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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Reference: Proposed development of land at Lee Point, in Darwin, for Defence and private housing

MONDAY, 19 JULY 2004

DARWIN

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Monday, 19 July 2004

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: Mr Jenkins, Mrs Moylan, Mr Brendan O'Connor

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Proposed development of land at Lee Point, in Darwin, for Defence and private housing.

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Committee met at 10.47 a.m.

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

JONES, Mr Peter, Chairman, Defence Housing Authority Board, Defence Housing Authority

LYON, Mr Keith, Managing Director, Defence Housing Authority

WILSON, Ms Sharon, Manager, Darwin Housing Management Centre, Defence Housing Authority

ROHDE, Ms Rebelle, Senior Planner, Connell Wagner

CHAIR—Welcome. I declare open this Public Works Committee hearing into the proposed development of land at Lee Point, Darwin, for defence private housing. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on 26 May 2004 for consideration and report to 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 an in camera briefing from the Defence Housing Authority, and we also carried out an inspection of the site of the proposed works. We will now hear evidence from the Defence Housing Authority; Darwin City Council; the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Northern Territory Chapter; the Planning Action Network Inc. and Mr Matt Coffey.

The committee has received a statement of evidence and three supplementary submissions from DHA. These submissions will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry and 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—No.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Jones—First of all, may I thank you for the arrangements that have been made during your busy schedule so that we can have this hearing today. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you. So far as the Defence Housing Authority is concerned, providing good-quality housing is critical to supporting the Australian Defence Force's role in Darwin. A key element of that is maintaining the retention rates for the personnel who occupy those houses. As indicated in the submission, the defence housing requirement is scheduled to grow over the next three years and there is a need to replace housing stock, which is becoming marginal in terms of the accepted defence housing standards.

The Lee Point Road development is critical and strategic to the authority's capability to support the Australian defence forces. We are very conscious that this development must be a quality one. We are pleased that there has been, and continues to be, very strong cooperation and support from the Northern Territory government. In this connection the authority is committed to ensuring that the commitments and the undertakings we have given, and which are contained in the memorandum of understanding with the government, are met in spirit and in practice. An important element will be to ensure that those businesses and skilled trades which are represented here will have a real opportunity to contribute to this project. This has been made a requirement in the joint venture selection process which is now under way.

Similarly, community consultation is critical to ensuring a successful project. DHA has undertaken, and will continue to undertake, consultation. Since the submission was lodged, DHA, with the facilitation of the Northern Territory government, organised an open public meeting on 22 June at the Tracy Village club. I note that the Darwin City Council has referred to the need to resolve a range of normal planning matters. These matters will be resolved as part of the development application approval process. This step will be undertaken once we have managed to finalise the selection of a joint venture partner. One of the key issues in determining this partner will be the quality of the urban plan.

Similarly, planning issues, such as lot size, energy conservation, protection of flora and fauna, housing design, location, walkways, cycle ways and road widths, will all be addressed fully during this planning process. The provision of schooling and community services, such as transport, are matters for the Northern Territory government and are being addressed. On that note I would like to hand over to my colleagues, who will be able to answer questions.

CHAIR—Thank you. We have talked in the private briefing about the lack of detail. What has been presented to the committee is really a broad macro plan. Obviously the detail cannot be determined until such time as a joint venture partner is involved and more detailed planning can take place. It is important for the committee to note that two of the three public submissions have also raised this and clearly it is a matter for concern. One of the questions that committee members have is this: is it possible for you to make available to the committee material on each of these critical phases of development so that we can assess it as it proceeds?

Mr Lyon—We would be very happy and pleased to provide additional information to the committee as we go through each of the major events. We will do that on a regular basis.

CHAIR—The Royal Australian Institute of Architects raises a similar matter in terms of the broad-brush approach and the lack of detail which would enable us to comment about the design merits. We know that in these tropical areas design is critical to the amenity of housing

development and houses in particular, so clearly the design elements are very important. Making sure that the lot development is developed to allow appropriate design is also a critical issue. Again, I would ask that you give us an assurance that the committee will be kept posted at each stage of the development to ensure that these issues are addressed as we proceed.

Mr Lyon—I am certainly pleased to give the committee that assurance. We have set out in our submission the design principles that we are seeking. As the Chairman of the DHA Board has indicated, we are looking for a quality development. In doing this, we have also reached agreement on a number of principles with the Northern Territory government. I am happy to table a copy of the memorandum of understanding today if the committee would like that.

CHAIR—At point 4.3 in your submission, regarding the description of the proposal, the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Northern Territory makes the point that you use the word ‘should’ a lot rather than ‘will’. Do you want to make a comment about that?

Mr Lyon—From our point of view, ‘should’ is a definitive statement of intention. The requirement will be for us to convince the relevant Northern Territory planning authorities that the intentions are translated into realities when we submit the precise development plan. I am sure that that is where the real test will be, because that is what will be committed.

CHAIR—In effect, you address those issues. You say, for example, that the lot size and orientation should include consideration of energy efficiency concepts.

Mr Lyon—In using the word ‘should’ there, we mean that they will.

CHAIR—Because it is important. As you know, the government has a very strong policy of ensuring that all Commonwealth developments minimise energy use, so those kinds of issues are always particularly important to the committee. One of the key objectives is to produce energy efficient developments, whether they are housing projects or major infrastructure or buildings.

Mr Lyon—Precisely. Just on this point, DHA is particularly conscious of energy costs in housing. It has an impact on ADF members and families. We are acutely aware that airconditioning is very expensive, so we are very keen to insulate and ventilate houses to minimise those sorts of costs to the extent that we can. We have in fact done quite a lot of pioneering work which is included in our standard houses up here. But, having said all of that, we know we can do better and we will certainly be trying to do better here, particularly with the orientation of the blocks, not just from an energy point of view but also from a liveability point of view.

CHAIR—The other ‘should’ that stands out is at point (e) under 4.3:

The road network should provide permeability and improved legibility and encourage pedestrian and cycle movement ...

We were having a discussion about that while we were looking at the site plans on the back wall there. I think this is an enormously important aspect of any modern development, so again I suppose we would like assurances that this will be incorporated, not as an optional extra but as one of the key criteria for the development.

Mr Lyon—I am happy to provide that assurance. That is a case where the ‘should’ certainly means ‘would’.

CHAIR—I think you generally get the drift. The Royal Australian Institute of Architects Northern Territory have highlighted a number of points in their submission and we hope that they will be addressed.

Mr Lyon—They certainly will be.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—I would like to follow up on the terminology used. I do not want to labour the point but, as I understand it, clause 4 of the proposal has incorporated the memorandum of understanding that has now just been tabled. The chair of the committee has indicated she would feel more comfortable, and I would certainly feel more comfortable—and I am sure the committee would, generally—if the term ‘should’ were replaced by ‘will’ or ‘shall’. I do not accept the proposition that ‘should’ is an undertaking. It certainly means that there is a preferred option but it seems to leave open a discretion. We would feel more comfortable if the terms used were mandatory rather than discretionary. I do not know whether you can do that on every item but I know, from drafting agreements myself, that if I wanted to leave open the capacity to obviate obligations I would place the word ‘should’ not ‘shall’ or ‘will’. That was quite rightly raised by other parties and it has now been raised by the chair. It was certainly a concern of mine when I read it without having gone through any other submission. I, therefore, would want some assurance that all of those subitems of clause 4 are obligations or undertakings not just preferable options. Could you comment upon that?

Mr Lyon—This is a case of language as distinct from intentions. I am quite happy to go through that and put in a supplementary note to the committee. There will be some judgment issues involved in translating the intentions into practice. I will just pick one that is the subject of some comment in some of the submissions—that is, 4.3(c), lot size and orientation. In this development—as in all developments—there will be a range of lot sizes but the minimum lot size that we are intending, and have agreed with the Northern Territory government, is 600 square metres, which is a reasonable size.

CHAIR—You could still say that they will include those things.

Mr Lyon—Exactly.

CHAIR—Smaller sizes do not necessarily, in a certain mix and balance, preclude the provision of those issues such as privacy, acoustic protection and so on.

Mr Lyon—Thank you, Chair. That is exactly the point I was trying to bring out.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—It would make it clear. There may be situations where you could not be expected to say something would definitely happen. We just delineate between those where we would clearly want to see it happen and those where there might be some preference. From the way in which this is constructed it is hard to know whether any of these things would have to be done in the construction phase.

Mr Lyon—I am happy to do that, and almost all of them will come back as ‘would’ not ‘should’.

Mr Bear—I would like to add that the development will be submitted for approval by the Northern Territory Development Consent Authority, which will have the final say on whether the development can occur or not. These principles and words—and I am not saying it is word for word—have been taken from the documentation that the Northern Territory government have provided to them. So in assessing the final development application when it goes forward, the Northern Territory Development Consent Authority would be looking at these issues.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—This is not one of the committee’s easier examinations in that things are done in phases and we have other partners to the proposal. Therefore, I suppose we are looking to, wherever possible, tighten up words so that we feel that what we are examining is in fact something that will happen. What is before us is not a simple case of looking at the construction of bricks and mortar. There is a lot of trust given in this area. With respect to the subdivisions, I know that there has been no definitive proposition put as to how many lots there will be, but we have talked about the size of the lots. There has been an issue about the fact that there would be no less than 600 square metres per lot, with some lots possibly ranging up to 700 or 800 square metres. Are those size lots in keeping with Darwin generally in terms of residential accommodation or is this something that is alien to the area?

Mr Lyon—There is a mixture of lot sizes. If I could explain it this way. In the older suburbs of Darwin—just like I think exists in most cities, to be quite honest—the blocks tended to be larger and in new developments they tend to be smaller. I think there is reference in the information provided to the committee that some of the development lots in places like Palmerston are a lot smaller than 600 square metres, which is occurring elsewhere. DHA are involved in developments right across the country and around 600 square metres on average is in the range. We do accept that there are special circumstances in Darwin with the tropical climate and the outdoor living that one must take into account.

CHAIR—What kind of market testing have you done to determine that people are interested in blocks around the 640 square metre mark? You have also mentioned Palmerston. Have you done any analysis to see whether Palmerston as a subdivision is actually working and whether there are issues that would indicate that 600-odd square metre blocks in this climate in such developments are not producing the best amenity?

Mr Lyon—DHA have got something like 674 houses in Palmerston, which would be one of the biggest concentrations. We are selling those houses. As the committee is aware, we finance our properties through sale and lease-back arrangements. Those houses are very similar to the other houses that are built in the community. In terms of value, there was a report in the Northern Territory press very recently which showed that average values have increased quite substantially, including in suburbs like Durack and Driver which have these sorts of block sizes.

CHAIR—Do you have any formal process of checking up on people who are occupying these properties to see how they are finding living on smaller lots?

Mr Lyon—Yes. DHA do annual tenant surveys and we do regular surveys of new tenants moving into the houses. We are experiencing high satisfaction levels. Our regional officer, Sharon Wilson, can elaborate.

Ms Wilson—Our last three surveys over the last three quarters for Darwin-wide show satisfaction levels for the housing provided was in the 90 per cents, and that included 600 in the Palmerston area.

Mr Bear—In the first quarter of 2003-04, there was 97 per cent satisfaction with the housing.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You may have some information on the design or proposed design of possible houses. Do you have to have regard for outside living? Would there be some part of the accommodation that would allow for people to inhabit an outside space?

Mr Bear—All our new houses have a mandatory 18 square metres of covered outdoor living area. That is a standard requirement. The other indicator we have is that a lot of people in that survey are moving into older houses. We would like to do a second survey of people moving into newly acquired properties as opposed to moving into newer houses. The satisfaction level of people moving into the newer houses is roughly eight to 10 per cent higher. We believe that is because when we do those surveys we ask them what they are looking for and the primary things that they are looking for are storage, outdoor living and security—and, because we are providing that within their houses, you can obviously expect the satisfaction levels to be higher.

There are some more intense areas, such as the development in Duntroon that you are involved in. A lot of the lots there are down at 450 and 420 metres. There was a lot of work done with the members concerned. In an area like that where the member is away a lot—he is working seven days a week—he does not want to come home on his afternoon off to cut grass. They prefer to use community facilities. We are trying to cover all of those bases. We also have to recognise that a large proportion of our clients have a dog and children, and there has to be scope for that sort of thing. It is a challenge to achieve the balance. But, on balance, the satisfaction levels are very high, and that is what they are telling us they want and that is how we put things together.

Mr JENKINS—To the north and the east of the site there are defence lands. Is the use of that land likely to impede anything to do with residential development? Are they compatible?

Mr Lyon—Those sites that are maintained by Defence at the present time have no impact on the development that we are talking about here. It is our understanding that the defence department will be relocating those facilities, but that will happen at some stage in the future. There is no impediment as a result of those existing defence sites to this particular development.

Mr JENKINS—How advanced are the thoughts about moving from that land? When you talk about it becoming available in the future, how far into the future is that?

Mr Lyon—I would have to get updated advice from the defence organisation and write to the committee on that.

Mr JENKINS—The context of those questions is that, if they were to become available in a reasonable time span, I want to ascertain whether the particular site that is subject to this inquiry has been looked at in the context of possible use of the surrounding land. Is there an outlined development plan of some sort about the extension of the northern suburbs?

Mr Lyon—I am aware that the Northern Territory government, which is very keen to see that land released, has taken a keen interest in making certain that the infrastructure is provided in such a way that it is capable of being extended. By infrastructure I mean water, power, sewerage and from a road planning point of view. DHA is not intimately involved in that; our mandate relates to this particular development.

Mr JENKINS—So, in the development of the concept plans for the site, there has been regard taken to surrounding existing developments—residential, health and community.

Mr Bear—Yes.

Mr JENKINS—And not to any potential?

Mr Lyon—There has certainly been regard to the community facilities associated with this particular development. But the development of the whole site, when the Department of Defence releases it, which is still some time away, is, I know, an issue that the Northern Territory government has been concerned with. Its planning and its intentions have been reflected in the agreement that we have.

Mr JENKINS—In the submission you talk about infrastructure and so on, and there is some talk about some optical cable and copper cabling or something that goes across the site but you are not sure where it is.

Mr Bear—It is also redundant and can be removed and will all be upgraded and replaced.

Mr JENKINS—When there was talk about optical fibre, it suggested that it was not that long ago.

Mr Bear—There is one cable up Lee Point Road which is optical fibre. That services the defence station up the road. It is new cable and is not within where we would be developing. An easement will be retained for that.

Mr JENKINS—So that is a known.

Mr Bear—That is a known.

Mr JENKINS—It is not a public piece of infrastructure?

Mr Bear—It is a Telstra piece of infrastructure. Telstra own it and operate it.

Mr JENKINS—Can it be used in any way for the development?

Mr Lyon—That is not a matter that we have explored at this stage. That would come as part of the next stage of our development.

Mr Bear—It is not the advice we are receiving.

Mr JENKINS—But it could be used.

Mr Bear—Yes. We are saying it is there. We are aware that it is there but—

Mr JENKINS—It is separate from your development.

Mr Bear—Absolutely.

Mr JENKINS—Take me through the requirements of development contributions, either by way of setting aside open space or by way of the ability in the Territory to have an impost by way of a developer contribution towards some community facility, transport facility.

Mr Bear—I think it might be best if the officer from Connell Wagner who prepared the technical research came to the table and answered the questions directly.

Ms Rohde—With regard to the requirements for open space, there is a general provision that 10 per cent of open space will be provided within a residential development which will be gifted back to the Darwin City Council. At present, Sandy Creek Reserve is under the ownership of Parks and Wildlife, with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. A public land reserve set aside for Sandy Creek would have to be through a negotiation process on the overall management or ownership of that land afterwards. But generally a provision of a minimum of 10 per cent, which includes land not encumbered by drainage infrastructure, is required to be provided. On top of that, with land that is gifted over to Darwin City Council or the owner, there are also developer contributions with regard to future maintenance and operation of these facilities.

CHAIR—How much of the land in this development would be provided for open space?

Ms Rohde—There is a minimum of 10 to 15 per cent in the concept plan that we have provided.

Mr JENKINS—So there are developer contributions only for the upkeep of the open space? There is not, for instance, a developer contribution for, say, traffic management on Lee Point Road or something like that?

Ms Rohde—The developer contributions to Darwin City Council include general roads et cetera and a percentage of the total amount of works undertaken or the total value of works that are wider than just open space. Lee Point Road would have to be a negotiated area, and the responsibility is not known at this stage.

Mr JENKINS—So that is something that may be asked for and required during the planning procedure—something about which there could be negotiations?

Mr Lyon—There certainly will be negotiations about those types of things as part of the approval process. That is normal, and we expect to go through that.

Mr JENKINS—Below—as in to the east of—Tracy Village there is a bit of land that has been set aside for ‘community use?’ Is that part of DHA holdings?

Mr Bear—Yes.

Mr JENKINS—You have just indicatively suggested that that might be an area that could be contributed?

Mr Bear—In doing the feasibility and looking at how the development could occur, if it was decided that that sort of facility was required, that is a potential spot for it. In terms of areas and road accesses et cetera we have just included that in a preliminary assessment.

Mr JENKINS—About what percentage of the site is that?

Mr Lyon—We could calculate that for you.

Mr JENKINS—That is okay.

Mr Bear—About five per cent.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—There have been some statements made that the Lee Point site falls within the traditional territory of the Larrakia people and is currently under native title claim. The authority maintains, however, that it has received legal advice to the effect that native title has been extinguished over lots 9774 and 9779. Could you provide what grounds have been highlight to indicate that native title has been extinguished over those particular lots?

Mr Lyon—We have advice from the Australian Government Solicitor that we are relying on. I could make that available to the committee on a confidential basis, if that would help.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Do lots 9774 and 9779 encompass the entire area of the development site?

Mr Bear—The numbers keep coming at me. Lots 9774 and 9775, yes.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—And lot 9779?

Mr Bear—And 9779. The two pieces of land that we are talking about are 9774 and 9779.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Yes.

Mr Bear—The advice in paragraph 10.3 is that those are the two lots that are covered by the advice.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Is there no native title claim under 9775?

Mr Bear—Lot 9775 is Tracy Village, and that is not part of what we are talking about.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Is there no other lot that would impact on the development site that might have a native title claim?

Mr Bear—No.

CHAIR—As you know, one of the tasks of this committee is to ensure that the taxpayer gets value for money. That is always a balancing act between producing a development with amenity and appropriate facilities for public habitation and getting the best yields and the best value out of the land to be developed. I notice that you are using an average of 638 square metres per lot and I think your assessment is that that will develop around 725 lots. We did talk about this in the private briefings, but is Defence prepared to look at a mix and balance of lot sizes within the overall scheme once you select a joint venture partner in the development?

Mr Lyon—We are certainly expecting a mix of lot sizes. We expect that some will be as large as 800 square metres. The average size is 638 square metres. The minimum size we have been working to is 600 square metres. Those are the perimeters we have been talking about.

CHAIR—The committee has called for you to provide to us a confidential analysis of the different mixes of lot sizes, their yield and their dollar value because not always, of course, does the maximum number of lots in a development equal maximum value. We look forward to receiving that information but, for the purposes of this hearing, can you give us an assurance that you will look at whether the best possible mix includes lots of 800, 750 and maybe 650 square metres?

Mr Lyon—We will certainly provide that information to the committee. We will do that in two stages: firstly, once the joint venture has settled on a plan prior to approval; and, secondly, after we have been through the approval process. We will provide information to the committee on both of those stages and we will also provide the additional information on scenario analysis, which we spoken about.

CHAIR—Has DHA done any work to prove that ecologically sustainable development principles can be achieved within the proposed lot sizes that you are talking about?

Mr Lyon—Yes. There has been a planning element. Ms Rohde can comment on that.

Ms Rohde—In the original planning context of the site, we looked at the preservation of flora and fauna, habitat corridors, connection with additional reserves, water sensitive urban design and orientation to address energy efficiency, provision of public transport, provision of community facilities and a range of housing lot sizes within the 600 square metre range.

CHAIR—How do you balance this against your stated need to minimise costs? This is a delicate balancing matter. You want to produce a development that provides the best environmental and sustainability outcomes but you also want to provide lots at a reasonable cost to both the Defence Housing Authority and the community. Do you see difficulties in achieving both aims?

Mr Lyon—I think we can comfortably achieve both aims in this development. We have done sufficient work in planning around 725 lots at an average lot size of 638 square metres, based on the available land, while still meeting planning principles in terms of open space and all those other important things. We believe that provides a reasonable balance. The proof will be in the next stage after we have the expert advice from the contenders to form a joint venture partner. Of course, the final test is in the ultimate approvals. But we believe that mixture will produce a really good result and that this is a good site to achieve a good result.

CHAIR—Do you foresee any shrinkage due to the consideration for flora and fauna and the maintenance of the Sandy Creek catchment area? There are obviously other issues that have to be dealt with: traffic management and access on the hospital side; the buffer zone to Tracy Village, which we talked about earlier; and, of course, the incorporation of the design elements that would produce the best possible housing designs.

Mr Lyon—There is always a risk that once we complete the development processes the development could be less than what we are doing our planning on. But we have done a lot of work with the assistance of Ms Rohde and her group, who have done a lot of analysis on the fauna, plants and so on.

Mr Bear—Alternative access to the hospital is mandatory. That will be achieved through what can be achieved in other areas. Because we have control of the whole development, as opposed to just 10 here or there, we are able to plan the lot size, the orientations and the replanting of vegetation in the whole plan. We are talking about a major development here. We will be able to control some covenants when land is sold as to how houses are sited and the plots. What are important in the way we design houses to ensure energy efficiency in tropical living are things like roof overhangs, vegetation, siting on the block for the cross-breezes and the window types that the put in. We do not put normal glass windows in. On the vegetation side, we are satisfied that we will be able to incorporate those sorts of things without difficulty in the way we set out the development.

Ms Rohde—A detailed flora and fauna assessment was undertaken which identified various vegetation communities around the site. That included a number of species in the Sandy Creek reserve area. The development as a whole and the Sandy Creek reserve areas have been set aside presently based on the location of that vegetation as well as appropriate buffers from that site.

CHAIR—Is the *Cycas armstrongii* plant species also primarily in that Sandy Creek area?

Ms Rohde—That is correct. It is located in other areas of the site but there is provision for its relocation.

CHAIR—So it can be transplanted?

Ms Rohde—That is correct.

Mr JENKINS—To what extent does the application of ESD principles in the tropics a contest of ideas? How much is based on a body of work or scientific analysis?

Mr Bear—On practical levels it is about how we manage the stormwater. It is about how we site and lay out the houses. It is about how we present the habitat. It is about how we recycle waste material. It is about how issues of environment are handled during the construction program. In this day and age, where we are at now, there are very good guidelines and precedents on how these matters can be handled.

Mr Lyon—Coming back to the intellectual level, if I have understood your question correctly, the big debate is about whether you can design housing here in the tropics in a way that avoids airconditioning. That it is the ultimate goal. Bearing in mind that most of the people we support are people who have been posted here as ADF members, our research based on our client group shows that they do need access to airconditioning because of the climate requirements. As a result of that, the defence department has agreed that we will provide airconditioning. I think that is the major issue.

Mr JENKINS—What is the experience or the basis of the experience that has led them to that conclusion?

Mr Lyon—It is really member satisfaction through the surveys. Also members have advocated through their command structure for airconditioning. They have also advocated for subsidies associated with the use of airconditioning because power costs are quite high. That is where it has come from. From our point of view, we are conscious of the need to try to construct houses that minimise the airconditioning requirements. So we put a lot of effort into ventilating and insulating the houses and increasingly siting the houses in such a way to limit that need, but if we stopped providing airconditioning in houses here in Darwin we would hear very quickly from our client group.

CHAIR—That leads me to a point that was raised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Northern Territory Chapter. One of the attachments to your submission is the request for expressions of interest from financially sound companies or consortia to enter into a joint venture with defence housing. One of the criticisms by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects of this request for expressions of interest is that it is biased towards management skills and successful financial outcomes. There is no reference in that document to the ability to design appropriately. What kind of emphasis are you intending to put on that requirement when you assess a company's ability to undertake a joint venture, and why have you not included it in the requests for expressions of interest? Do you not see it as pivotal to the successful joint venturer's ability to produce the best possible outcomes for this development?

Mr Lyon—The selection of the joint venturer has gone through two stages. The first stage was a stage based on capability, and the capability of the contenders for innovative design was one of the criteria that was utilised. That criterion will be reinforced in the selection of the final joint venture partner when the request for tender documents is issued in the next few weeks.

CHAIR—We are not just talking about innovative design, though, are we? We are talking about appropriate design experience and skill—

Mr Lyon—Precisely.

CHAIR—to ensure that these houses meet the conditions of the tropics, minimise energy use and produce the best possible outcome?

Mr Lyon—We are talking here primarily about the design of the development layout. The actual houses are not part of the development here. That will happen as part of the next step.

CHAIR—But still the layout and the design of the land itself will determine what you can build on it?

Mr Lyon—Absolutely.

CHAIR—So the way that the lots are orientated and the size of the lots will become key issues in maximising the design aspect of the properties that people will be living in?

Mr Lyon—I agree, and it goes back to what we were talking about earlier: they should become stronger because of the types of elements that influence achieving the right outcome.

CHAIR—Would you agree that the person who comes in as a joint venture partner needs to have not only the financial and management skills but also the ability in the design area of a subdivision in order to ensure that it maximises the enjoyment of people's amenity?

Mr Lyon—I agree. It will be part of the criteria in selecting the ultimate joint venturer.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I am not sure whether we raised this in the confidential meeting or publicly but, for the record, can you express the extent and nature of the role envisaged for local businesses in the construction. I know we have touched upon it, but I want to make sure we have expressed that formally and that it is on the public record.

Mr Lyon—I am pleased to table a document that we have agreed with the Northern Territory government titled *Industry Participation Plan: Lee Point Project, Darwin*. The document sets out the requirements in more detail.

CHAIR—Thank you. I thank you for appearing before the committee.

[11.40 a.m.]

BAILEY, Mr John, Deputy Lord Mayor, Darwin City Council

COLLINS, Mrs Janice Ellen, Alderman, Darwin City Council

CRAWLEY, Mr Francis Richard, Director, Corporate Services, Darwin City Council

SMITH, Mr Shayne, Design Team Leader, Darwin City Council

CHAIR—Mr Bailey, you are the deputy lord mayor and we particularly welcome you to the hearing today, as well as your staff and other aldermen. The committee has received a submission from you. Do you wish to propose any amendments to the submission made to the committee?

Mr Bailey—We do not propose any amendments.

CHAIR—Then I invite you to make a short statement in regard to your submission and we will proceed to questions.

Mr Bailey—Our main overall comment is that until we have a great deal more detail about exactly what the proposed development will be and more information about many of the issues that directly affect Darwin City Council, we will not be in a position to comment. Darwin City Council has a number of responsibilities, as we have covered—to do with road layouts, public areas et cetera—and, until we know what those are, the staff will not be able to make more detailed comments.

There are some general areas that, as elected members and as residents of the local area, we would like to add some thoughts about. A general comment that I would make is that—and we listened to the people who appeared before you previously—it is our understanding, and we were aware of it right from the start, that the minimum lot size in the Darwin town plan is actually 800 square metres. We were a little surprised at how much emphasis there has been on having an average size of 638 and a maximum approaching 800. Within the Darwin town plan 800 is the smallest that is currently permitted without a waiver of the lot size. It is our understanding that smaller lot sizes are allowed in Palmerston but not in Darwin. There are lifestyle issues involved and, as elected members, we would have some concerns over the lot sizes that are being talked about and the amenity of residents. Many people in Darwin have an outdoor lifestyle—open windows et cetera—and noise does travel. Airconditioners are on all the time. Building very close to boundaries does create a disturbance for others and we were wondering on what basis the lot size is being worked on.

In the comments made about open space areas to be transferred across to council there was mention of the Sandy Creek reserve area as a sort of nature area. Darwin City Council would expect areas for recreation as well as just reserve areas in there, so that people can go and play and run around—more like parks recreation than just reserves.

We have some concerns about what the road access outside the area will be. One concern is that, if there is a major access into the bottom end of Tiwi, into Rocklands Drive and that area there, it could be seen as a shortcut towards Darwin. The concern is that that would mean, potentially, a reasonably high volume of traffic going down roads that really are not designed for that volume of traffic. Again, we have not seen it, but the thought would be that the major access road should be Lee Point Road, and that going down past the hospital, around past the university, would not be an appropriate way to move.

The last issue is that I have had some representation to make sure that there is adequate local building content and participation from local builders within the development. There was even a suggestion of something like a display village where not just major developers come in but smaller local ones in some way support it, to demonstrate the quality of local building and some of the innovation that may be there. One of the concerns that has been raised over the years is the move towards what we call southern housing styles being transported to Darwin and sort of plonked on. Initially, if you have come from somewhere else, it may seem familiar and you may feel comfortable with it, but it is not necessarily the best style.

There is an issue that you people might like to look into. As a person who has a bit of an interest at the moment in doing a building, I am also the holder of a student membership card of the Institute of Architects—I have been doing a couple of units myself. There are issues to do with the Building Code of Australia and the energy rating issues, in that the basis of that for the Northern Territory is that you will build a home for airconditioning. The so-called ‘troppo’ style of housing—generically, rather than that of particular architects—does have some problems in complying with that type of design, and there is a concern, listening to people saying that you almost have to build a house that is efficient for airconditioning. You can build houses that may not be overly efficient for airconditioning but almost require minimal airconditioning, so that you only need to use it on a few days. While it may not be the most efficient way of using airconditioning, you actually do not need to use it very often, so that it actually becomes more environmentally friendly. There is a debate going on up here at the moment, and for such a major development that may be something in which there is an interest as to how you design it. That is my overview.

CHAIR—Can I go back to your first point about lot sizes. Will it be Darwin City Council that determines that issue?

Mr Bailey—No, the consent authority here is actually controlled by the Northern Territory government. The city council has a very high interest in that, and it actually has two elected members who are on the consent authority. They are nominated by council but act independently in their decision-making while they are on there. Darwin City Council does meet monthly about planning issues. Alderman Collins is the chair of that committee, where we look at all of those issues and we submit extensively. I have known a number of occasions where people have, say, tried to subdivide a block—which would have meant that you would have ended up with two, say, at about 750—and we have objected strongly to that reduction of block size below the minimum. So at the moment, if this plan came before us, all of our previous patterns would indicate that we would not support lot sizes below 800 for single dwelling residential developments.

CHAIR—You did mention that there was an opportunity to waive these conditions. Under what circumstances could they or would they be waived?

Mr Bailey—You would have to ask the consent authority for that.

CHAIR—You are not aware of that?

Mr Bailey—With any of them, it is usually to do with how close you can go to a fence line. It might be 1½ metres. That is the standard you work with. If you can show merit in going closer than that or you have an overhang so that you get shading on the side and it is not impinging on your neighbours, then the consent authority has the powers to work within that. All the consent guidelines are almost lowest common denominator principles, which means that that is the starting point. If you want anything different from that, you have to apply for it. I am not aware that there has been any consistent allowance of less than 800 square metres. Occasionally you might get something that says, ‘You’ve got 1,580 square metres and you want to cut that in half, so you will end up with two blocks of 790.’ That is so close to it that they might waive that. Quite often it is like that. I would not be aware of any developments in Darwin that have averaged down to anything like that size.

CHAIR—I take the point that you make about the particular conditions here, which are very different to other capital cities, but from observation it seems that there has been a trend in almost every capital, and even in the far north of Queensland, to reduce lot sizes because, as we heard in earlier evidence from the Defence Housing Authority, people do not want to go home and tend gardens and mow lawns. Have the contemporary living styles and the desires of the public been taken into consideration in continuing with the policy of a minimum of 800 square metre lot sizes?

Mr Bailey—Even though we have no control over it, the only experience we have is that there seems to be public support when council has objected to smaller blocks. When people have actually tried to have land subdivided into smaller blocks, there has been far greater public support to object to the reduced block sizes than to allow them to get smaller. I guess the interest in pursuing smaller block sizes has been from developers and not from the community, although there is definitely a want out there in the community for affordable land. In Darwin, which has very defined borders, there almost has not been—other than in very upmarket developments like Marina, Cullen Bay, Bayview type developments—any affordable land turned off in the Darwin area for 10 or 15 years.

CHAIR—In Perth, which is not tropical, many of the lot sizes are actually down to 300 square metres and less, and the need for smaller and more manageable lot sizes is driven by public demand, as much as anything, as an alternative to apartment living.

Mr Bailey—You would possibly be looking at what is called a townhouse development, which is strata titled, on community lots, with a number of them within one area and not subdivided smaller. That sort of thing is acceptable.

CHAIR—It is permitted up here?

Mr Bailey—It is permitted, but down to smaller sizes. A three bedroom townhouse has a 300 square metre lot size requirement. So if you have a 900 square metre block you can put three three-bedroom townhouses on it.

CHAIR—What we have seen in other capital cities is that a lot of people do not like living in strata developments, so the small green title has been very popularly accepted publicly.

Mr Bailey—This is the first major development in the Darwin area for many years and, quite clearly, if small green titles were to be pursued, it would need significant public consultation and debate within the whole planning area to be approved.

CHAIR—We are not talking about quite that density.

Mr Bailey—No, but even down to 600 square metres. If this development is going to be less than what is currently the minimum then that is almost a separate issue to the development. That needs to be accepted by the community, otherwise there will be an objection to this development on a philosophical basis before they even start.

CHAIR—Has council actually looked at the issues of changing lifestyles? Not everybody wants that, obviously, but some people do. I imagine that you would have quite a lot of single people coming up here to work.

Mr Bailey—The debate within council about lot sizes has almost always been objecting when the application relates to a large block in an old residential area being divided to sell off. In those cases council has nearly always objected to the less than minimum size being allowed, even if it is only slightly less.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Do you see a difference between the size preferred in some of the traditional residential areas and the size preferred by the public generally in these areas for development? Do you see any perceived difference by the public with respect to the two different types of areas?

Mr Bailey—I am not sure—possibly by the buying public. This is the interesting debate that goes on. I think you would find that if you ask anyone nearly all of them would like a larger block if they could afford it. They may not like the traditional bit of lawn but if you look at the sorts of developments we are seeing now you will see that the size of houses and even the outdoor areas have grown significantly. You have block sizes getting smaller and built areas on them getting larger. In some areas you can literally walk from roof to roof because there is no space in between. Before we came here comment was made by people that in some of the Palmerston houses you have been talking about you can look out your kitchen window into someone's bedroom window. It is only a couple of metres away. That is not the traditional Territory lifestyle that people are saying they want to try to maintain.

Whether that is realistic in the long term, whether we can still allow that space, I do not know. But we have people wanting the outdoor space. If it is a single person coming up to live here, do they want a three-bedroom house? What we are talking about for the 800 minimum is a housing block. If you are talking about two bedrooms plus living areas then that is a different type of

structure. Whether you would be building that on individually titled blocks of land, I do not know.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Given that the Territory government has in the end discretion to waive objections, what role does council play? Can it be proactive? Can it consult, in this case with DHA, and discuss with them concerns that you feel the public may have in relation to lot sizes?

Mrs Collins—I believe they are coming to talk to us—I would hope so. It was strange that I heard about their client that came to the Territory—like the airconditioning and things like that. We get quite a few complaints about the noise because of the closeness of some houses in Palmerston, so I guess we hear the opposite. People do not like to live so close. I can understand that if you are in the Defence Force you would not want to come home and mow your lawns but living close is not something that we do. We represent the community and that is what they are saying about these two new suburbs. They just do not want somebody's bathroom looking into the bedroom.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I understand that there would be a variety of ways where you receive public concerns. How do you assess the community's views on these matters? How do you measure the concerns?

Mrs Collins—By public meetings. The ward that both John and I represent is getting two new suburbs. We represent the community where those suburbs are actually going. There will be quite a few public meetings between now and when the decision is made and when it is built.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Have there been public meetings to date?

Mrs Collins—Not as yet. There is not enough information other than in the paper that it is about to happen. I think that from tomorrow there will probably be quite a few meetings.

Mr JENKINS—We have had a bit of a discussion of what circumstances would allow a mixed density development. Are you satisfied that this development is purely residential, or should it have elements of commercial and retail for the size of the development?

Mrs Collins—I believe it is not just residential—that is what I am hearing. I am hoping that there are other infrastructure facilities, because it is quite a few houses, a lot of people, two new suburbs. For Darwin, as we previously heard, this is a first for many years, because we do not have the land. I hope they are not just putting houses there and depending on the closeness to Casuarina or whatever—I have not read that there is actually going to be a suburban shops; I am not sure what is actually planned.

CHAIR—I guess the question was whether you think there should be. Is that what you were getting at, Mr Jenkins?

Mr JENKINS—Yes.

Mrs Collins—Yes, I think there should be.

Mr JENKINS—To what extent, in relation to the whole of Lee Point, has there been any thought about future use? This site, as it has become available, seems to be a logical next step in that around it are built-up areas alongside the hospital, but to what extent does it form a first stage in what could be a larger type development?

Mr Bailey—For a number of years both Defence and NT government in future planning documents have shown that whole area as becoming a potential development. The indication for many years has been that the defence requirements in that area are going to be phased out. What we are seeing now is the first stage of that land becoming available, but the idea of having major defence infrastructure close to residential areas is a bit of a contradiction. From what we have seen it would not surprise me at all if that is the way it goes.

Some of the history is that Tiwi and the hospital were the last developments of pre-cyclone Darwin. That was just before my time—I was a couple of years after Cyclone Tracy. At that stage it was envisaged that that was the way Darwin would go. Following Tracy, all of the development went out the other side of Lee Point Road and headed in a more easterly direction. In a way the hospital was seen as a bit of a centre of the development rather than the end of the development in those times in the way the roads were built. Lee Point Road was initially set up to be, I think, a four-lane road, and then the development never occurred. Yes, it will happen. We need to be—as I think you mentioned with your previous witnesses—planning on the future requirements for much more residential development in that area so the infrastructure can deal with that.

CHAIR—Has Darwin City Council in consultation with the Northern Territory planning authority done a master plan for this area given that there seems to be a loose plan to see this area further developed in due course?

Mr Bailey—My understanding is that future planning of that type has only been carried out by the Northern Territory government over a number of years, largely for longer term processes where they have produced them. The first one I was aware of was in the early nineties. That was a land use one that showed what they expected would happen in the next 50 years or so.

CHAIR—Wouldn't Darwin City Council want to have some say in that? How far is your reach?

Mr Bailey—What has largely happened is that we have been given copies and briefings of what those outcomes have been rather than having been largely involved in the early stages. Within the town planning process there are reviews. It is open to anyone, including the city council, to provide information on those reviews. But, as I said, the Northern Territory is a slight anomaly in that local government is not the main mover within town planning development control as it is almost everywhere else. So, while we input, we have no control.

CHAIR—Alderman Collins said that some retail should be incorporated. But it would perhaps not be appropriate to lump all that infrastructure and those commercial concerns onto one relatively small development if there is going to be a much bigger development master plan for this area. Do you want to comment on that?

Mr Bailey—Until we know what Defence is going to do with the rest of the land, we cannot say. I have been aware of development proposals in this area for 15 years, but it has only just come together as a reality in the last 12 months or so. It could have gone on for another 10 years. We may not have any more developments for another 10 years. It is a bit hard to know what to put in. I do not think it has been suggested that a shopping complex like Casuarina be put in this area, but you would expect that it could support some small corner shops. Most of the suburbs in Darwin and Palmerston have local retail community centres. Provision of creches, primary schools et cetera are the sorts of issues that need to be dealt with.

CHAIR—We noticed on our inspection this morning that one of the shopping centres in a nearby suburb had closed. It had burned down or something like that.

Mr Bailey—A shopping centre in the nearby suburb of Nakara burned down and largely has not reopened. Every suburb in Darwin originally had its own shopping centre in the same way that, down south, you had the ribbon developments along roads. As major shopping centres have developed, many of the small suburban shopping centres have gone through difficult times and have had to try and decide what they needed to evolve into. That is where we are at with a number of these shopping complexes. But providing what is required within a small area seems to work. That is what is happening in Palmerston. Each of its suburbs has a small regional shopping centre.

Mr JENKINS—I want to ask about developer contributions. Whilst you are not the decision maker I take it that, post the decision, the council is the recipient of developer contributions to do certain works. Is that the case?

Mr Smith—When developments are put forward, council can comment on the provisions for infrastructure or ask the developer for a contribution towards the different types of infrastructure that are not put in place immediately. Roads are a good example of that. The council may ask for a monetary contribution because a development may impact on roads to a certain degree but not to the point where work needs to be done immediately. That also takes into account the more strategic approach to the whole area and what other developments could take place.

Mr JENKINS—Without leading you too far, and given that there is scant detail, what sorts of areas do you think you would be looking at? You would be looking at Lee Point Road but would you be seeking a contribution for the impact of this development on any other parts of the road infrastructure?

Mr Smith—At this time it is very difficult to comment specifically on what contributions the council would ask for or need at the end of the day. But, in respect of contributions for roadworks, council's initial stand would be that, if the development puts an extra strain on the road network, the developer should address those issues. That may mean the widening of certain roads or the provision of adequate carriageways to take the extra volume of traffic to and from the site to other focal points. That would probably be council's first stand—if that is the correct word. It would also take into account the other developments in the area. It may not be reasonable to put X amount of infrastructure in place to cater for that development when council knows very well that, in the near future, additional strain will be put on that same infrastructure and its further development or expansion will be needed. In that case the contribution would

probably be a more appropriate way to go so that the council can enhance the road system and, at the end of the day, know that it is adequate to service the whole area.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[12.10 p.m.]

TONKIN, Mr Ross David, Chapter President, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Northern Territory Chapter

CHAIR—Welcome. We have received a submission from you. Do you wish to propose any amendments to the submission you made to the committee?

Mr Tonkin—No.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will proceed to questions.

Mr Tonkin—The RAIA is looking for a higher commitment by the DHA in achieving good design outcomes for the Lee Point site than is currently reflected in their submission to the committee. The submission by the DHA to the committee is inadequate and does not provide sufficient confidence to the RAIA that the outcomes alluded to will, in effect, be incorporated into the development. We are concerned that outcomes generated by this proposal will be the result of pressures caused by economic modelling to achieve short-term economic benefit for the developers rather than decisions that are made in the long-term interests of the community as a whole. Our concerns are being supported by recent DHA actions, including the evaluation criteria used to select the short list for joint venture partners to enact appropriate weighting to the design; the verbal advice that has been issued by the DHA that the intent is to develop the subdivision with allotments ranging from 600 square metres; and the response by the DHA to our submission to the committee, which has the public consultation processes occur within the planning process. We recommend that this committee requires a higher level of commitment to the appropriate design of the subdivision and the DHA housing stock and that the committee further reviews the proposal at the completion of the subdivision design and the first stages of the DHA houses.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You have raised in your submission a number of concerns with the proposal of the authority. Could you please elaborate on any misgivings in respect of the feasibility of the development proposal. Could you elaborate on those things that are outlined in your submission.

Mr Tonkin—There really is not enough information for us to properly assess the proposal at this stage. For that reason, we ask that this be reassessed by the committee so that all the issues that are being identified by us and other parties can be properly assessed.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—As someone representing the Institute of Architects, you have indicated that you have concerns about the potential lot sizes. Given the lack of information, I know it is hard for you to make conclusions, but could you comment upon the extent to which design can mitigate the proximity of housing? Can there be a design issue rather than a proximity of one dwelling to the next?

Mr Tonkin—Designing for blocks of 600 square metres can be achieved provided the right level of design is put into the development. The problem you have is that the majority of houses that will occur at this development will be project home houses, which are pre-designed, packaged and sold as necessary. The DHA may be able to achieve appropriate design. Our concern lies outside of the DHA procurement model, and that is assuming the DHA procures their houses through a design technique rather than a project home builder. Blocks of 600 square metres can be designed for, but there are all sorts of other constraints—for example, only having two sides with adjoining allotments. There might be a street to one side and parkland to the rear, so the issues of privacy are sorted out through that development design.

Mr JENKINS—What percentage of housing in Darwin do architects get involved in the design of?

Mr Tonkin—I could not give an exact figure. The percentage of architecturally designed houses at the moment is very low. Probably five per cent of the housing stock has an architectural input.

Mr JENKINS—That was a bit of an indulgence of mine. I am on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage inquiry into Sustainable Cities 2025. Your colleagues came before us and we were amazed at the low percentage of housing that has an architectural input. As to the rating system that you mentioned, which of the rating systems are you referring to?

Mr Tonkin—Are you talking about the rating system for energy consumption?

Mr JENKINS—Yes.

Mr Tonkin—There was a four-star rating system identified in the DHA submission. There are a number of computer modelling systems available to assess and define a rating. Currently the model that is being used up here is the NatHERS system. The NatHERS system is appropriate for airconditioning. It is not appropriate to assess a passively designed house that may incorporate airconditioning. There is a new computer modelling system which has just been developed but it has not been properly assessed. I cannot remember the name of it. That has not been proven as yet.

Mr JENKINS—But there is really no rating system that has been tailored for the tropics?

Mr Tonkin—At the moment there is nothing available commercially.

Mr JENKINS—With regard to the infrastructure requirements of this development, is there anything out of the ordinary about the site that creates difficulties? We take on board the comments about the allotment sizes, but, to your knowledge, is there anything about the site that give special problems?

Mr Tonkin—I am an engineer, so I cannot give an opinion on that. From an architectural point of view the things that are of interest are that geocognition is taken for correct orientation, that the issues about privacy between allotments have been properly dealt with and

that there is adequate landscaping and streetscaping provisions for things like access for pedestrians and roads et cetera.

Mr JENKINS—What about the difficulty of convincing users that the type of energy efficient cooling that could be put in place is appropriate? No matter where you are, whether it is in the tropics or anywhere else in Australia, there is always this perception problem in trying to get users to be convinced from the outset that what is being provided does work.

Mr Tonkin—The thing that you have to be careful of is that you do not create a subdivision which has housing that cannot be used passively and that flexibility exists. If someone decides that they want to aircondition their bedroom that is fine, but that should not impinge on the adjoining neighbour. If they decide not to, they should not have to because the house is not an appropriate design to deal with the climate.

Mr JENKINS—So really the amenity and noise issues are important.

CHAIR—Are you saying that the design standards are just a blanket standard Australia wide and that nobody has ever thought to perhaps produce a design standard for the tropics against a general design standard? Is that what I am hearing today?

Mr Tonkin—When you say design standard—

CHAIR—In terms of airconditioning.

Mr Tonkin—It still has not been finalised and resolved from the tropical regions point of view. In fact, there is a conference on tomorrow which is going to deal with exactly that issue.

Mr JENKINS—To the extent that there is a need for special provisions for cyclone rating, is that an assistance to designing an energy efficient house or does it impinge upon it?

Mr Tonkin—The two are unrelated.

Mr JENKINS—Absolutely unrelated?

Mr Tonkin—There is an argument that a masonry house model will survive better than a light steel frame model in the event of cyclone, but that does not necessarily mean that the masonry house is a more energy efficient house. In fact, it can be a less efficient house if things like proper roof overhangs and sun protection are not provided.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[12.20 p.m.]

CLINCH, Miss Margaret Anna, Convenor (Chair and Spokesperson), PAn—the Planning Action Network Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome to the hearing. The committee has received a submission from the Planning Action Network. Do you wish to propose any amendment to the original submission you put before the committee?

Miss Clinch—No.

CHAIR—I now invite you to make a brief statement in relation to your submission and then we will move to questions.

Miss Clinch—Our group is made up of members of the community. We are a core residents group. We are a sustained group which is there when other residents groups need assistance. We have been operating for nine years and we have drawn a lot of experience from what people have told us and what the problems have been. I have been in the Northern Territory since 1972, so I also have a good deal of experience of the community over that length of time. It was from this perspective that the submission was written.

Firstly, I would say that there is not sufficient information for making a good submission. Responses cannot be made when the detail is not there. I have noted from the web site that there is a submission on DHA housing off-base for Adamstown. It would have taken me two to three hours to download that. There is also one for Queanbeyan which contains maps, suburban layouts and house plans. The DHA submission for Darwin contains none of those things. There is just a blurry, coloured map showing the location of the site. That is not really adequate.

We have asked for consultation since 1998. We have written to the owners of the land and we have written to politicians. There has not been sufficient public consultation. There was a public meeting the other evening but it was basically to gather information rather than have a discussion. We put great weight on community consultation. We believe that because the housing concerned is DHA housing—it is for service personnel—it is not just the economic aspects that are important. What is also important is the way in which this new suburb—and it must be seen as a suburb, not as a subdivision, which we seem to be talking about more than anything else—is going to provide for our service personnel, particularly spouses who are left at home while their men are off serving the country. I think that echoes a statement that the minister, Robert Hill, made in January. That is a very important aspect. It is not just a question of how much it will cost and whether it will bring in a handsome profit.

We are concerned about the size of the lots: 600 to 700 square metres is too small, particularly in providing for correct orientation for breezes, distance between dwellings and cutting out noise. We have the fine example of Palmerston and what went wrong when blocks that were too small were used. In fact, the DHA here has stressed that it does not want a repeat of the problems that it has had at Palmerston. The road is too narrow, houses are too close together and, in fact,

run-off from one house could run off into the garden of the next house. When you have small lots the houses tend to be bigger and there is less outside space.

Mr Richard Bear said in his presentation the other evening that he thought the typical service family had three children, a dog and a trampoline, and that does not go very well with a small block. We often have people telling us things repeatedly and ignoring our experience. I think, with the experience already of Palmerston, the DHA should know that small blocks are just too small for families. We have alternatives. We have the Carey Street towers and we have an ability for service people to rent outside. We have lots of units in Darwin; we have an excess of units in Darwin. But what we are looking at here are domestic dwellings for families to live and grow in.

Our other major concern is the lack of services to be provided. There seems to be a determination to have no commercial centre, no community centre and in fact nothing else that would be of service. You are talking about a suburb of 3,500 to 4,000 people. That is not a small number of people. We have adopted the four-square idea of economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability. If you build something quickly without considering all the social issues and social impacts, you are going to cost yourself more later. We would prefer that DHA does not do that, because those costs will fall on the general community. The government wants to integrate the service families into the community to give them a happy lifestyle so that they can relax and feel part of the general community. If there are angry members of the community who feel they are being short-changed, it will unfortunately reflect on the families themselves. That is not a good idea for any of us. If you think I am antiservice, I am not; my brother was in the Navy so we were a service family too. All those things are important. It is not just the economic aspects that are important; the whole thing is important. I find it rather insulting that Darwin has such a short report compared with some of the other places I looked at.

I will now go to the question of the primary school. There has been some decision made not to have a primary school. If you do not have a centre of the community, which is usually the primary school, children have to be bussed. They go to different parts and do not belong to the suburb and their parents are not concentrated on the suburb, because their children are at this school or that school, and do not build up a good community feeling. It is not true that there is a school in Tiwi, because that one has been closed. We believe also that, if there is the potential in the future for another suburb to be built across Lee Point Road when the other area is released from communications work, there will be even more reason for a school. We would argue that, if the government does not want to provide a school now, it must provide a school site and its associated ovals. Better still would be to have a school there, starting with a preschool perhaps, so that mothers and families would have an anchor in the suburb itself and children would feel they belonged to that suburb.

There was a reply from the DHA on the web site which talked about consultation. It said that in the MOU there was provision for consultation between DHA and the government and that there was some sort of committee that had met twice and that was to provide for third parties as well. We have not had any input into that. We have a lot of people who live in Leanyer, Woodleigh Gardens and Tiwi, and we want to see that the suburb next to us is not second rate and not substandard due to economic issues being the prime issues. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Miss Clinch. I must congratulate you and your group on your submission. It is obvious that you have thought through many of the issues, and being a

resident here perhaps gives you some better insight into some of these planning issues. It is a very detailed submission and a very good submission. In your submission, at 6.3 you say:

To say the least, the community is amazed and disappointed that DHA thinks no primary school is necessary.

I can understand that amazement and disappointment but I wonder if that ought not be directed at the local people that are responsible, because we were out on site today and there was a government minister there who told us—because we asked about the schools—that Tiwi was closed but that there was plenty of capacity in the surrounding schools to cope with this new subdivision. It is very difficult for us as a committee to adjudicate these matters when the Northern Territory government is stating quite categorically that there are enough schools already in the area to provide for the children in this particular subdivision. Do you want to comment on that? From our point of view it does not seem appropriate that DHA makes that decision. They have to take advice from the planning authority and from the decision makers locally as to whether they should provide land for these facilities. In this case they have clearly been told that it is not appropriate and not necessary.

Miss Clinch—I have heard a minister say that he does not think the school is necessary. I have also heard members of the public comment on the capacity in various nearby schools. One has a very comfortable capacity now and is able to teach better because of it. There is another one that they say is crowded. These things are going to change. When you think of the number of children—if you are talking about 700 blocks at three children per household—there are a lot of children to be absorbed. The government is talking about the cost of providing the school. We think that there are a lot of families with children there; at least you need a preschool. You have a situation where the husband may go out to work and the children have to be got to school. Does this mean two cars per family?

In each of the northern suburbs you will see the pattern. I have a map here. When the northern suburbs were designed by the Commonwealth the centre of the whole suburb was the school and the ovals and, beside them, the shopping centre. We say that that has a community significance as well as the provision of the school. Without a school as a central feature the suburb does not have much focus. Given the across-the-road Lee Point potential, we are looking like doubling the numbers. Even without that, if there are three children per family—sure, some of them will go to private schools—I really do not see how you are going to absorb that many children.

There is an idea of bussing primary school children around to a space in a school. If the suburb were, say, 50 houses or something like that you could do that, but we are talking about having 725 houses and are anticipating that these are family homes. These are not Carey Street type people but families. I do not see how that advice was so readily accepted. I do not know who is responsible here. Is DHA responsible for housing the families or are we responsible for giving advice? What is it—the cost of land? What is the crucial thing? It is more than just the economic situations. If I were asked about the bottom line I would say that there should be a preschool and a school site so that they are there and ready, because the pressure will be even greater when we go across the road to the other piece of land.

CHAIR—I understand defence housing has set aside a piece of land for future use of some sort.

Miss Clinch—Where there is an SU, which is a ‘specific use’ type of handling of zoning, we have had other situations where there was a list of functions but the functions that were negative, cost-wise, continually got pushed out. Bayview is an example of where there was to be a school and it has been successively pushed out and the children there are bussed because there is a main road in between.

Mr JENKINS—Do you think that the planning procedures here are sufficiently robust to be able to look at this development in terms of a sustainable community based on the four squares, as you have put to us?

Miss Clinch—From my nine years experience I can say the planning process is hardly aware of four-square sustainability. It is perhaps beginning to recognise it ecologically, but only about five per cent socially and culturally, which of course has an economic cost in the long term.

Mr JENKINS—You spoke about the layout of other suburbs in the north and the model, and you indicated some of the positive aspects that you are concerned are going to be overlooked in this development. Was there anything about the nature of the way those suburbs were set out that has been a negative experience that we can learn from?

Miss Clinch—I do not think so. If you are talking about saving energy, the large blocks give you room for trees. Everyone talks about complicated things such as greenhouse and all that. Trees and shade cloth are absolutely marvellous but you have to have room for those things, you have to be able to put the house on the right angle to handle the sun and you have to have overhanging awnings. No, I think the northern suburbs are actually very well designed. They have the parklands, they have the schools and they have a major shopping centre. The minor shopping centres have not survived the Casuarina shopping centre or they have been reduced in size. In most of the shopping centres you may find a general supermarket and a hairdresser—the centres vary, but most of them have shrunk. They could be used for community purposes—a youth centre or a drop-in centre for women or something like that—but that has not happened. I think it is essential that there be some facility like that in the new suburb. Even forgetting the service point of view, women who are isolated in a very hot climate with little children can go bonkers.

Mr JENKINS—So you have moved to the type of social infrastructure that you think is required. Is a mix of housing density an appropriate thing for suburbs that you are looking at?

Miss Clinch—We do not have anything against a mix of housing density, providing it is done with the families in mind. We know we are caring for the DHA families. Some of the other housing could be of mixed density, perhaps for older people. Madam Chair referred to the fact that some people like smaller houses because they are easy to care for. We find they are mainly retired people whose children have left home. It is a matter of choices. But, because we have been told that this is essentially for families, it is the non-service housing that would have an opportunity for that.

Mr JENKINS—Down south, as I now understand it to be referred to when we are up here, there is a move to look at development that is mixed use and that goes beyond just mixed density—it would be residential, commercial retail and include forms of other industry that are compatible alongside residential. Is that a model that would work here?

Miss Clinch—We already have a great dissipation of light industrial. You cannot really think of heavy industrial next to residential, but we have light industrial at Coconut Grove, Palmerston and Winnellie. You have to remember all the time that Darwin only has a population of 100,000 people; it cannot diversify that much in bulk. We already have a concentration of lots of high-rise unit buildings closer to town, because it has been judged that the young people going to work would like to live in units. There is an oversupply of them already. I think the cluster dwellings are a good idea, but they tend to get not so much into cluster dwellings but four-storey units and eight-storey units.

Mr JENKINS—Excuse my ignorance of Darwin history but if the northern suburbs development is one era can I take it that Palmerston would be the next wave of development, or would they get developed about the same time?

Miss Clinch—In the northern suburbs, as John Bailey was referring to, you had Tiwi. That was the last government suburb. Leanyer and Woodleigh Gardens, I understand, were more privately developed but they were built after Tiwi. They were mainly houses but there was some cluster development there. I am not a Palmerston person and I cannot really make generalities about that but I do know that Fairway Waters creates a lot of problems with the closeness together and the small blocks. What you get to is not a factor. When people come from the south and they buy in, they think, ‘This is nice. This is something familiar.’ But whether they like living there afterwards is quite another thing.

Mr JENKINS—So is there a marked difference between the development of Palmerston and the northern suburbs?

Miss Clinch—There are a lot of detached dwellings. There are a lot of ordinary houses in Palmerston. I would also like to throw in that a lot of people favour the two-storey houses over the houses on the ground. A lot of them like the old Darwin louvred houses because they get the breeze and they have the louvres. That should not be forgotten because they have sort of gone out of fashion as far as contractors or major large areas are concerned. We have to remember that in this case we are not talking about 20 or 50 houses; we are talking about a whole suburb. We must build it in an integrated way so that it works.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[12.42 p.m.]

COFFEY, Mr Matthew Martin Joseph, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. In what capacity do you appear before the committee today?

Mr Coffey—I am appearing before the committee as a citizen and also as a resident of Tiwi, the immediate adjoining suburb to the development.

CHAIR—The committee has received a submission from you. Do you wish to propose any amendments to the submission?

Mr Coffey—No.

CHAIR—Would you like to make a brief opening statement to your submission? We will then go to questions.

Mr Coffey—Firstly, I noticed this morning that it seems size does matter. It has been mentioned by just about everyone. Everyone has great concern about the lots being too small. My concerns, which I will reiterate—they are in my submission—is that there is scant detail or a lack of detail in the submission. I point to the request for expression of interest. On page 1, at the second paragraph, it says:

The MOU accepts that DHA might enter into a joint venture arrangement with a private partner to undertake the initial development, which is expected to deliver between six hundred and fifty and nine hundred fully serviced allotments.

There is a figure of 700 in another document. Later this document has a figure of 725. I am a bit concerned about what the actual JV is. I am also concerned about the commercial nature of this joint venture—the fact that this committee has put forward the seed funding of the DHA on a commercial venture that is two-thirds greater than their requirement for that said land. I am concerned that this committee is going to allow the Defence Housing Authority to be overleveraged in a development that could possibly fall off with sales or end up as a suburb that desires commercial boundaries and ignores the social and community aspects.

CHAIR—I make the point that this committee's role is not to determine the mechanisms for delivery, but there is a clear role for us in determining the public value of such a venture and making sure that it is good value for money, does what it is intended to do and obviously meets the requirement. Our role is not to allow or disallow various means of producing the goods, if you like.

Mr Coffey—That is my concern because, if you look at it, you will see the figure is 900. It is less than 30 per cent; it is one-third. So your decision relates to only one-third of the development, not the other two-thirds.

CHAIR—Our decision overrides the whole of the development. We have a very clear role in ensuring that the public interest is served by this development both in its functionality and its

value for money to the taxpayer, who ultimately would bear the cost or derive a gain from the development. In this case, it will be a gain to the public purse.

Mr Coffey—That is my main concern. My other concern is that this development, should it go ahead, takes into account further uses of the land around. It includes a high access into the hospital property. In 1987 and 1984, our hospital was cut off from the community of Darwin because the creek, which this land will drain into, was overflowing the road. The ambulance had to wait there for four hours, with patients in the back from a motor vehicle accident, until the ambulance could cross the creek. I am concerned about putting an urban development into that drainage catchment as it will only exacerbate those high, wet season flows that will cut the hospital off. They should look, in an engineering and drainage sense, at other accesses and improvements which can be made in accessing the two largest hospitals in the Northern Territory.

Mr JENKINS—In a sense, the stage we are at with this development is more akin to not necessarily other DHA developments but things like redevelopment of surplus defence land, such as Randwick. I think that was the last one we considered. Having said that, because of the nature of the joint venture we have a different degree of information at this point. Your concerns are not only about mechanisms but also about how the development of this site relates to the surrounding areas. It is about not only the residential areas but, as you have mentioned, access to the hospital. You attended a meeting last month at Tracy Village. You have expressed some concern about the nature of that meeting. What do you think could have been better achieved at that meeting? Was your concern about the fact that it was not a dialogue or that there was still insufficient information?

Mr Coffey—There was insufficient information. The question I asked at that meeting was: what was the size of the smallest lot and the largest lot? I was told an approximation of what the smallest lot could be, which was around 650, 700. I now find out, when I look at the MOU or the EOI, it could be down to 600. Not only that, we do not know how many lots; we do not know what sizes. Is the sponge wet, is the sponge dry? Is the glass half full or half empty?

Mr JENKINS—Lot size is of concern. Is access to the site one of the other primary concerns?

Mr Coffey—Yes. Also, the adjoining land behind the hospital makes up the Conservation Commission park area—that is, Lee Point and also the Casuarina coastal reserve. Both those areas are the most visited park areas in the Northern Territory. The same minister whom you met this morning mentioned in parliament earlier this year that 750,000 people per annum visit that park. Sandy Creek, which is the drainage area that runs through into that park across the hospital, is going to be affected by this development. That is the amenity that I have in my immediate suburb where I walk to the beach. I do not want that overused, overpressured or the drainage mitigated or altered. There is an existing amenity there that we enjoy. We do not want to overly impact it by this development.

Mr JENKINS—To underscore each of these comments, at the moment you have insufficient information to be able to make an assessment about how well these things are being addressed.

Mr Coffey—Yes. If there were to be further urban development in the area—because there is still quite a lot of crown land immediately nearby—I am concerned that it would be a strip development on the edge of town in globo by itself, that it would not be designed either to integrate to the aspects of access to the hospital, the park or the conservation reserve or to integrate to access to other suburbs which might be further developed, with roads intending to lead through, at further developmental stages, areas outside of this development. At the moment we do not know whether the streets go into cul-de-sacs or are designed to go into a new suburb that could come at a later date. It seems a very closed-in development idea at the moment.

Mr JENKINS—The contrary, without pre-empting and being overly optimistic, is that we could see something towards best practice. There is an opportunity, through a full process, to achieve some of these outcomes that you would like.

Mr Coffey—Yes, but the detail is very broad in the way they have stated it. I would like to put forward that the most recent large development by the DHA up here was very successful, the Carey Street towers. They managed to, with slight amendments to the design and stuff, which I was involved in, achieve a NatHERS class 5 heat energy rating. So I would hope that they would be able to step out of the tall buildings and go into the smaller dwellings and also be able to range the suburb in a similar manner to the surrounding suburbs. I live right next door to this area, and my block is 1,120 square metres. So that will make up, from what they are telling me at the moment, two whole house lots, and that is just ridiculous.

Mr JENKINS—When was that lot developed?

Mr Coffey—In 1972. It was actually designed by an understudy of Walter Burley Griffin, so it was designed on very sound concepts in those days.

CHAIR—Thank you for your thoughtful submission.

Mr Coffey—Thank you very much.

[12.55 p.m.]

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

JONES, Mr Peter, Chairman, Defence Housing Authority

LYON, Mr Keith, Managing Director, Defence Housing Authority

WILSON, Ms Sharon, Manager, Darwin Housing Management Centre, Defence Housing Authority

ROHDE, Ms Rebelle, Senior Planner, Connell Wagner

CHAIR—I remind representatives that they are still under oath. I invite DHA representatives to make any supplementary statements in answer to some of the queries raised and in support of the submission you put forward earlier today.

Mr Lyon—Almost all of the issues relate to matters that need to be resolved as part of the next step, which is obtaining the detailed planning approval for the development. I have just a few comments. I have since been able to confirm my understanding of the base approval arrangements. The requirements for the new development will be agreed with the Northern Territory government.

The reference that the Darwin City Council representatives made to the 800-metre blocks covers existing development within the existing areas. But just like the development of Palmerston, where the minimum size was 600 metres, a new set of arrangements will be created by the consenting authority. That is the first point. On that point, through the consultative arrangements set up under the memorandum of understanding, we have DHA officials working with Northern Territory government officials to agree the key planning parameters.

With regard to the criteria for the selection of the joint venture partner and the development of the new site, as I agreed to before, we will tighten the criteria to replace the word 'should' with the word 'would'. I will confirm this in writing with the committee before the end of this week, Madam Chair. The points made there were quite constructive, and we accept them.

With regard to the point that we did not take into account scope for innovation in the selection of the short list, criteria 2 talked about innovation and partnering. It included:

... the extent to which a Respondent can demonstrate its capacity for development innovation and originality ...

So it was an element, but in the next stage we will tighten our requirements to reinforce the criteria that we referred to. Again, that suggestion makes sense and is very constructive.

There was some discussion about developer contributions and our responsibilities in that regard. The Northern Territory government does not have a developer contribution type arrangement that you would be familiar with in some arrangements down south, but the

memorandum of understanding which I tabled today makes it very clear that the Defence Housing Authority will be responsible for additional costs associated with the infrastructure of this development. How much that will be will need to be negotiated. Of course, it will be based on detailed professional assessments. With the joint venture partner that is selected, we will have detailed work done on traffic generation and its implications. So it will be professional work, and that will be done. To the extent that costs come out of that, those costs will be picked up by the joint venture. In the confidential briefing we provided you with some indication of some preliminary estimates that we have had to do to come to grips with this.

We are conscious of the need to deal properly with water and flooding. I think Mr Coffey made reference to some problems that have existed in the past. When we were out on the site this morning we did mention the need to hold water. That was all part of the planning arrangements not to impact on the hospital, which is obviously important.

Lastly, there was some reference to Palmerston. In our early evidence I did give the committee—or the DHA representatives gave the committee—information that our tenants and ADF people are pretty happy with their experience out at Palmerston. The reason we need this development is that we are looking to continue to provide choice in housing, including housing location. We feel that out of 1,800-odd houses that we are providing we need to get more of a balance in the north. That is an additional reason why we are pretty keen to get this development going. There is a range of other issues, but I hope I have picked the pertinent ones.

Mr JENKINS—The stormwater along the creek is in the model of a retention basin. I am just trying to get my head around whether, with the heavy downpour types of events that you have here, that technology works.

Mr Lyon—I might need the help of our expert again but, in general terms—in discussions we have had—it allows for flowthrough but it also allows for retention when it builds up very quickly so that it does not impact in a flood that would adversely stop communication with the hospital. We have the expert here.

Ms Rohde—Modelling to the Q100 flows was undertaken for stormwater on site on the basis that the site would be totally developed. With regard to that, the area required on site for appropriate retention and holding of water was also undertaken and those areas were detailed in the report. The retention of water has been looked at in a number of scenarios and incorporation of aspects into water sensitive urban design. To date, there have been a number of developments around Darwin and Palmerston region that have had a look at these, as well as the management of water. One is the Chase development in Palmerston, which is an integrated lake management system for the treatment and holding of water for the Mitchell Creek Reserve.

Mr JENKINS—Does the retention basin become permanent?

Ms Rohde—No. The retention basin is one that holds water for fewer than five days, in accordance with the public health guidelines for mosquito breeding. There is opportunity to create more permanent water bodies, as undertaken with the Chase development and the proposed NTU lake, but these would be under a different set of design criteria.

Mr JENKINS—Thank you for that. Now I know the difference between ‘up here’ and ‘down south’ and retention basins. The conflict about what I think you envisage will be your impact on the local road system and what is out there in the world leads to my asking you for some comments about the consultation process at this point in time. It struck me that, with some of the things you have covered and which have been raised today, the dialogue has not occurred in order for people to know.

Mr Lyon—I think that is because of where we are in terms of the development of this particular project. We have had extensive bilateral consultation with key parties that are involved in the approval process, and we have had some community consultation. As we firm up the development plan—and this will occur after we have selected the joint venture partner—we will go into an extensive consultation program where the plans will be out and available to be discussed and so on. It is just a little premature for that. The concerns that have been raised and which we have taken on board are genuine concerns. They are typical concerns that we face with other developments—and the committee will be familiar with them. We have had similar issues, particularly with the Newcastle development, which we have had to work through. That process will occur here. Mr Coffey, whom I have not seen for quite some time, reminded us that we had similar issues with the towers, and we worked through those as a result of input from the community. There is an opportunity to get a very good development here, and we are determined to make that happen.

Mr Bear—I will quickly draw your attention to paragraph 12.3. We did some preliminary planning on the basis of 6,400 vehicles a day, and that was thought to be an appropriate level of traffic. You can see the comments there. We have also undertaken—and I have confirmed with the Darwin City Council—that in conjunction with them, rather than our doing it independently, a further detailed study of traffic would be undertaken.

CHAIR—Going back to the high wet season, water flows and anxieties raised in relation to the hospital, in particular, have there been discussions with the hospital?

Mr Bear—Yes. I have had discussions with the hospital, and it is a given that an alternative access from Lee Point Road directly into the hospital will be provided.

CHAIR—That is on the transport side, but on the possibility of water flows in the high wet season blocking access—

Mr Bear—The alternative access would be provided.

CHAIR—So there is an alternative access point, in a way.

Mr Bear—Yes.

CHAIR—But are they happy with the water management proposals thus far?

Mr Bear—We have not discussed it in detail, but they are happy that we are talking to them.

CHAIR—And that will continue, I take it.

Mr Bear—Absolutely; they are our neighbour.

CHAIR—Miss Clinch raised some anxiety about the school situation. She seemed to think that there would be three children per household. Have you done any studies to determine just how many children might end up living in the suburb? Can you take some guidance from other suburbs as to, on average, how many children per household might live in it?

Mr Lyon—We certainly can. We have had what I would regard as general discussions with the Northern Territory officials who are advising the Northern Territory government. We certainly do know the demographic make-up of the ADF. Typically what we find is that there are children, but they are a mixture of ages. They are not all primary school children; they are a complete mixture. Our advice at this stage of the development—and I have no doubt it will be tested further as part of the process—is that the local school capacity is fine. Certainly we believe there is an opportunity for development of preschools, and that is why we have fingered that.

CHAIR—I am not quite sure where Miss Clinch got the figure of three children, but would it be normal—

Miss Clinch—From Mr Bear.

CHAIR—Was that an off-the-cuff remark that has caused some anxiety?

Mr Bear—Off the cuff.

CHAIR—I would be surprised if, these days, you had three children of primary school age in every household.

Mr Lyon—I accept that and I certainly do not believe there would even be a trampoline either!

Mr Bear—There was no suggestion that every family had three. It was an expression about creating an environment of what is a family. In my view, a family is that—with a dog and a trampoline. It was just that sort of comment.

CHAIR—So it is likely to be fewer than three per household on the whole of the development?

Mr Lyon—Absolutely. Typically, in terms of the demographics of the ADF, half the married folk do not have children. That is something we have discussed in committee before. But there are a number of families who have multiple children and, as a result of that, we frequently need to provide houses with five-plus bedrooms, which we do.

CHAIR—I noticed Mr Tonkin from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Northern Territory Chapter, talked about the need perhaps to procure on a design basis the construction aspect of this, rather than just working to project home designs.

Mr Bear—There is a lot more work to be done in that regard. We believe there is an opportunity to do a bit of both. For example, the last five houses that we built in Darwin in the last 12 months were architect-designed because we wanted to have a look at a special situation with regard to what might be done with cross-flow ventilation et cetera. The most recent 20 houses that we built in Cairns have that sort of architectural input. In fact it was an architect from Darwin that helped us with the Cairns houses. I believe it will be a mixture. There is a happy medium to be struck.

CHAIR—In fact this inquiry from our point of view is not so much about the housing at this juncture as about the development of the land, but we have to ask a few questions about one to really determine the value of the other. There was a question asked about display home villages and I think there were some anxieties that perhaps there would be one big developer instead of a number of smaller developments. As I recall, in our private briefing this morning you indicated that you would have some preferences in relation to that. If I recall, you said you will be looking to local, smaller construction companies to participate.

Mr Lyon—That is true. Typically, we find that the builders are able to handle between 20 and 30 houses. For the DHA product, that tends to be the most efficient. That is what we have been doing in the Northern Territory outside of very specialist developments, like the towers we built. In terms of the display village, that is one of the things we will take on board. We would need to talk that through under the joint venture arrangements. We must also be cognisant of the ability of the market to supply. It is no good trying to build 100 houses all at once if there is not that available resource.

CHAIR—Another issue goes more to the building aspect, but again it comes back to the layout, block size and aspect of the development. I think Alderman Bailey raised the issue of the building code and the energy rating. Will you follow that through? He raises the very important point that the Australian design standard at the moment says that you will have houses built to accommodate an airconditioner, but that does not suit the tropics. Anyone who has lived in the tropics knows that you probably only need to use an airconditioner for a relatively short time.

Mr Lyon—It is an issue that we have had a number of internal debates about. We are monitoring those arrangements very closely. That is one of the reasons why Mr Bear, in his responsibilities, has been utilising and doing some experimentation to try and minimise the use of airconditioning. Where it is provided it has to be provided efficiently. We believe there ought to be a way in which we can get a more optimal trade-off through better research, and certainly better insulation.

CHAIR—This definitely goes to the heart of issues like the proximity of houses to one another, noise factors and so on.

Mr Lyon—Indeed.

CHAIR—It is a very significant issue in terms of the layout of the blocks, the size of the blocks, the aspect of the blocks.

Mr Lyon—Without question, because you also have security arrangements involved in all of that.

CHAIR—Another point that was raised was that there were no planning details on the web site. Are you able to rectify that and make sure that your web site—the committee understands that you can only approach this from a macro planning point of view at this stage—contains whatever information you are able to give at this stage and that you will update it on a regular basis?

Mr Lyon—We certainly can, and out of this I will reassess what we have on our web site in relation to this development. I am delighted that people are using it.

CHAIR—That brings me to the public consultation. I am sure my colleagues would want me to seek from you a commitment to an appropriate public consultation process. This is something we have discussed with defence housing on many occasions. I must say you have always come to the party on that. We would like an assurance that you will engage in an appropriate public consultation process.

Mr Lyon—Yes.

CHAIR—One other issue relates to regular updates. I would like the public to understand that because the development has been presented to the committee on a macro planning basis—because that is the only way at this point that it can sensibly be referred—I would like an assurance that you will give the committee regular updates as we proceed through those more detailed micro planning phases.

Mr Lyon—We will certainly do that. We would welcome the committee, or members of the committee—if they are in town at the right time—coming along and listening to what is said about this or any of our other developments.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr JENKINS—I think that it would be fair to say that your organisation has some regard for what I might term the pastoral care of your clients. I am interested in whether you are able to give us some aspects of your experience with regard to the input into the processes that you will go through in outlining the development. Miss Clinch made a good point about this suburb, this community, that is going to be created, saying that it certainly needs something as a core to build around. It may be that you provide a school site and then hope that the Territory is going to set up a school. She made comments about whether it would be a preschool. Many communities have a community activity centre where a playgroup or a preschool starts, where mothers gather for whatever reason, and a multifacility that might be able to be used by the whole community—at least having it upfront as something that is provided to give people who move into the new area something to latch on to.

Mr Bear—That is a point that we understand. We must not overlook the point that within the site is the Tracy Village Social Club. On the occasions I have been there 200-odd people from the community were having a meal. That centre has sporting facilities, recreation facilities, a computer area where kids can play Pacman and those sorts of beaut things. So there is a centre around which some further thought can be given. We are talking to the management of the committee and they are talking about how they might reorientate the club to provide that service. So I understand what you are saying, and there are opportunities.

Mr Lyon—In addition to that, we have very close relationships with the Defence Families Association. Indeed, their convenor is a member of our board. In a significant development like this we have and will continue to closely interface with DFA.

Mr JENKINS—We should not underestimate the shared experience of newcomers. I acknowledge that there is an existing facility that you have had issues with to straighten out the continuation, but the fact that the new development will bring with it people who are sharing a new experience has to be looked at as well.

CHAIR—I agree with my colleague. Miss Clinch put it very well, saying that in a lot of these developments there will be spouses, most particularly women, who are at home caring for their children while their husbands are away and it is important for these women to have some kind of support network around them. I know that defence is very good at that, because I have a defence base in my own electorate, but the ideas that have come forward from people like Miss Clinch are worthy of consideration. Before closing, I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared before the committee today and defence for assisting the committee with its inspection this morning and with the private briefing.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Jenkins**):

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 the public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.19 p.m.