



PO Box 280 Woden ACT 2606; e-mail: info@wvcc.org.au

Environment, Sustainable Development Directorate

Mawson@act.gov.au

Submission on Master Plan for Mawson Group Centre

ESDD's discussion document rightly notes that the Mawson Group Centre works well as it is. This means that any changes announced through the master planning process should enhance the existing amenity, rather than detracting from it.

WVCC agrees that there is scope for intensification of residential development (and re-development) in and around the Group Centre, but this should be done in tandem with the protection and enhancement of much-needed and well-used public open space. WVCC is of the view that a genuine Master Plan should include key areas adjacent to the Group Centre, so that planning can be done with a broader perspective in mind. WVCC believes that intelligent enhancement of the area, with attention to community amenity, as well as employment maintenance and growth, is crucial for the future.

Open space between Woden and Mawson

It is disappointing that the area between Mawson and Hindmarsh Drive (to the east of Athllon Drive) has not been included in the area for the Master plan. We have been informed that this is because this land has been designated as a transport corridor. In keeping with the government's interpretation of this objective, the EDD has already designated the area for residential development, with land releases scheduled for 2016-2017.

WVCC is of the view that this plan (for residential development) is unsuited to this area, for reasons of safety, amenity and sustainability. The land is flood-prone – which is why it has previously been left as open space. Recent heavy rains (and as climate change proceeds, more episodes of heavy rain are to be expected) have resulted in the drain becoming almost full on several occasions and overflowing at least once. Holding ponds to the south will not address this matter.

The corridor should be reserved as a public park (connecting with the corner area of public open space in the Group Centre described below) and should be rezoned (from RZ2) to public open space. Reservation of the land for future generations will retain the sightlines towards Black Mountain while retaining a pleasant area for walking and cycling. If the budget permits, appropriate plantings and landscaping could be added. WVCC notes that in 2012, the EDD proposed a small wetland in this

area, to 'add to the natural environment'. WVCC supports this initiative, as part of much-needed landscaping for this area.

Appropriate transport planning should mean that there is no need to alienate this strip of land for residential building. Higher density should be concentrated in an around Town and Group Centres, not between them. Athllon Drive retains its transport corridor function by providing a thoroughfare for people moving between the Mawson group centre, Tuggeranong and Woden Town Centres and Canberra City. Appropriate residential development in and around these centres (not between them), with park and drive providing access for those living further away, is the logical way to proceed.

Retain existing Public Open Space adjacent to Mawson Drive

WVCC is most concerned by the implication (pp 36 and 44 of the discussion document) that the area on the corner of Mawson Drive and Athllon Drive (on the northern side), currently zoned as public open space, should be considered for residential redevelopment.

This area should be kept as public open space, as clearly envisaged by the original planners of the Group Centre. It is a most important pedestrian thoroughfare, linking the Group centre with the Bus Stop on the western side of Athllon Drive. This area, which is completely unsuited to development due to its proximity to the drain and difficulty of access, is an important open space in its own right, as well as forming a natural southern section of the proposed public park extending to the north. ESDD should devote its considerable resources to considering public-realm enhancements here, which will benefit the community as a whole, rather than supporting the option of residential development.

Car parking and cycling and walking access

WVCC is disturbed by the implication in the discussion document that current, convenient ground-level parking will be reduced in the Group Centre. This type of car parking is particularly important for those doing the family shopping!

At the same time, more should be done to encourage access by cyclists to the Group Centre, and to the Bike and Ride. The main shared path along Yarralumla creek needs upgrading as the path narrows from the main underpass near Melrose/Marist secondary schools.

WVCC supports a cycle path that links the shared path from the south (at Heard St) with the shared path from the north (that stops at Mawson Drive). The new link should provide a safe, convenient and direct crossing of Mawson Drive. The WVCC would also support a cycle path on the eastern side of Athllon drive, which goes through the park/bike and ride and continues on up to Beasley St.

The intersection between Mawson Place and Mawson Drive is particularly dangerous for pedestrians crossing Mawson Place. This issue should be addressed through a traffic study for the area, as suggested below in the section on Mawson Place.

New bus stops at the Mawson Drive Athllon Drive intersection for routes 23 and 24 would be useful for interchange with the Blue Rapid route.

Mawson Place

Mawson Place needs a re-think! WVCC supports the idea of making Mawson Place more of a street – without removing the service stations! Lessees with premises backing onto this street, should be encouraged to tidy up ‘the backs’ as much as possible. The extension of the CZ1 area as designated in the Master Plan discussion document, should make it possible to add new, small-scale business to the street as this becomes commercially viable.

WVCC considers that there is a need for a traffic study into usage patterns relating to Mawson Place and Mawson Drive. Mawson Drive needs some traffic calming. Cars come off Athllon Drive quite fast and also come down the hill quite fast too. . To promote consistency with the practice at town centres such as Woden 40km/h speed limits are appropriate for the streets around the Mawson centre, particularly if residential development is significant.

Fresh thinking applied to the operation of Mawson Place. At the moment, pedestrians crossing Mawson Place are at risk from traffic moving along the street, and from turning traffic (from Mawson Drive).

One option that might be looked-at in this context, is the case for linking Mawson Place with Athllon Drive itself, thereby turning the ‘Place’ into an actual ‘street’. This would have the advantage of allowing vehicle exit out of the southern end of Mawson Place thereby reducing the volume of traffic travelling north along Mawson Place.

Building Heights and residential development in the Group Centre

WVCC supports an increase in building heights in the group centre to 4 storeys, provided that sensitivity to the need to maintain sightlines and to avoid overshadowing is maintained.

Mawson Group Centre already has considerable multi-unit and apartment development around it (particularly to the east and south-east). There is scope for further development and redevelopment in these areas which should be investigated by ESDD.

The line of flats in Wilkins Street (on the western side) known locally as ‘the Great Wall of China’ could well be re-developed as an enhanced residential precinct, retaining social housing.

Employment - clubs

The clubs area to the east of the car park (in Heard Street) is a key part of the precinct. While the Mawson Club is prospering, the Serbian club has closed and the plans of the Austrian club are unknown. WVCC considers that the master planning process offers an excellent opportunity for exploring the future of the three latter sites, all of which are presumably on concessional leases. This important precinct should be retained for restaurants, clubs or other premises with a community-attraction and employment function, possibly in conjunction with added residential development on upper floors.

Conclusion

It is disappointing that the Discussion document contains almost nothing relating to the future of the Group Centre other than as a site for urban intensification and transport convenience. There is also a need for the implications of proposed DV 304 land-use changes, referred to in the document, to be spelled out. WVCC considers the Group Centre to be a significant community and commercial asset that requires appropriate and sensitive long-range planning if it is to continue to develop these roles into the future. WVCC welcomes the opportunity for further discussion on these important issues.

Dr Jenny Stewart

Chair

Woden Valley Community Council

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