not have a baby; now they do and they are in a four-bedroom house—but that was the only one available at the time. They had to move because the lease was expiring. They had no choice—the lease was up in June—and they said, ‘This is what we have available.’ He would dearly love to live in town because his wife’s business brings her into town on a daily basis, but there was just not the availability. They would like to put their hands up for this when it comes in.

Senator COLBECK—So there is a broad spread of user types?

Mrs Murchie—Yes—like the general community.

Senator COLBECK—Do you feel that you could comfortably judge what you are seeing here on the documentation provided against what you are experiencing in the communities that you live close to or within at the moment to make a comparison?

Mrs Murchie—With regard to what?

Senator COLBECK—Amenity and issues of that nature. It is not a trick question. I was just asking you whether you could or could not.

Mrs Murchie—One thing that comes to mind concerns the road size. I know it is difficult when I go to pick up the children of other people that live in this accommodation up the end of my street. But, by the same token, it does slow me down when I am going in because I am aware that there are children there. I think that can only be a good thing. With regard to the quality of the housing, all of the married quarters I have ever been in are very nice—the new married quarters, not the old ones that used to be there. Should I say that? The new ones are aesthetically pleasing.

Senator FORSHAW—Have you had much of an opportunity to actually consider the plan—the number of dwellings? I am particularly thinking about the fact that, as we have been saying, children and families will be living here. One of the criticisms that has been raised by others is that there should be some useable open space somewhere in the development that would presumably have some playground equipment—the usual sorts of things. You know what I am talking about. What is your view about this?

Mrs Murchie—With regard to where I currently live, which is my choice, it is about 1½ kilometres to the nearest park. We do not seem to have any trouble at all: we go to the beach and for drives to the picnic areas and duck ponds. I do not believe that as soon as you get home from work you should stay in your house. I have outside activities, as I am sure other people do. There are parks in the immediate vicinity—within a 400-metre to 800-metre radius. The beaches are close by. Lots of sporting facilities and playgrounds are available for the children that are too young to play sport, so I do not think it is an issue that there are no great big rambling fields.

Senator FORSHAW—No, I am not talking about the availability of sporting facilities and so on, which was pointed out to us.

Mrs Murchie—I meant more somewhere to go and throw the frisbee or play with your football.

Senator FORSHAW—Yes, or even just the sort of small piece of open space which breaks up the cluster effect that might otherwise appear.

Mrs Murchie—I think that is the appeal of that type of accommodation where you have your own private courtyard. A lot of people do not have lawnmowers and whipper snippers when they are moving around on short deployments or short postings.

Senator FORSHAW—I will just play devil's advocate here for a moment as I want this issue to be properly considered. Let me put to you that it is not unusual in this day and age for a development like this—which may be built not necessarily for defence personnel but as a subdivision or even a retirement village complex and which may have a mix of different types of accommodation—to have built into it some area of open space. It does not have to be a huge football field or even a gigantic park; it may simply be a small area of land or a couple of small pieces of land which break up the landscape and are an aesthetic environmental visual thing, as well as serving a purpose. That is what I am picking up from some of the criticisms that are being put, particularly when it is said that there is going to be an open space area but it is more about separating the development from the golf course than it is about providing somewhere for the mothers or whoever to stroll along and let the kids run around on the grass.

Mrs Murchie—Maybe something could be done there—some sort of a fence could be erected or some sort of a buffer zone put in—but you would have to be pretty unlucky to be hit by a golf ball. I have lived next to a golf course and it did not stop me.

Senator FORSHAW—Let me cut to the chase quickly: that would be a positive thing to have incorporated into a development like this, wouldn't it?

Mrs Murchie—I think it would always be a positive inclusion, yes.

Senator FORSHAW—Obviously.

Mrs Murchie—Yes.

CHAIR—There being no further questions, I thank you, Mrs Murchie.

[12.47 p.m.]

MORRIS, Mr Kevin John, President, Merewether Golf Club

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee has received a submission from the Merewether Golf Club, which will be made available in a volume of submissions for this inquiry and also be available on the committee's web site. Do you wish to propose any amendments to your original submission?

Mr Morris—Perhaps one amendment: in my submission I suggested that ownership of a portion of land be transferred to Merewether Golf Club, but I have since received a response from the DHA expressing concern that such a thing, because of the need to rezone, could hold up the project. Perhaps my original suggestion should stand of the land being transferred to the golf club or loaned or something of that nature so that it would not hold up the project, if that were the case. That would be all.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I now invite you to make a brief statement. You have given us a very nice, clear submission. Please speak briefly to it, and then we will proceed to some questions.

Mr Morris—In the past, Merewether Golf Club has made the same errors that many other golf clubs have made—they have sold land that they have owned around the perimeter of the course to use the money to develop the golf course. This has come back to haunt many golf clubs, including us, as we now have seven holes on our perimeter where we regularly have golf balls that have been hit with the best of intention flying into backyards, onto roofs, into pools et cetera and creating quite a problem. Two weeks ago I was in a neighbour's home discussing a problem and he said to me, as a ball flew past my ear, 'That's the sixth this morning.' So it does create quite a problem. Fortunately, our neighbours choose to live near a golf course because of the aesthetics and the environment that they have and therefore we do not have a lot of problems or arguments with them. However, we do spend sometimes up to \$3,000 a month repairing damage to roofs, windows et cetera and it can become a problem.

The golf club tried to buy the area that is now under discussion for development when it was zoned open space, because nobody else wanted it. The council did not want it to make a park. The Army did not want it. The golf club could have taken it over, because we did not want another neighbour outside that fence. I was a member of the Adamstown citizens' group. I lived in the area and also represented the 800 members of the golf club at those meetings to try to stop this development. However, when the rezoning went through, we decided that we had to look at our next option because we did not think there was any way we were going to stop the development going ahead.

It is not the cost of the repairs et cetera that bothers the golf course, it is the potential danger to people or persons who are outside of our boundaries, particularly children. Golf balls fly at very high speeds, and you can imagine a young child being hit in the eye or on the head with a golf ball. They are lethal; they could kill a child. So we are extremely concerned. That is what caused me to send my submission to you. The possibility that we look at is that we could end up with serious litigation. All the people who have decided to allow this development to go ahead

without taking due measures to protect children et cetera could end up being joined as defendants in litigation. We brought that to the council's attention, and the lord mayor was quite concerned that that could occur. It is not only the person who hits the golf ball who will be involved but everyone who has allowed this danger to progress, and that concerns us tremendously.

There have been instances throughout Australia where golf holes have been shut down. If no solution was found, the golf courses would have found their way into receivership, because no golfer wants to play a substandard golf course with holes shut down. Steps have been taken to prevent golf balls flying out of golf courses. If you have driven down Pennant Hills Road in Sydney, you will see where Pennant Hills Golf Course has erected those huge, ugly fences. I do not think the aesthetics would please any of the residents going into a new development like this if we had to put up a 25- or 30-metre fence that would be in the view looking out over the golf course. Trees take 20 years to grow before they will do any good, so that is the style of thing that we are looking at.

On page 12 of the Defence Housing Authority submission, you will see that there is an area marked No. 3, which is the landscape buffer zone. The eastern boundary of the development site runs along the third golf hole of Merewether Golf Club. Drop below the No. 4, then go to your right and you will see the roof of a house. Then there is a narrow strip of open land. Near that it says 'opportunity to place'. Below that you can see two bunkers. That is the green.

Senator FORSHAW—Where is the tee? Is that where the light shaded part starts? Is it almost in line with where the two arrows cross?

Mr Morris—Yes.

Senator FORSHAW—What is the length of the hole?

Mr Morris—It is 130 metres. It is a par 3.

Senator FORSHAW—It is about a nine iron—about a five iron for me actually.

Mr Morris—Yes. Potentially you would hit a ball very high in the air.

Senator FORSHAW—Yes, you are playing very high shots.

Mr Morris—Therefore, the height of any defending fences or something or other would have to be extremely high. That is the area that we are concerned about. As it is now, golf balls fly practically where the No. 3 is written. We are proposing that a triangle of land, which is less than half of that shaded area, be transferred under the control of the Merewether Golf Club. To get this area, take a line from the tee which we have just described, parallel to the hatched area, to the end of this development area. It would practically pass through the No. 3. The security fence that runs along the hole now would be moved over to embrace that area to keep nongolfers out.

Senator FORSHAW—What would you do with that land? I am a member of a golf club and I am pretty familiar with this sort of thing because I have seen it happen at my own club. What

would be your usage of that land? You would not be looking to bring it into play at all, would you?

Mr Morris—No. It is absolutely useless as far as golf club land goes.

Senator FORSHAW—But would it then become part of the hole?

Mr Morris—The area where the No. 4 is is the low-lying area. That is the swamp area on this land. DHA have offered to drain the water from this area into Merewether Golf Club. Water is of course vital to us, and we would be very happy to take the water, but it must be well controlled. In the construction phase particularly, a lot of silt et cetera will run down through that low-lying area with the stormwater that will find its way to Merewether Golf Club. We hope that a pondage could be dug on the area that could be transferred to Merewether. It would be the original settlement pond for the water that runs from this course. The water has to go through a treatment plant at any rate, but the major silt could be settled out there, because the last thing that we will allow is for our storage dams to be silted. As a matter of fact, we have told the DHA that they have to do a survey of the dam you can see under the words 'Merewether Golf Course'. If any silting of that dam occurs, it will be their responsibility to take it back to the capacity that it is now. That is one of the provisions that we put in correspondence prior to this submission.

As I said, that land is no good as golf course club land, but it could have a desilt settlement pond for stormwater to run through before it is transferred to Merewether Golf Club. Our golfers would be very unhappy in some ways, because that would be a place where they would lose more golf balls but, as far as protecting the water of the golf club is concerned, we would be willing to take the irate golfers. That is what we would do with that land—hopefully have a settlement pond in there. If you look at that picture, below where it says 'opportunity to place stormwater detention on golf course land' is another dam—it is a dark area much smaller than the one that is up further on the page. That takes all the water that comes down through the 25 hectares above the Army base and from the Army land. We do not use that as irrigation at all as we do with the bigger one. That is a settlement pond. We allow any silt or anything that comes through the system to settle out there before we put it out through a Caisson system to keep that other dam desilted, because we have about six megalitres of water in that dam. That is very vital to us, because we already have to buy about \$40,000 worth of water each year. We cannot afford to have our storage diluted. Therefore, that land that we said that we would take over could be used as a silt trap.

The council said to us in some of the meetings—and, as I said, I was part of the residents' group that discussed this at length with council—that they did not want to have control of any wetlands, and a pondage dug in this development area that was not fenced off would have to be council responsibility as they would be controlling this other grease trap et cetera. Fence that off and put the pondage on our land and we become responsible. We already have seven dams on the course, so we could take responsibility for that. That keeps the kids out of it et cetera, so it is a safety area. The kids also will not be in where the balls fly, so that is a double-barrel safety margin, which we are looking for.

Our main goal is not to enhance the golf course, get extra acreage, get extra holes or anything of that nature. We are just looking at that strictly to provide a safety area if errant golf balls fly there. Remember that, although it is a private golf course, the public play on it. There are social

players. There are beginners. They hit golf balls all over the place, I can assure you. One thing we want to do is to keep people out of the flight path of those golf balls. That is our total motivation. It is safety. I do not want to be part of any future litigation, and I am sure none of you people who make the decisions do either. It is always possible that we could kill somebody by a golf ball.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator FERGUSON—How long is that hole?

Mr Morris—It is about 130 metres.

Senator FERGUSON—The defence housing land stops just short of the green, doesn't it?

Mr Morris—Yes, it is right along at the back of the green.

Senator FERGUSON—When we were looking at it this morning, I got the impression that it was a bit shorter than that, looking at the tree that was at that side of the bunker. But it does not look like it from this map.

Mr Morris—Not on that map, no.

Senator FERGUSON—I will check that with DHA. It is just that, with a 130-metre hole, currently you have a fence along there.

Mr Morris—Yes.

Senator FERGUSON—Do you have a gate to retrieve golf balls? How do they get them?

Mr Morris—They do not. We have a rule that any golf ball that is hit out of the golf course remains out. We will chastise any member who climbs fences or goes into other people's property. It is just not on.

Senator FERGUSON—I do not know if I can afford to play on your golf course.

Senator FORSHAW—You should not be playing on any golf course.

Mr Morris—One thing I would suggest is this. If the gross pollutant trap which must be fitted into the drainage system is placed in that area, we would not mind—that is fine—but the council would need access. We would not like the council getting access through the golf course, particularly when it is wet, with vehicles. We would like a locked gate put in that fence to allow them to enter that area if need be. They would have the key to get through to service that.

Senator FERGUSON—A 130-metre hole is not a long hole.

Mr Morris—No.

Senator FERGUSON—You are not looking at a ball at the end of a 300-metre drive that is hitting somebody. You said that you are one of the people whose property is along the edge of the golf course. Isn't there just as great a danger of someone being hit by a golf ball there as there would be outside this fence in the triangular buffer zone?

Mr Morris—We have seven holes already that we have got a danger area in. We do not want another one.

Senator FERGUSON—Having played a bit of golf, I think there is more danger if you have people living along a long hole than there is from somebody on a 130-metre hole where you have to carry a fair way outside the fence before you are going to hurt anybody. How far is the fence from the hole? How wide is it?

Mr Morris—The fence from the hole—

Senator FERGUSON—Thirty metres?

Mr Morris—Ten paces. There is the bunker near the green. If you look there, you will find it is about three paces between that bunker and the fence line. If you put a ball in between, it is very difficult to play to the green. Do you see the small bunker that I mean?

Senator FERGUSON—The only point I am making is that, in my history of playing golf, there is more danger where people are driving with a wood on a long hole than on a 130-metre hole where people are using an eight iron or a nine iron.

Mr Morris—I agree.

Senator FERGUSON—It has to hit straight down on you almost.

Mr Morris—If you hit a wedge or hit it 30-odd metres in the air, and if you take a ball that is falling to earth and it hits someone on the top of the head, you will not be a very happy chappie.

Senator FERGUSON—Can you reach it with a wedge?

Mr Morris—Yes, I can.

Senator FERGUSON—I understand the point you are making. It is just that, looking at it from where we were out there today, I did not feel that there was as much danger there as there would be from a longer hole where the ball is on a lower trajectory.

Mr Morris—Fortunately, our longer holes have had the benefit of preplanning for 20-odd years, and we have also planted more trees, et cetera, to try to give some coverage. But it is a major problem. We belt balls onto roofs and break windows. As I said before, sometimes we pay up to \$3,000 a month just to repair damage to neighbours' homes. Insurance will not cover that.

Mr LINDSAY—It is good to hear that you are concerned about the liability of your balls going outside your golf course. Does this mean that you might be interested in approaching the HA to purchase some extra land?

CHAIR—You may have been absent earlier when Mr Morris said that the purchase probably is not a practical option and that perhaps some other arrangement could be made.

Mr LINDSAY—Sorry.

Mr Morris—We would be happy to pay \$1 a year rent or it could just be transferred over and we would look after it or something of that nature. To try to buy a parcel of land that is absolutely useless to us at residential prices is just not on.

Mr LINDSAY—We would love you to consider it.

Mr Morris—We would have been happy to buy the whole lot when nobody else wanted it, but we cannot afford it now at residential values.

CHAIR—That was an addition to Mr Morris's original submission. Senator Forshaw, do you have any questions?

Senator FORSHAW—No, I do not have a question. I understand the proposition you are putting. I am conscious of the issues you have raised, being a part-time golfer myself who would like to spend more time on the course but cannot.

Mr Morris—I can give you a membership form if you would like to move into this area!

Senator FORSHAW—Can I get reciprocal rights with Cronulla? I am a member there.

Mr Morris—Move to Ryde or Parramatta and you will be okay.

Senator FORSHAW—This would reduce the amount of open space with the development.

Mr Morris—Yes.

Senator FORSHAW—You have raised your proposal with the DHA?

Mr Morris—Yes.

Senator FORSHAW—What has been their response? You may have covered this in your submission.

Mr Morris—No, I did not.

Senator FORSHAW—I did think one of their responses might be that it constricts their development in terms of the amount of open space.

Mr Morris—Yes. In the reply that I received from Irena Sharp, it spoke of loss of housing to satisfy council requirements for provisioning of open space elsewhere. The DHA are concerned about what would happen if they transfer that section over. However, there would still be a considerable amount of open space along there. We are only taking that small triangle of land, leaving that other much longer corridor open.

Senator FORSHAW—I was tempted to ask earlier whether it was a par 72 golf course.

Mr Morris—It is a par 70.

Senator COLBECK—What sorts of plantings would you see being required or desirable along there to protect that triangle of land that you talk about? You mentioned that the other holes have the advantage of mature trees.

Mr Morris—Yes. We currently plant a variety of trees. We had Greening Australia come and visit us and give us a tree planting program. They told us which trees to plant on our boundaries that would grow comparatively quickly and fairly high, the ones to avoid that have short life spans and the ones that do damage by root intrusion under greens, et cetera. There are possibly things like tallowwood or something of that nature that grow fairly quickly to a decent size and have a fairly dense canopy at the top. We have taken advice from them, and we would use their advice again. We go to the experts wherever we can.

Senator COLBECK—What is the time frame in which something like a tallowwood would be effective?

Mr Morris—Twenty years for something like that. You are not hitting a low-flying ball; you are hitting one with a fairly steep club which would flight in the air. That is one of the problems there. Even to consider a fence, which somebody mentioned earlier this morning, would be a problem. It would need to be extremely high. If you play golf, you will realise that there are nine irons that hit the ball in the air. They are not low trajectories.

Senator COLBECK—The 20 years is from what age at planting?

Mr Morris—You normally buy what is called tube stock, which are very small. You use those on any open development like this because they establish their root growth first. Then they will catch a much more mature tree within three years. They develop a root system much more strongly. You put them in when they are only six inches high.

Senator COLBECK—So planting of more established trees is not really an option, from what you are saying.

Mr Morris—If you are thinking of getting something that is 10 years old or something and putting it in there, no. It would be very expensive and, frankly, I think the mortality of those trees would be quite high. I cannot see them surviving.

Senator FORSHAW—You get the land anyway, don't you?

Mr Morris—Yes, of course. The current consultants for DHA were not planning to bring the water in through there, because of the council's concern about having a pondage there. They were proposing to bring it in behind the tee towards the golf course. Our concern there is: how are they going to settle the silt out? I do not think that the gross pollutant trap that has to be put in would cope with construction silt and debris that will flow down the area. It is the construction phase that bothers us the most. After the place has been running for three or four years and most of the debris has been washed away, I do not think that we would have as much trouble with silting up our dams; but the early construction period would give us a major problem.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Morris.

Mr Morris—Thank you for the time.

[1.12 p.m.]

BEAR, Mr Richard James, General Manager, Development and Sales, Defence Housing Authority

CHAMBERS, Mr Matthew John, Regional Manager, Hunter Valley Housing Management Centre, Defence Housing Authority

FARNSWORTH, Wing Commander Ian, Base Commander, RAAF Base Williamtown, Royal Australian Air Force, Defence Housing Authority

LYON, Mr Keith, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Defence Housing Authority

MILES, Mr Philip Andrew, National Manager, Development, Defence Housing Authority

SHARP, Ms Irena, Project Manager, Defence Housing Authority

TWINEY, Mr Peter Michael, Director, Masson Wilson Twiney

CHAIR—I welcome back to the hearing officers from Defence Housing Authority. I invite your comments on evidence that has been given before we proceed to questions.

Mr Lyon—Three points have been made. Firstly, in terms of the DHA clientele, families and the ADF, the evidence is supporting the type of development that we are talking about. Secondly, DHA will need to resolve the community concerns centring around traffic access through the planning process with the council. These are the normal types of issues that DHA deals with when it is involved with these types of developments. Certainly, we will make available the experts' reports that residents and community groups have asked for. The last point relates to the issue of golf balls and the offer of the club to take responsibility for a piece of land. I think that warrants closer investigation, again with the council. I think that summarises it.

CHAIR—In terms of the golf club, would you like to make a comment on what could be a real concern, and that is the run-off of water over that development phase and possible settling problems? Do you see a way that that can be resolved?

Mr Miles—Certainly. During the construction there will be silt traps established as part of the construction process. From our point of view that is a straightforward and standard process in any construction development, so we can reassure the committee that there is clear environmental action taken during construction. I think that is fairly clear.

Senator FORSHAW—I have a couple of questions about the traffic arrangements. Remind me: at the moment Brunner Road is two lanes on both sides? What is the position?

Mr Chambers—It is one.

Senator FORSHAW—It is one lane and then one lane and parking?

Ms Sharp—It is a single lane either side with a lane and parking on both sides.

Senator FORSHAW—That is what I had in mind when I said ‘two lanes on both sides’. Has any consideration been given to putting in some sort of turning bays as vehicles approach, in particular, the proposed roundabout entry? You know what I mean—where you would splay the road bay.

Mr Twiney—We have looked at a series of options for that intersection. One was what is called a ‘seagull’ arrangement whereby you have a central island and you turn into the island and then merge into the traffic. The second was putting traffic signals in, and the third was the roundabout. We would expect to have a two-lane entry into the roundabout, so in effect you would have a left-turn lane and a through and right-turn lane on Brunner Road.

Senator FORSHAW—You say that Military Road is a private road or a road that is used for vehicles to go into the depot. Is that right?

Mr Lyon—As I understand it, we have certainly had discussions with the defence department—because it is a defence department road—and the advice I was given was that the defence department were not keen for that road to be used as part of the exit.

Senator FORSHAW—I appreciate that, but let us put that to one side at the moment; that could be a policy decision or whatever. You may want to take this on notice—it might be not necessarily a fair question to put to you at this point in time. Would it be possible within the proposal to have some form of traffic exit out through Military Road, either in conjunction with the defence department facility being able to use that road or by putting in some other entrance into their establishment? Am I making myself clear? At the end of the day, I know it is a defence department and defence housing matter, but let us get together here. Is there some win-win situation here?

Mr Chambers—Council and the RTA would also be involved in that.

Senator FORSHAW—Yes, they are always involved.

Mr Chambers—I understand that that was looked at in the early stages.

Mr Twiney—As I said earlier, I think you have a controlled intersection either at Military Road or at Rifle Street; I do not think you have both, because they are too close together and you get interference between them. So it is an either/or situation. Physically you can get into Military Road or into Rifle Street. The other issues are this thing about access to a public street over private land and mixing military vehicles with private vehicles, if you were to use the Military Road option, and the type of intersection you would have. We think a roundabout is better than traffic signals because it has that slowing effect on traffic coming down the hill and going into a new speed zone in Adamstown, whilst traffic signals only do that intermittently, when you have to stop at a red light. Those are the issues that would be involved.

Senator FORSHAW—This is more of a point than a question, but I invite a comment. This is not some sort of final considered opinion on my part but it seems to me that, somehow, the development should accommodate some small area of open space that could be available for recreational purposes—children’s playground equipment and that sort of thing. You have said that there is an open space area but, at least on the arguments I have heard, it does not seem to have much purpose other than to collect a lot of stray golf balls—which maybe the kids and the developer could collect and sell.

I have seen similar developments—both private and public—where some sort of small open space area has been built in. If nothing else it would have a visual attraction. I am just putting that on the record and I think you know exactly what we are saying. That diagram looks clustered and I know that is a representation. It might mean that you have fewer units but it is not uncommon to do that in subdivision developments.

Mr Lyon—We will take the comment on board. There are a couple of issues that I will mention without prejudging anything. DHA has provided things like playgroups in developments that warrant it. So it is something that we consider.

Senator FORSHAW—It is, particularly given that you make the point to us about the facilities that are nearby.

Mr Lyon—It is something that we look at. Secondly, we need to work with local government because responsibility for the maintenance would necessarily be with local government. We would need the council to come on board in a consideration of that but we will have a look again in the light of your comment.

Senator FORSHAW—It has traffic implications too. It may have implications for your road network.

Mr Lyon—Yes, and it has insurance implications and a range of other implications.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—I have a question on a similar note. Where I live now there are a lot of new estates going up and they keep existing trees where they can because the value is maintained. People like to go into areas where there are established trees. I know I would prefer that and I think I am in the majority. Has there been any consideration about maintaining existing trees, if possible—because it would maintain beautification, be more aesthetic and so on?

Ms Sharp—Absolutely. It is DHA policy to maintain as many trees as possible on site. Certainly, the landscaping plan that has been put forward has looked at the implication of the lots on the site and has identified all the trees that can be retained. The trees that will be put in place in the development will increase the quantity of trees in the area. But the policy is to maintain as many trees as possible.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—With the plans, have you worked out what proportion of trees you would keep?

Ms Sharp—Of all the healthy trees that are there, probably about half of them will be kept.

Mr Lyon—We will provide you with further information. I prefer to do that in a considered way.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I appreciate that. I would like to raise one other point. Mr Davies, from the residents action group amended his submission today. He added a rather serious matter. He asserted that due to the concentration of personnel in a residential area this may diminish the security of Australia's defence personnel. I ask whoever is appropriate to respond to that.

Mr Lyon—I am the appropriate person. We are obviously conscious of security with our housing arrangements. I would probably prefer to brief the committee in camera on what our current arrangements are.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I appreciate that. That is fine.

Senator FERGUSON—Mr Lyon, are you likely to come to an accommodation with the golf club or not? I have heard what they have said; I have had another look at this map. As I said, it is 130-metre par 3 hole and I know there are going to be some balls that will go outside there. This is the green buffer zone that you were talking about to keep the houses back so that the houses are not likely to have balls in the front yard—or they should not; I do not reckon even I could get one in from there. Is there any chance of any sort of accommodation somehow in relation to safety?

Mr Lyon—I am very keen to address danger from golf balls. I have taken the implications of people being hurt quite seriously. I live on a golf course myself actually so I am keen to take this matter further. Again it is an issue that we will need to discuss with the council as well as the golf club because there is a common interest here.

Senator FERGUSON—My personal view is that if you push the fence right back against the housing it makes it look like a compound. The open space there at least gives it a bit of space.

Mr Lyon—You would think, and I agree, that commonsense would apply through this and I am pretty keen to make certain it does.

Senator FERGUSON—If you could have some discussions with the golf club so that we can come to some common agreement, I would be very pleased.

Mr Lyon—And we will keep the committee informed about whether that materialises.

Senator COLBECK—You have given us some time line figures for the approval process—28 days for the control development plan and then 45 days for planning approval, which you are looking to run concurrently in some aspects. Are they working days or weekdays?

Ms Sharp—They are calendar days.

Senator COLBECK—In your discussions with the council, the former planner indicated suitability for the site of 50 sites and you are looking at 72. Is that an issue that will be addressed in the control development plan process?

Mr Chambers—You are referring to a planner who was at council in the late nineties. Since that time, council have produced a new urban strategy. They have rezoned those areas so what we are talking about in terms of densities, the 72 is well inside—and I stress well inside—what is allowable under the existing local environment plan.

Senator COLBECK—A lot of public housing these days is being developed as infill rather than bulk lot. How does that impact on your housing policy? It has been mentioned here as a possibility today and it is not necessarily rated as that but is that a policy that defence housing has?

Mr Chambers—A planner would probably say that this site is an infill site given that it is an existing suburb, although in some respects it is also a greenfield site so it really probably sits in both camps to a certain extent.

Senator COLBECK—I do not know that I would agree with you on that, but you are entitled to your opinion I suppose. I will leave it at that, Chair.

CHAIR—I would like to make one point before we close. The committee takes very seriously the importance of public consultation. It is partly what these hearings are about and so we hope that some of the irritation that has been conveyed to the committee today might be taken into account in a better communication between the DHA and the public groups here. We know that it is not always possible to accede to all the requests and sometimes there are practical reasons why you cannot do that, but the committee would agree with me that we consider consulting with the community groups as pretty important. I am sure that you will need to go back and resolve some of those issues with the council as well as with the golf club, for example. Obviously the city is going to have some input there. I want to thank all the witnesses who have taken the time to appear before us today, to DHA for ensuring we are able to get onto the site and do a thorough inspection of it, and to our secretariat and the *Hansard* staff who have helped us through the hearing. Before closing, it is necessary that the committee authorise the publication of evidence.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr O'Connor**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.30 p.m.