



BCC Response to Belconnen Town Centre Draft Master Plan

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The Belconnen Community Council (BCC) is grateful for the development of the draft Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan and supports and endorses much that is in the draft both in terms of the vision, general principles and of specific directions and proposals. The BCC is confident that, apart from a few key areas, the draft Master Plan strongly reflects the community's views and desires.

The BCC strongly supports the overarching goals of:

- improving cycle and pedestrian connections into and across the centre (pages v, 61 & 79);
- providing clear building height requirements and design guidelines (pages v & 64);
- introducing a better strategy for parking to ensure supply meets demand (pages v, 49, 81, 82 & 85);
- improving employment diversity (pages v & 65);
- preserving the quality of Lake Ginninderra (page 53); and
- seeking to improve the linkage between the University of Canberra and the Town Centre to ensure that the UC development complements rather than competes with the centre (pages 49, 77 & 78).

The BCC also endorses a significant number of specific observations and recommendations in the Master Plan. Key among them are:

- key areas and streets to have wider footpaths (page 52);
- streets to be enclosed with buildings and trees at a scale which feels comfortable (page 52);
- encouraging a range of apartment building types within the Town Centre (page 64);
- ensuring ground floor apartments are adaptable for commercial uses where fronting main pedestrian areas (pages 65 & 75);
- establishing development controls that provide incentives to reward good development outcomes where the maximum height is 12 storeys or higher: for example, contributing to the public domain by providing street trees, public facilities or more effective 'place-making' (page 64);
- ensuring the development of new apartment buildings preserves the views from existing apartments as far as possible, while maximising their own potential views (page 64);
- there being no requirement to rezone open space adjacent to the lake to enable additional development (page 65);
- helping maintain the contrast between the lake's open space and the Town Centre's built form (page 65);
- investigating measures to further improve stormwater quality (page 67);
- investigating the design and construction of a children's play area at Margaret Timpson Park and establishing planning controls for the blocks fronting the park that encourages high quality buildings and enables contribution to the upgrade of the park (pages 67 & 68);
- establishing a park between Walder Street and Purdue Street (pages 69). Public comments have recommended the park be extended to reach Lathlain Street;
- developing a street tree planting plan for the Town Centre to achieve a minimum 50% shade coverage of the streets (pages 69 & 78);
- developing a structured car park in a central area in the Town Centre (Figure 35), particularly where it may be in close proximity to both Westfield Belconnen and Lake Ginninderra, as well as the bus interchange to encourage Park & Ride, such as the current car park across from Belconnen Community Service; and
- use of the Canberra Central Design Manual to form the basis of future public domain improvements (pages 75 & 85).

The BCC has concerns that the draft Master Plan does not provide sufficient focus on a number of areas:

Emu Bank: While the BCC agrees that the precinct has strong potential to become a more attractive destination, especially for dining, and is agreeable to the option of a mix of two and four storey buildings close to the lake foreshore and a minimum 10 metre setback from the building line to the lakeside, the BCC considers that the attractiveness and usability of the precinct would be considerably enhanced by prioritising the infilling of the small bay near the arts centre (Figure 32) and extending the pathway around the lakeside of the arts centre to join the existing pathway. Before the Master Plan is finalised, the BCC urges consultation with the Belconnen Arts Centre on appropriate uses for this land once in-filled so that it both supports the Arts Centre as well as provides a connection between it and the eastern (restaurant) end of Emu Bank. Consideration should also be given to basement public car-parking along the waterfront side of Emu Bank.

Lake Ginninderra: The BCC is very aware that urban open space around Lake Ginninderra provides an important recreational resource and holds ecological value; however, the need for vegetation restoration is not sufficiently prioritised, particularly on the peninsula where there are now four patches of ivy spreading. The BCC supports the recommendation for additional parking spaces at John Knight Memorial Park for picnickers and other lake users (but not for commuters).

Street Trees: The amenity provided by the elm trees was appreciably reduced in 2014 by attacks from elm beetles. If action is not to be taken to control the beetles, future plantings should be made of trees more insect and disease resistant. While street trees cannot be planted on part of Benjamin Way closest to the lake, suitable shrubs should be planted to beautify that part of the street.

Linking the Town Centre and University of Canberra: Consideration should be given to building a pedestrian/bike bridge across Aikman Drive in place of the traffic lights. This would assist the movement and safety of students and others going to and from the UC and town centre. It would also assist traffic flow, which has increased over the years and currently can be a problem at peak times. At public forums, the current UC Vice-Chancellor has indicated some interest in such a proposal. The need for the pedestrian bridge will increase as Lawson (South) is developed and its population grows resulting in a greater traffic flow along Aikman Drive.

To avoid worsening traffic bottlenecks and to support the development of the UC Public Hospital, a duplication of Aikman Drive would be a wise priority. Confirmation of the budget approval for this *before* the Master Plan is finalised would assist in ensuring the Master Plan accurately reflects future development and use of this area.

The approval of the UC development at the same time as the future of Belconnen Town Centre is considered presents a critical opportunity to reflect *now* how the two will link *within the Master Plan*. The BCC strongly suggests that these links be determined and clearly reflected in the final Master Plan so that the developments of the two areas continue to be complementary and not in conflict into the future.

Lathlain Street: The BCC does not oppose the Master Plan's intention to change the character of Lathlain Street. As a street which provides access to the services and trades area, Westfield Belconnen and the Belconnen Markets, it is a central hub which nevertheless could be improved - especially in terms of ease of movement along it and in aesthetic - and the relocation of the remand centre and the emergency services facilities provides some opportunity for renewal. However, the BCC strongly disagrees with the proposal that Lathlain Street become the Town Centre's 'Main

Street'. The focus of activity in the Town Centre has not necessarily moved to Lathlain Street despite what the draft Master Plan suggests (page 67). Benjamin Way remains the natural main street, providing direct access to Belconnen Town Centre's greatest asset: the lake. Effort should be concentrated on both enhancing Benjamin Way *and* connecting it better with Lathlain Street.

In-principle, the BCC is not opposed to the development of the former remand centre and emergency services sites. In particular, the BCC notes there are numerous benefits for the BCS if it relocates to a site which is in proximity to the health centre, the popular Westfield bus station and Westfield Belconnen. To effect this, the draft Master Plan suggests much taller buildings than those currently/previiously on the site - up to 18 storeys. While the area can accommodate taller buildings and the BCC supports development here - particularly that which supports enhanced community services - 18 storeys will result in a significant change to the landscape, and a change which appears inconsistent with many other proposals in the draft Master Plan. This section of the draft Master Plan fails to present any compelling case for an increase to 18 storeys on these sites. The BCC urges a revision before the Master Plan is finalised. Any proposal for heights above 8-10 storeys on these sites needs to be better justified.

Municipal centre: The draft Master Plan suggests that the land around and including Margaret Timpson Park remain the municipal centre, yet also suggests that Belconnen Community Service and Belconnen Library could move to Lathlain Street. The two suggestions will continue to be incongruous unless the final Master Plan indicates (a) exactly what municipal services could be planned for this land and (b) provides for enhanced planning on how to connect the centre to Lathlain Street.

National Capital Authority Land: The height limits imposed by the NCA should be reviewed.