

19 June 2012
Please quote: OSS 015-12

The Secretary
Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF DEFENCE HOUSING AT WESTON CREEK, ACT

I am making this submission on behalf of the Orana Steiner School in Weston Creek. Orana is an independent, co-educational and non-denominational school set in 13 hectares of unique, natural landscape. It was founded in 1981 and has developed in size and reputation with 640 students currently enrolled from Pre-school to Year 12. It is largest Steiner school in Australia. We have occupied our current site since 1990 and have maintained an active interest and involvement in our local community.

In recent years the Weston Creek area has experienced a number of major challenges, commencing with the fires in 2003, in which the school lost a number of classrooms and the subsequent decision to develop the Molonglo valley. Our school, which had been sited in a semi-rural setting, is now surrounded by a new housing estate and major changes to road infrastructure. This background to our submission is not to criticise or call into question those changes but simply to underline our sensitivity to any major new development that can impact on the amenity of our school environment.

It is therefore most unfortunate, to say the least, that the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) has failed to consult with us, formally or informally, concerning this proposal. A glance at page 22 of the DHA submission, which has an aerial view of the site, suffices to illustrate the importance of this proposed development to our school. We would be very interested to hear DHA's explanation for this failure to consult with us.

That noted, we are not writing to express our opposition to the proposal, but to raise some questions which do not appear to have been addressed in the DHA submission and which go to the requirement of the Public Works Committee to satisfy itself of:

- the stated purpose of the proposed work and its suitability for that purpose,
- the need for the work,
- the cost-effectiveness of the proposal,
- the amount of revenue it will produce if the work is revenue producing, and
- the current and prospective value of the work.

We do have concerns about the scale of this development and the likely turnover of residents. Approximately half of the dwellings will be occupied by defence-related personnel and in particular these dwellings are intended to be used as accommodation for those attending the Australian Defence College, particularly defence personnel from overseas, whose residence must, logically, be relatively short-term (see page 16 of the DHA submission). There is no evidence put forward in the DHA submission, other than an assertion, that the purchase of in-fill housing is not a suitable alternative to the creation of an estate with an ongoing population turnover. In our view the suitability of this project and the need for it in this form requires further examination.

Another issue of concern is the impact on traffic in the area. It is difficult to be conclusive on this point in light of the absence of a publicly-available comprehensive traffic impact study. We do take issue with one statement in the DHA submission at page 9, namely:

'As a part of the rezoning of land in the greater Molongo area, of which Weston Creek is a small part, a wider traffic impact statement was undertaken. The statement concluded that, whilst development of the Weston Creek site would generate additional traffic on the surrounding road network, the overall peak hour increases would be relatively low.'

With respect this traffic study was not about this proposed site but the other development that is occurring in Weston Creek and therefore should not be relied upon in this exercise.

We note that a social impact survey has been commissioned but unfortunately has not yet been completed. The social impact of this intensive development on the surrounding community is likely to be marked.

In conclusion, can I reiterate that our school community is not opposed in principle to this development and it may be that the issues we have raised in this submission are either misconstrued or resolvable. It is unfortunate that DHA's failure to consult with us has led to the necessity to make a submission in these terms.

John Davidson
Principal
Orana Steiner School