

Construction of Housing for Defence at Larrakeyah Barracks, Darwin, Northern Territory

- 3.1 The proposed construction of housing for Defence at Larrakeyah Barracks, Darwin proposes to provide 97 new houses and related site works for members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their families. The estimated cost of the project is \$52.40 million (excluding GST), to be delivered by Defence Housing Australia (DHA).
- 3.2 The proposal was referred to the Committee on 17 September 2009.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 3.3 The inquiry was advertised in local and national newspapers and submissions sought from those with a direct interest in the project. The Committee received two submissions, two supplementary submissions and one confidential supplementary submission detailing the project costs. A list of submissions can be found at Appendix A.
- 3.4 The Committee undertook a site inspection, public hearing and an in-camera hearing on the project costs on 9 November 2009 in Darwin.
- 3.5 The transcript of the public hearing as well as the submissions to the inquiry are available on the Committee's website.¹ Plans for the proposed works are detailed in Submission 1: DHA.

1 <www.aph.gov.au/pwc>.

Need for works

- 3.6 Approximately 4500 members of the ADF reside in the Darwin area, 1800 of which have dependents. DHA manages 1816 dwellings in that area, both on and off-base. DHA provides 85 per cent of housing nationally for ADF members to a standard set by the Department of Defence (Defence).²
- 3.7 DHA states the need for the works as:
- deficiencies in areas such as size of living areas, bedrooms, kitchens and lack of amenities mean that 87 per cent of houses on Larrakeyah Barracks do not meet the Department of Defence's New Housing Classification Policy;
 - a significant deterioration in the fabric of the buildings has led to high maintenance costs;
 - the current houses do not meet the Defence green building requirements; and
 - the current houses (built in the 1970s) are not appropriate for the tropical environment with lack of cross-flow ventilation, low ceilings and small windows.³
- 3.8 In addition, while DHA has programmed 493 constructions between 2009 and 2013, there is insufficient land in Darwin to build enough new homes off-base, and so some constructions will need to take place on-base.⁴
- 3.9 The Committee inspected the current housing available at Larrakeyah Barracks and notes that the housing stock is in need of repair and sited on large blocks. DHA officers told the Committee that the large blocks were difficult to maintain, particularly when an ADF member is deployed and the responsibility for property maintenance then generally rests with the at-home spouse.
- 3.10 The Committee finds that there is a need for the proposed works.

2 Mr P. Howman, Chief Operating Officer, Defence Housing Australia (DHA), *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2009, p. 6.

3 Submission 1, DHA, p. 2-3; Mr P. Howman, Chief Operating Officer, DHA, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2009, p. 2.

4 Submission 1, DHA, p. 2.

Scope of works

- 3.11 The proposed scope of the works is detailed in Submission 1: DHA. In short, the project proposes:
- demolition of 61 existing houses;
 - construction of 97 new houses in two stages:
 - ⇒ Stage 1, comprising 69 dwellings; and
 - ⇒ Stage 2, comprising 28 dwellings.
 - extension of the south-western end of Whittle Crescent to facilitate improved land utilisation;
 - minor upgrades to stormwater and sewerage infrastructure;
 - resealing of roads and replacement of footpaths where required; and
 - landscaping and construction of a new playground.⁵
- 3.12 The current house lots are to be reconfigured to provide the additional 36 blocks and houses will be constructed so as to take maximum advantage of the environmental conditions to reduce reliance on artificial cooling.⁶
- 3.13 The project is proposed in two stages as Defence is currently undertaking an infrastructure review of Larrakeyah Barracks and the Stage 2 houses are dependent on the outcome of this review. DHA advised that the review report is expected in December 2009 and while no outcome could be formally advised, it was expected that both stages would proceed concurrently.⁷
- 3.14 The Committee notes that a range of passive solar design elements and materials will be incorporated in the final design to maximise the environmental benefits of the site and minimise reliance on air conditioning. In addition, the road reconfigurations and the proposed new location for the children's playground will make better use of the impressive vista afforded by the site, overlooking Darwin harbour.

5 Submission 1, DHA, p. 8.

6 Submission 1, DHA, p. 13-14.

7 Mr R. McComas, Project Director, Defence Support Group, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 9 December 2009, p. 8.

- 3.15 The Stage 1 works are due to commence construction in mid-2010 with completion anticipated in mid-2011. The Stage 2 works are due to commence construction in early 2012 with completion in early 2013.
- 3.16 The Committee finds that the proposed scope of works is suitable to meet the needs of the project.

Cost of works

- 3.17 The total estimated cost for this project is \$52.4 million. The Committee received a confidential submission detailing the project costs and held an in-camera hearing with DHA on the project costs.
- 3.18 The Committee is satisfied that the costings for the project provided to it are adequate.

Project issues

Traffic

- 3.19 The Committee received a submission from a local resident, Mr Ian Lea, raising concerns about an increase in traffic resulting from additional on-base housing.⁸ DHA told the Committee that a maximum of ten additional vehicle movements per day were expected as a result of this development.⁹
- 3.20 Therefore, the Committee considers that this development will have little impact on traffic issues at and around the base.
- 3.21 Nonetheless, the concerns raised by Mr Lea are not new to this Committee's consideration of Defence-related proposals. Accusations of harassment, vandalism, failure to obey speed limits and pedestrian safety around Defence bases have been raised in previous inquiries and are of serious concern.
- 3.22 The management of local roads and traffic behaviour is a matter for local councils and police and the Committee is unable to make any recommendations in this instance.

8 Submission 2, Mr Ian Lea.

9 Mr R. Bollen, National Manager, Land Provisioning, DHA, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2009, p. 4.

- 3.23 However, the Committee considers that the Department of Defence, as a major tenant, has a responsibility to work closely with the local community in regards to traffic safety. Defence also has an obligation to ensure that all personnel living and working on-base are aware of their obligations to act responsibly as members of the community. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 5 of this report.

Sewerage

- 3.24 The Committee received a briefing on-site on presently vacant land at the intersection of Nimmo and Elliot Places. As part of the proposal, Whittle Crescent is to be extended to meet Elliot Place and a playground and barbeque area constructed on presently vacant land overlooking the harbour. The Committee is of the opinion that this proposal will make excellent use of the available land, providing significant amenity for families on base.
- 3.25 However, currently a sewerage pump station sits on the section of land that will form the corner of Elliot Place and Whittle Crescent. This pump station is at present set well back from roads, but will be very close to the extended Whittle Crescent at the conclusion of this project. In addition, the pump station is an eyesore.
- 3.26 The Committee has two concerns about the location of this pump station. Firstly, its proximity to the proposed Whittle Crescent extension poses a risk to services in the event of a vehicle accident. Secondly, the location of the pump station in an area that is to be used for recreation is inappropriate. DHA noted that the intention is to obscure it with vegetation once the new road is constructed. The Committee encourages DHA to consider an alternative location for the pump station.¹⁰

Committee comment

- 3.27 The Committee notes that this project incorporates design proposals specifically for the tropical climate and does not compromise on this design in order to meet site constraints. The Committee commends DHA for the design elements included in this proposal.

10 Mr P. Howman, Chief Operating Officer, Defence Housing Australia, *Proof Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2009, p. 5.

- 3.28 Overall, the Committee is satisfied that this project has merit in terms of need, scope and cost.
- 3.29 Having examined the purpose, need, use, revenue and public value of the work, the Committee considers that it is expedient that the proposed works proceed.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives resolve, pursuant to Section 18 (7) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, that it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work: Construction of Housing for Defence at Larrakeyah Barracks, Darwin, Northern Territory.