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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: Development of off-base housing for Defence at Queanbeyan, NSW

MONDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2003

QUEANBEYAN

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Monday, 3 November 2003

Members: Mrs Moylan (*Chair*), Mr Brendan 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 Ferguson and Forshaw, Mr Jenkins, Mr Lindsay, Mr Lloyd, Mrs Moylan and Mr Brendan O'Connor

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Development of off-base housing for Defence at Queanbeyan, NSW.

WITNESSES

BEAR, Mr Richard, General Manager (Development and Sales), Defence Housing Authority..... 1

BROCKLEHUST, Mr Jon, Chief Financial Officer, Defence Housing Authority 1

CHEN, Mr Benny, Senior Traffic Engineer, Scott Wilson Nairn Pty Ltd 1

KEMP, Mr Gavin, Manager (Development), Defence Housing Authority 1

LYON, Mr Keith Thomas, Managing Director, Defence Housing Authority 1

MacCALLUM, Mr Alastair, Director, AMC Projects 1

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WALLER, Mrs Caragh Caireen, National Convenor, Defence Families of Australia 1

Committee met at 10.16 a.m.

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

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MacCALLUM, Mr Alastair, Director, AMC Projects

WALLER, Mrs Caragh Caireen, National Convenor, Defence Families of Australia

CHAIR—I have pleasure in declaring open and welcoming you all to this public hearing of the Public Works Committee's inquiry into the proposed development of off-base housing for Defence at Queanbeyan, New South Wales. I would particularly like to acknowledge Mr Gary Nairn, the member for Eden-Monaro, who represents this constituency. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on 21 August 2003 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.

Earlier this morning the committee received a briefing and inspected the site of the proposed work, and the committee will now hear evidence from the Defence Housing Authority. 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, and they are also available on the committee's web site. Does the authority wish to propose any amendments to any of the submissions it has made to the committee?

Mr Lyon—Madam Chair, one small amendment relating to the figures in our submission covering the defence housing forecast: as a result of a change in Defence planning, the housing forecast for 2005-06 is shown in our submission as 1,858. The current figure is 1,563. The headquarters are still to be located in the region. It is just that it will be slightly later than our submission suggests.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I now invite a representative of the Defence Housing Authority to make a brief opening statement, after which we will proceed to questions.

Mr Lyon—This is an important submission for Defence Housing. In the Canberra-Queanbeyan area we currently have a significant number of people dependent on rental assistance, so we are anxious to improve the size of our housing stock. This development is an important part of that process. We believe we will have a good development here and one that will serve the ADF and their families for quite a number of years. The development does not cover this particular clubhouse, as indicated in our report, although we are hoping that we will be able to facilitate a childminding centre, which is badly needed to support the region and particularly members of the Defence Force who are located in the Queanbeyan city. That is all I have; thanks.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. In the past one of the contentious issues about these developments of defence housing has often been forecasting for housing. I notice at 2.2 of your submission you outline the need for this housing. For the record, could you perhaps give us a little more information about how the future housing requirements were determined and what work was done to establish that those requirements could not presently and in the near future be met by the existing market?

Mr Lyon—The future housing requirement is advised to us by the Department of Defence each year. The Department of Defence goes through a planning exercise to look at the location of its units, and it gives us advice as to the expected number of houses that are likely to be required, taking into account any changes in planning. Then DHA prepares what is called a provisioning schedule, which would go back to the defence department. That indicates how we plan to meet the housing requirement, including the use of rental assistance, which we also administer on behalf of Defence. We then reach agreement on the reliance on rental assistance. Rental assistance is actually somewhat more expensive for Defence than housing that is provided through DHA. That is partly because our average rents tend to be somewhat less than the rental ceilings that are applied. Secondly, members of the ADF and their families can preselect a home, which means that there is no requirement for temporary storage as part of the move. On a national basis we seek to work to a rental serving of about 10 per cent, but that does vary from market to market according to the nature of supply and our own housing stock.

CHAIR—So what proportion of the requirements are currently being met by private sector housing?

Mr Lyon—About 18 per cent in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region, which is higher than we think is desirable.

CHAIR—Are you looking to replace that entire deficit?

Mr Lyon—We are looking to reduce it. Particularly we will try to do that over the next two or three years. We know we need to increase the housing stock to also accommodate the move of the theatre headquarters to the region. We will be looking to maximise flexibility to be able to deal with that.

CHAIR—One of the difficulties we as a committee have discovered is that in the past there have been some information transfer problems between DHA and Defence. Has that been resolved now? Can the information you are getting with regard to future requirements be relied upon as being reasonably accurate?

Mr Lyon—We are working very hard with Defence. Defence in fact have a consultancy reviewing the current arrangements with an aim of improving the forecast. Of course we are fully cooperating with that because, the better the forecasts, the better our provisioning can be. Defence do have some difficulties, because one of the key estimates is knowing in advance the proportion of married members versus single members and also estimating the number of people who choose to acquire their own home. That is a fluctuating number as well.

CHAIR—The other issue around that was the type of housing that Defence families require.

Mr Lyon—Yes. Defence and DHA work together on that. We seek to provide houses that meet the Department of Defence's rental ceilings because we are quite conscious of the cost implications to Defence. We are in the process of introducing more choice for ADF members, but that is again within the Defence perimeter and rules. These houses that are proposed to be constructed here all fit within the classification requirements nominated by the Department of Defence.

CHAIR—Thank you. I know there are some questions about some of the local issues, so I will go first to the deputy chairman, then to Mr Lindsay.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—In relation to your time lines for completion and your reference in your submissions to having the construction occur from the domestic sector of the local construction industry, are there concerns that the domestic demand that would have arisen as a result of the bushfires in January would have an adverse effect—

Mr Bear—When we put this submission together there was a concern, but we are now seeing a softening of that occurring and we are monitoring it closely.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—So you are saying the time lines that you now have in place have regard to the domestic demand that was created as a result of losses of homes?

Mr Bear—Are realistic.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You have also made comments about consultation. You had a public meeting in June, I think, of this year. You say in paragraph 19:

DHA is undertaking further formal consultation in an effort to keep interested local residents informed.

Mr Bear, how were people informed of the public meeting, approximately how many people were in attendance and what form will the 'further formal consultation' take?

Mr Bear—Our interest in this particular development first became apparent in the press on 8 and 9 January. On 9 January, in anticipation of people reading that in the press, we letterboxed the local residents and we also doorknocked.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—How far and wide?

Mr Bear—The immediate area in the first instance. Not only did we drop the letter in their letterbox; we actually knocked on doors and, where we could talk to somebody, we had a chat to them about what their feelings were, what they were thinking. We then began to address those issues. On 10 January, an article appeared in the local press broadly outlining what we were planning. We were keen that the first advice that went into the community had a little background on what we are trying to do. On 24 January, in anticipation that the local member would receive inquiries, we briefed the local member so that if any constituents did come to him with concerns he could be aware of them.

On 16 March we were in a position where we did have some sort of plan that we could put forward and we had a public meeting in this very building. At that meeting we presented some drawings similar to those the committee have seen so that people could get an idea of what we were on about. A couple of concerns were expressed during that meeting, which we addressed. For example, local residents were concerned that we had a through road and people would be driving through it at pace. They were concerned about traffic issues which we had not adequately explained.

We then went back to the drawing board and again went through our planning process. On 2 September we had a second public forum, at which we outlined our revised plans. We also organised for the local member to address that community and stress the importance of the consultative process. We also outlined at that meeting the public works process. At that meeting there were in the order of 20 people. The issues that came out of that ranged from whether we would be able to include a letterbox—we have undertaken to talk to Australia Post about that—to some concerns about traffic. We have endeavoured to address that, and of course we have closed off the street. There were some questions about what might happen with this site in terms of child care. We have explained that that is on hold and that we will move to do something about that once we have this project through the process.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—That is not a bad segue, actually, because I was about to ask you about the child-care facility. In subparagraph 9.6 you do assert that there is certainly an interest in having child-care facilities in the area. You then go on to say:

It is the intention to proceed to excise the site and offer it for sale for development and use as a child care facility.

Would that be open to local residents and people who obviously are in need of child care, or is it something to do with DHA and children of Defence personnel?

Mr Bear—There is no intention for DHA to be the operator of the child-care facility.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—No, not operating but usage.

Mr Lyon—We would see it as being wider than the ADF, but as part of the process obviously we as the facilitator will be seeking to maximise access for ADF families.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Would ADF families be given preference over other local residents?

Mr Lyon—We are not at the stage really to be definitive about the access arrangements, but our intention and the reason for doing this is—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Sorry, Mr Lyon, why couldn't you now be of a firm mind as to whether preference would be given to ADF personnel?

Mr Lyon—Simply because I am not sure what the consequences of that requirement would be, either financially or from an operating point of view. The advice that I have at this stage, and it is informal advice, is that it would not be reasonable to go down the preference route. But we really have not explored that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Do you have any idea about the amount of places that you are looking at?

Mr Lyon—Not at this stage. We were simply reacting to advice, particularly from Defence families, that really a major issue is to have sufficient access, plus we became aware that there were operators who would be pretty keen to have a serious look at utilising this facility. So we are at the very early stages.

Mr LINDSAY—Mr Lyon, we have talked about this previously. This development, including the town houses up here, under your current plans will be entirely Defence. You know the concerns that the ADF and the wider community have about having a community that is entirely Defence. In other developments you have done you have put outsiders into the development. Why have you not taken that route in this development?

Mr Lyon—For two reasons: firstly, we have a very large demand for ADF houses and a shortage of land; secondly, this development is not a huge development in a concentration sense. We do have a couple of others that have been operating quite successfully. So we have been primarily driven on this occasion by the difficulty in getting access to sufficient housing.

Mr LINDSAY—Is it your evidence that you are not prepared to put independent families in this development?

Mr Lyon—We just feel we have such a heavy demand for Defence families and also this concentration is not sufficiently large enough to cause us concerns. But there will be other developments that the committee will be looking at in the future, including one in Darwin, where we will be injecting civilian people as well.

Mr LINDSAY—The triangular block—the last block right down the other end of this development—has a fair bit of open space around it. Would it have been better value for the

Commonwealth to have put on that triangular block some kind of higher density block—a town house type development?

Mr Bear—Perhaps I could ask our architect consultant to talk about that. We talked about a number of different options of how the site might be developed, and the one we have come forward with seemed to be the most efficient.

Mr MacCallum—So we are looking at whether there may have been alternatives for the end block, which has a rather unusual shape, and there was some discussion about whether another form of housing might be appropriate? I guess in preparing our initial master plan studies we did look at a variety of house forms. There is no doubt, as I mentioned on site, that the shape of the site is problematic in the way you configure the site. But we did feel that, to retain the character of the streetscape along McCrae Street and also because of that unusual shape, a single dwelling was more appropriate at that position. We also felt that we would prefer to consolidate, if you like, the medium density component of the site, that is the town houses towards the middle of the site, because the site lent itself more at that point to that style of housing.

Mr LINDSAY—I am struggling to see right down that end of the street, but it is fairly open development down there, isn't it?

Mr MacCallum— Yes.

Mr LINDSAY—It is all open down there. A higher density unit would not have been out of character, and Mr Lyon has already said that he needs as many development sites as he can. Why wouldn't we be considering getting better value out of the site?

Mr MacCallum—Something I probably should have also mentioned is that on race day that is quite a busy facility at that point and you do get quite a number of cars building up and down that part of the street. So, once again, it seemed that the pressure on that site, particularly if there were more dwellings associated with that, perhaps was not necessarily the best relationship for the racecourse. So in some ways that larger site in effect becomes a buffer from that racecourse.

Mr LINDSAY—Mr MacCallum, I will come back to you later on, if that is okay. Mr Bear, you may be able to answer this. There has been a new policy in Defence in defence tendering and contracting where local contractors are mandated to get a piece of the action where possible. Does this apply to DHA and the contracting for this project?

Mr Bear—Primarily we use local contractors, and we always have. If you go back through our past projects, you will find we used local contractors. In this case it is our intention that the whole of the work would be done by local Canberra based contractors.

Mr LINDSAY—I think you meant to say Queanbeyan based contractors.

Mr Lyon—Local area contractors.

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to Aboriginal heritage, your submission says you have had three groups on site and they have agreed there are no Aboriginal relics. Thinking about the risks

associated with that, did you get that signed off legally and are you able to assure the committee that legally there are no Aboriginal issues related to the development of this site?

Mr Bear—We use professionally trained people who assess those things. We have had meetings on site with the relevant Aboriginal groups. We have then had formal reports prepared. Those formal reports have then gone back to the Aboriginal groups that we consulted with, with a request for them to confirm whether this is how they see it. They have accepted what is in the reports as being a true and fair representation of the situation.

Mr LINDSAY—My question was: does that cover DHA in a legal sense in the future?

Mr Bear—I have not sought specific legal advice. I could do that.

Mr LINDSAY—That is a risk, then, isn't it? Although you have done all the consultation, it does not stop an Aboriginal group coming back and saying, 'We think this is a heritage site,' after you spend money?

Mr Bear—I cannot answer that question.

Mr LINDSAY—I think the answer is no. In relation to traffic management and this site here, firstly, is this particular building suitable as a child-care centre? Have you assessed that?

Mr Bear—Not specifically. In terms of traffic, it has been used as a pitch and putt clubhouse with a major car park.

Mr LINDSAY—No, leave traffic for a minute. You do not know whether this building is in fact suitable as a child-care centre?

Mr Bear—I do not.

Mr LINDSAY—Mr Lyon said earlier in a private briefing—I think I can say this; these were his words—he is not sure that he can get it off the ground, meaning as a child-care centre. That just brings to mind the risk and uncertainty involved, and now you are saying you do not know whether the building is suitable. You would not even know whether it was suitable as a refurbished dwelling, I guess, to be sold off as part of this development?

Mr Bear—The 1,900 metres associated with this site and the car park remain owned by DHA. If the alternative use of it did not prove to be financially viable, from either our point of view or an operator's point of view, it remains DHA land and we would again look at building further dwellings.

Mr LINDSAY—It is not usual, is it, that DHA concerns itself with whether there is a child-care centre adjacent to its development, the same as it would not concern itself if there were a shopping centre or—

Mr Bear—DHA is concerned that, when it is putting houses in an area, community facilities are appropriate for what we are doing. We would always look to see what schools are available,

what shopping is available, what things are in the area. In this particular case the child-care centre was an idea that came to us from the community.

Mr LINDSAY—In view of Mr Lyon's comment that he needs as much housing stock as possible, why is it that DHA is not in fact redeveloping this site and the car park with more housing stock?

Mr Bear—Because we are exploring what might be an alternative use for this particular block.

Mr LINDSAY—Thinking of traffic now, from a layman's point of view one of the possibilities might have been bringing the main entrance to this development off the street that is over the road here with a roundabout at that intersection. That would basically take it just beside this building here. Did you reject that traffic management option because you are trying to preserve this as a child-care centre?

Mr Bear—No, that was an option looked at. I have here the traffic engineer who considered all those options, and I could get him to give you the technical detail, if you wish.

Mr LINDSAY—Just before you do, I do not know whether that is appropriate but what I am looking at is just this development's value to the Commonwealth and whether by changing the traffic conditions you would get better value out of the site?

Mr MacCallum—Certainly in the initial master planning options we looked at different streetscape configurations, mainly because of the challenge of a triangular shaped site, to come up with the best way to achieve the best yield and the best balance of competing interests. One of the challenges we found was, if we were to try to run the road directly through, it was actually a fairly awkward relationship—one road on this side to the existing road on the other side—and likely to be problematic when compared to perhaps moving the road. There is quite consciously quite a distance between where the road would be located towards the boundary and where it currently is across the road here so that you do get a natural offset, which is a much safer solution. In doing that and in actually having that wider sweep, it allowed us to achieve better opportunity. Whether this remains as an adaptive reuse or whether this becomes additional housing, it gave us more flexibility to locate houses in this position.

Certainly we have an equestrian run adjacent to the boundary down there. Council have demanded a setback from that equestrian run to act as a buffer, as it were. So to have the road in that position seemed like a good decision because it dealt with that interface, where we may have had more challenges with housing. So on balance, given the competing interests, it really did seem to make sense to push that road further down.

Mr LINDSAY—Is the equestrian run part of the turf club?

Mr MacCallum—No, that is actually separate. They do obviously work together, but I gather it is operated by a separate group to the racecourse.

Senator FORSHAW—I have just a couple of questions. In terms of the density of the block, just following on from Mr Lindsay's question, what sort of scope, if you like, would the council allow for on this block in a mix of houses and town houses?

Mr MacCallum—There is certainly some flexibility in what can be provided on this site. We have targeted minimum 600 square metre size blocks, except for the town houses, on the basis of council documentation that allows that to be a single detached dwelling. If we wanted to go for integrated housing, we could indeed increase the density. But, when we brought into the equation DHA's requirements for Defence personnel, that did not seem to be the most appropriate form of housing in this situation. So we have tried to strike a balance then between what is a good size block and also achieving quite a good yield from the site.

Mr Bear—A lot of higher density developments, which have a different type of client group, are available in the general market, and we can acquire that in the general market. We have an opportunity to have housing with a little more room that is more suitable for families. There is room for a trampoline, a dog and for kids to move around. So the opportunity in this case to provide a slightly larger area was taken.

Senator FORSHAW—I did ask my next question when we were inspecting the site, but it is not on the record. Just so it is on the public record, the computer generated design shows all the buildings looking identical, but could you comment about what sort of flexibility you would have in terms of the streetscape and the design of the various houses along particularly McCrae Street—is it?

Mr MacCallum—McCrae Street, yes. Certainly in our experience working on previous projects, and the same fundamentals apply here, there are fairly clear requirements for Defence Housing Authority dwellings, but typically we would design, for example, along McCrae Street three or four floor plan types and they would each have an alternative elevation or streetscape elevation to provide that visual variety. I think from DHA's perspective they want the suburb to sit comfortably with the surrounding context, and that means variety in the dwelling types. And that will be reflected in the subsequent designs that we do.

Senator FORSHAW—You are going to have 16 houses along McCrae Street. Directly opposite on the other side of the road, it seems there are fewer houses. What implications are there for motor vehicle access to houses in the development along there?

Mr MacCallum—I guess that is why we engaged with Queanbeyan City Council early in the piece—to get a feel for what they felt was appropriate. They felt quite comfortable with our using McCrae Street as an access point for those dwellings. Given that we are working to their standards in terms of minimum block size, and indeed we exceed that with many of the blocks, then they are quite comfortable that McCrae Street can accommodate that.

Senator FORSHAW—Is McCrae Street—I did not notice as we were coming along it but I will certainly have a look as we go back—a fairly major road or through road?

Mr MacCallum—It is not meant to be. It is used that way sometimes.

Senator FORSHAW—Is there a median strip along there? I suppose I am looking here at people turning in and out.

Mr MacCallum—There is not a median strip. Certainly our traffic consultant categorised it as not being significant in that sense to, for example, require a median strip. I think the community's major concern was that a through way into the site would encourage more people to use it, and in fact we are trying to deter people—

Senator FORSHAW—I appreciate that point.

Mr MacCallum—Also, possibly all of these things become traffic-calming measures at the end of the day to discourage people using it in a way they should not be using it.

Senator FORSHAW—No doubt the council will monitor that.

Senator FERGUSON—Madam Chair, a lot has been said about Defence families, and I am wondering whether it would be possible to ask some questions of Mrs Caragh Waller.

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator FERGUSON—Firstly, does your association have any input into the style, planning and design of the houses that are currently proposed for Defence families?

Mrs Waller—Not directly in this development, but we certainly give feedback to DHA about the properties once they come online. In the past DHA have taken note of our concerns, particularly regarding the internal fittings of homes. But, having said that, I have been privy to the floor plans and if I were concerned I would have no hesitation in representing those views to DHA.

Mr Bear—We are very much concerned with tenant feedback. Whenever a new tenant moves into a house that we acquire, during the year they are asked to complete a survey commenting upon a number of things, including what they like or what they would like the house to have. We are getting that constant feedback right across the country. Families are saying they want security, storage and access to work. So certainly when we are designing our houses we are continually looking at addressing those issues: storage, security and access. In putting together this development, the feedback from those surveys is very much a driver of how we design the houses. That is where we get the feedback about having somewhere for the dog, somewhere for the family to move.

Senator FERGUSON—Mrs Waller, Mr Lindsay raised the issue about having a development or what you might call an enclave of Defence housing in an otherwise civilian residential sector. Does your association have a view as to whether families would prefer Defence housing to be in an enclave or whether they would like other families in the mix?

Mrs Waller—I think the difference here is that the development is actually part of a bigger community. If, for example, this development was by itself and was not surrounded by other facilities or other homes, then, yes, I think it would be far better for us and for our integration into the broader community that there be more civilian families mixing with our own. But, as has

previously been mentioned, because this development is a relatively small one I think it sits quite comfortably within the existing community, and because there is already such a large Defence presence in the area we are very much a part of the Queanbeyan community anyway.

Ms Robinson—We have had a very successful enclave in Stirling, in the ACT, where we have 50 homes. That, again, is part of the community, and that has worked very well. We have had very positive feedback.

Senator FERGUSON—There must be a stage when the number of houses actually gets too large to be an enclave within a community, when it becomes a town within a town. I do not know when you actually reach that stage, and that is what I am really interested in: how many Defence houses do you put together before they become virtually a community within a community?

Mr Lyon—It is a difficult question to answer, but we are certainly conscious of size and we are certainly conscious of concentrations from a social point of view and, indeed, from a security point of view. But in this particular case we have looked very closely at its size and where it fits within the community and we are fairly comfortable that on this occasion it will work well.

Senator FERGUSON—I suppose you personally have looked at it rather than your association, and you are very happy with this concept that they have here?

Mrs Waller—Yes, and I think there are certain benefits as well. Having said that there are benefits from being part of the broader community, there are also a lot of social benefits from being close to other Defence families. For example, if our partners are deployed, which a number of them are at the moment, there is that immediate support provided to us from other families. That is quite a big benefit. Also, a number of families have been able to do things like car pools to work because all the partners, for example, are working at Russell. That frees up cars for spouses to do school runs et cetera. There are potential detractions, I guess, but there are benefits as well to our being closer to other Defence families.

Senator FERGUSON—Do you live in the same sort of—

Mrs Waller—Yes, I live in Jerrabomberra, which is the development immediately this way. I live in a DHA property surrounded by other DHA properties in my street. As I say, from my personal experience there has been a big benefit in living close to other Defence families.

Senator FERGUSON—What sort of public transport do you have close to this development?

Mr Bear—There are local bus services, but I cannot talk to you about the route.

Mr MacCallum—I will just point at the plans to make it clear. There are actually two bus stops, just in front of the child-care centre here and also along McCrae Street.

Senator FERGUSON—Where do the buses travel?

Mr MacCallum—That I cannot tell you. The traffic consultant may be able to answer that question.

Senator FERGUSON—Do the buses go into Queanbeyan or do some go into the ACT?

Mr Bear—They go to Tuggeranong and they go into Queanbeyan.

Senator FERGUSON—It sounds like the local member might know.

Mr JENKINS—I was pleased that Mr Lindsay and Senator Ferguson have asked questions about—I do not like the word ‘enclaves’—small estates and related issues. In similar situations is there an estate committee or something like that that acts as a bridge between the subcommunity and DHA?

Ms Robinson—We have regular feedback from the tenants. If any issues arise we will consult with them, either one on one or as a group, when we have areas like this. We do that with all our tenants. Irrespective of whether they will be in a small community or in the wider community, we have tenant consultative groups.

Mr JENKINS—Mention was made of Queanbeyan council’s processes and the development application. Is that finalised?

Mr Bear—The development application has been lodged. The public notification period was from 16 September to 3 October, and that has now been completed. Officials are now putting together their submission to the full council, which we anticipate occurring on 17 November.

Mr JENKINS—Has there been an indication of any issues that still need to be resolved?

Mr Bear—The issues that were needing attention we believe have been attended to. We are in close liaison. We have had a number of discussions with the council in order to ensure they have every piece of information they need.

Mr JENKINS—I am interested in access to communal space which is not on the site—access to other recreation space. The nearest is across McCrae Street. Has this been looked at as an issue and what are the considerations? Is the equestrian thoroughfare, or whatever it is called, also a space available to families living here on the site?

Mr MacCallum—In the briefing this morning I perhaps should have shown you a wider context of the surrounding area. There are significant playing fields just to the other side of McCrae Street. When we were looking at the master planning for the site we did factor in whether some sort of facility should be provided on site or whether those be taken advantage of. Increasingly we find that councils are concerned to create so-called public spaces which they then have to assume control for and manage. Small public spaces are not necessarily particularly useful, so most councils generally prefer not to create them. Rather, they would prefer that the facility that is designed to work as such be used that way. So we investigated options for public space and decided not to create a significant area as such. At the entry, however, we have still left an open area where the buffer is, and that can be used by kids if needs be as a recreation area.

Mr Bear—If I could just add, at page 15 of the submission you will see a large park/open area across the road, and that is accessed by retaining the pathway through the development. So the pathway through here allows people to access that green open space.

Mr JENKINS—Crossing McCrae Street is not seen as an issue?

Mr MacCallum—No.

Mr JENKINS—I appreciate that, because I was not sure whether that was covered in the briefing as I was walking across that park whilst in Queanbeyan. As a part-time ratepayer of Queanbeyan, I am aware of the controversy over small parks and large parks. But I think we have all that on the record. My final questions relate to stormwater treatment. First, is DHA as a developer looking at internal use of stormwater on site? Further, is it looking at ways of recycling grey water for use on site? That question not only applies to this site but relates to future developments.

Mr MacCallum—Certainly very early in the piece with the master planning study, and actually even prior to that, there has always been a relationship between the pitch and putt golf course and the racecourse where if the dam was too full that water would be used by the racecourse. We engaged in formal discussions with the racecourse fairly soon after the site was purchased, and they were very interested in getting some of that stormwater. So that has been formalised now into some sort of an arrangement, and our civil engineer is now in the process of finalising the detail of the design. Certainly that has always been a big consideration: how to actually augment the stormwater and reuse it somewhere rather than just putting it simply back into the system.

Mr JENKINS—I was going to follow up with a specific question about this site which was to do with the racing club. It is for use by the racing club. Is that by a licence agreement, and does it give the sites here access back?

Mr Bear—No. Just for the record, I can table a letter from the racing club to confirm how we are working with them, and their acceptance and desire to receive the run water. In a more general sense, we have, without reaching any conclusions yet, been looking at a number of opportunities to do the very thing you are talking about. We are in discussion with a company concerning how concrete can be better used to collect and store water. We looked at one development as to how we might use grey water. But at this point we have not come up with a viable solution to that problem, but we are continuing to work on it.

CHAIR—Mr Bear, would you please hand a copy of that to the assistant secretary? I ask the committee to accept that as an exhibit. There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Mr JENKINS—Is this a commercial arrangement about the stormwater or is it just a—

Mr Bear—No, it is part of our commitment that it is a sensible, good thing to do. In our previous development, which the committee would be aware of, we adjoined a golf course and there we have organised for water to be used on the golf course.

Mr Lyon—That was not the question. You are not charging the racecourse for water.

Mr Bear—No, we are not charging the racecourse for water.

CHAIR—Another matter that I think might be of interest to local people is dust and truck traffic management. Undoubtedly during the construction period there will be a level of dust, particularly if you are proposing to get this development under way—and I think you want to do so—fairly quickly.

Mr Bear—We do.

CHAIR—Could you tell us what you are going to do to minimise the dust problem for residents and also about the management of trucks carrying and perhaps taking away materials?

Mr Kemp—Part of the building approval process is actually to put in place environmental management plans, which basically handle what you do on the site and what you do in terms of truck traffic as it leaves. These plans will be drawn up between the civil engineering contractor and our own civil engineering consultants, will be agreed and will obviously be signed off by the appropriate authority, Queanbeyan City Council.

CHAIR—And those conditions are set down by the local council?

Mr Kemp—Correct.

CHAIR—Your project timing is a little unclear. Paragraph 1.2 of your submission states that DHA intends the first house to be available for occupation in November 2004 ‘to meet the operational needs of the Australian Defence Force’. However, paragraph 17.2 states:

Delivery of all completed dwellings is expected to occur by November 2004.

Further, the time line provided at paragraph 22.1 is ‘Based on an aim of having progressive delivery of first new residences starting in December 2004’. Can you just clarify that for us, please?

Mr Kemp—Basically the construction program that we have fundamentally we have split into three stages. The first one will be delivered towards the middle to end of October; the next stage will be in the middle of November; and the last stage, stage 3, will be on 30 November. That is what we are working to. I apologise for some of the anomalies there, but that is basically it.

Mr Bear—The point to make from a project management point of view is that the planning is around the posting cycle of 2004-05 in having the houses ready for occupation. Planning-wise, a number of the houses will be ready before that period. If they can be suitably isolated from the construction process—we would not want a family living next door to a construction site—then they would be occupied early. There are options for us to do some of that, given the elongated shape of the site, and to work in areas.

CHAIR—But you can understand why the committee might be concerned about this, because obviously if there are delays or difficulties it adds to your overall cost of development.

Mr MacCallum—Just one comment, for what it is worth, picking up your question there. We are fortunate on this site that we can access a lot of the dwellings off McCrae Street. So in terms of the civil works strategy we will design the civil works to be delivered in two stages. Certainly stage 1 would most likely be McCrae Street, and that allows very easy access to those sites. So it takes out some of the risks of having to rely on an internal road system only to access those sites. So that is a benefit.

CHAIR—I know we are running out of time, but just for the record—because you are aware that the federal government has a very strong policy of minimising energy use and minimising the resultant greenhouse gas emissions—can you quickly tell us whether you have consulted with the Australian Greenhouse Office and what you are doing to make sure that the site is developed in an energy-efficient way?

Mr Bear—Firstly, we have had the first of the prototype houses, which will be the main house used, assessed against the NatHERS rating, and it comes up with a five-star rating, which is in excess of the four. Our internal planning processes, aside from what may be required by local government, say that houses must have at least a four-star energy rating. So that is the starting point for us. We will then be looking at what other good things can be adopted. I can get Alastair to talk to you about how the site lends itself to sun orientation.

Mr MacCallum—I touched on it briefly this morning, but the benefit of effectively designing a development like this from scratch is that we can, rather than simply laying a house on a site, design houses to take best advantage of northern solar access. They will be courtyard style homes that will benefit from good solar access. It is our intention to use thermal mats in the house construction with concrete slabs and to use insulation. They are the primary things to achieve energy-efficient housing. Obviously there are other initiatives that can be investigated, and that will be part of the design development process.

CHAIR—Are you consulting with the Greenhouse Office?

Mr MacCallum—Yes, we have.

Senator FORSHAW—I do not think we covered this. Could you tell me about the parking arrangements for the whole of the site? Is it single or double garage?

Mr MacCallum—Each dwelling will have a double garage, including the town houses. So that caters for the requirements of each house. Then off-street parking will be provided for visitors, and that has been assessed by Queanbeyan City Council to be appropriate.

Senator FORSHAW—It is a bit hard to tell from the drawing, but are you confident that there is plenty of room on the internal roads?

Mr MacCallum—Yes. They have been designed for their width and the verge width to accommodate on-street car parking.

Senator FORSHAW—What is the arrangement along McCrae Street for any visitor parking?

Mr MacCallum—Similarly, because of the sides of that road, there is an opportunity there for on-street car parking as well.

Senator FORSHAW—It is open to parking at the moment?

Mr MacCallum—That is right.

Mr LLOYD—Firstly, I want to commend DHA on the amount of community consultation that has been involved in this site—I think it is very important—and also to reacting to some of the community's concerns in changing the traffic layout. I think that has been very commendable. This question was actually raised by the local member, Gary Nairn, who I know has been very active in ensuring the interests of local communities are looked after. Has a traffic study been done of the amount of traffic that will be generated by residents living on this site?

Mr Bear—Yes, there has, and I can make that report available.

Mr MacCallum—That has been made available to Queanbeyan City Council.

Mr LLOYD—Can you give a rough overview of what that says?

Mr Bear—We have the consultant here, if you would like to talk to him.

Mr LLOYD—Okay.

Mr Chen—My firm, Scott Wilson, undertook a traffic study and submitted a report in September. We looked at the traffic impacts of the development and impacts upon the intersections during both the a.m. and the p.m. peak hours. We also analysed the traffic noise on McCrae Street and on another road, and we also looked at the amount of delays and queues at the respective junctions. From that assessment, we concluded that the development itself will not create any significant impacts in terms of traffic congestion and queues or contribute significantly to traffic noise.

Mr Bear—The local member, Gary Nairn, has pointed out to me that he has already been in discussion with Australia Post about providing a letterbox, and he is working on that.

CHAIR—That is excellent. Thank you very much. Before closing, I thank the witnesses who have appeared before the committee today and those people who have assisted our inspections and, of course, the private briefing this morning. I would like to thank the public—local people, no doubt—who have come here today, and also the member for this area, Mr Gary Nairn.

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

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it and submissions presented at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.14 a.m.