



Australian Government

Department of Finance and Administration

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The Hon Judi Moylan (MP)
Chair
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
House of Representatives
Parliament of Australia
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Moylan

**Villawood Immigration Detention Centre Redevelopment
Response to Submission by Bankstown City Council**

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and the Department of Finance and Administration (Finance) would like to take the opportunity to reply to the submission from the Bankstown City Council (Council) dated 23 March 2006 concerning the redevelopment of Villawood Immigration Detention Centre (VIDC) at Villawood, New South Wales.

The issues raised by the Council of concern and for consideration in the preparation of further design are responded to below.

1. Environmental Impacts:

Biodiversity and Ecology:

1.1. Remnant Cumberland Plain Woodland (CPW) / Cooks River Castlereagh Ironbark Forest (CRCIF):

The proposed redevelopment will have an impact on the core remnant of CPW/CRCIF which covers approximately 0.4 ha at the southern end of the site because the proposed car parking is to occupy about half of that area.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) of the proposed redevelopment (commissioned to support the Referral made to the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act)) states that the conservation significance of the remnant CPW/CRCIF lies in the presence in that remnant of mature trees.

The intention is to place the car parking spaces in this area in a way that will preserve as many of the mature trees in the remnant bushland as possible. The EA and Referral note that this area of bushland is otherwise degraded, that it is isolated from other remnants in the Bankstown area, that it has been subject to soil disturbance and is dominated by exotic weeds. While the proposal indicates a 50% loss of the area of remnant bushland, the design layout will seek to avoid the clearing of mature trees in it wherever possible. However, the Council's position that retention of all remnant bushland is necessary cannot be achieved within the design parameters and constraints of this site (refer Item 1.4).

1.2. Mature Trees:

There are other mature trees scattered over the site as well as those in the remnant bushland area which would be affected by the proposed redevelopment. This is unavoidable because of the design requirements of the facility and the constraints of the site (refer Item 1.4).

1.3. Hollow Bearing Trees and Habitat Boxes:

Hollow Bearing (HB) trees within the existing Stage 2 and 3 compounds of the VIDC will not be affected by the redevelopment. However those HB trees in the redevelopment area will be affected because of the site constraints (refer Item 1.4). The EA considered it unlikely that any threatened fauna would be reliant on the site for resources or habitat. Habitat boxes as alternatives to HB trees will be placed on site, as provided for in the Referral and the EA.

1.4. Cut and fill and other Design Issues:

The Council has raised a number of design issues. The number of storeys in the accommodation buildings for detainee use is driven by considerations of operational effectiveness and disabled access that have led the design to limit some of the accommodation to one storey. Unfortunately the site constraints have meant that the 48 bed accommodation units must be two storeys. The current design attempts to balance the disabled access and management requirements against the desirability for additional open space. The security separation of buildings together with the Australian Standards on disabled access requires level grade walking paths on site that have led to the cut and fill earthworks necessary for the site.

1.5. Native Seeds:

Refer Item 6 (Landscaping).

2. Stormwater Management/Topography:

2.1. Stormwater Drainage:

As stated in Item 1.4, the cut and fill across the site is the result of the need for level grade walking paths for disabled access on the site, the site constraints, security and operational effectiveness issues. The stormwater design for the new facility will be in accordance with the relevant design standards and will ensure that runoff will be captured and discharged appropriately.

2.2. Flood Levels:

A flood level study will be undertaken to assess the impact of the additional stormwater discharge from the site. The outcomes of this study will be provided to the Council, and any necessary mitigating strategies will be undertaken.

2.3. Council Drainage System:

Site Feature Surveys have been undertaken to identify all existing infrastructure and systems on the VIDC site, and the design will take account of these, either by relocation or keeping clear of the identified infrastructure or systems.

2.4. Overland Flow Paths:

Where appropriate existing, overland flow paths at the VIDC will be considered for retention, however, the design of the facility may require the flow paths to be captured with new stormwater systems. The site constraints associated with the design requirements of the new facility will determine the need for new systems.

2.5. Bankstown Drainage Standards Policy:

The drainage design will take into consideration the Bankstown Drainage Standards Policy.

2.6. Open Drain UpStream of Birmingham Avenue:

The Council's request that the open drain be piped will be considered as part of the overall facility design requirements, however it will not be undertaken unless a real need is identified.

3. Heritage

3.1. Retention of Heritage Buildings On Site:

The proposed redevelopment includes the establishment of a heritage precinct on the Western edge of the VIDC site. This would contain the most valuable, in a historical and social sense, buildings identified in the Commonwealth Heritage List (CHL) (ie.: Mess and Two Nissen Huts). Active, adaptive re-use of the buildings in their current locations is not possible due to the constraints of the site on the design of the new facilities. The only building that can be retained in situ is the former Magazine Hut.

3.2. Heritage Precinct Accessibility:

It is agreed that as a minimum static storyboards will be displayed for the public to view from Miowera Road adjacent to the proposed heritage precinct without the public entering the VIDC site. The ability to allow public access onto the site raises both liability and security concerns for DIMA. It is proposed that further discussions be held between Finance, DIMA and the Council to agree what can reasonably be done to address the Council's requests for ongoing public access to the heritage precinct.

3.3. On-Going Maintenance Plan:

The heritage buildings being located to the heritage precinct will be restored and an ongoing maintenance plan (as part of a Heritage Management Plan) prepared to ensure that their condition is appropriately preserved. This plan will be in accordance with sections 341S and 341ZA of the EPBC Act.

3.4. Periodic Public Access:

Refer Item 3.2.

3.5. Other Heritage Issues:

The part played by the Villawood migrant community in the development of Sydney's post-war infrastructure could be explained in the "site history" section of the VIDC Heritage Management Plan, and this explanation also included on the static storyboards mentioned in Item 3.2. However, these connections to the wider South-Western Sydney area have not been emphasised in the two previous studies of the sites heritage significance, and are not considered to affect the overall findings of the heritage assessment undertaken for the VIDC Redevelopment.

3.6. School Based Programs etc:

Refer Item 3.2.

3.7. Other Heritage Values:

Three separate heritage assessments of the VIDC have been formally undertaken by Graham Brooks (2001), Godden Mackay Logan (2001) and Environmental Resources Management (2005). Each of these assessments has been undertaken in accordance with Commonwealth legislation and relevant Commonwealth heritage assessment criteria.

Each of the assessments, as well as the current CHL citation, has considered all aspects of VIDC including location, landscaping, topography, deliberate plantings (i.e. vegetation) and site layout. None of the assessments to date have found the VIDC has sufficient Commonwealth heritage value under these criteria to cross the significance threshold. This is reflected in the CHL citation.

4. Social Impact and Community Relationships:

4.1. Recreational Facilities:

The proposed education and recreation facilities will be designed to enable external providers of programs to utilise those facilities. The Council and other contracted providers of programs will be consulted during the design phase. Other social support groups may interact with detainees in the visits area.

4.2. Institutional Amenity:

It is acknowledged that the site usage changed from migration reception to immigration detention in the mid-1980's. The nature of detention unfortunately requires the provision of appropriate security systems.

The proposed redevelopment will endeavour to minimise the institutional feel by use of less intrusive technology, freer movement of detainees within the security perimeter, improved accommodation, appropriate landscaping and provision of facilities that support a normal community lifestyle (ie: recreation, education facilities etc). Multiple perimeter fences are required to separate various levels of security needs.

Landscaping will be undertaken to provide appropriate screening from adjoining properties. Flood lighting provided on the perimeter security fence will be designed to minimise the light spill onto adjoining properties.

4.3. Family - Style Accommodation (Residential Housing Project (RHP)):

It was originally intended that the RHP would provide accommodation for families detained at VIDC. As a result of a change in Government policy, families with children are now accommodated within community-based facilities. It is intended that the RHP will be used for accommodating very short-term detainees (eg. those awaiting return flights to their country of origin within one to two days.)

5. Urban Design:

5.1. Accommodation Units:

It is not desirable to have accommodation units as two storey facilities as this limits disabled access to the upper level as well as making operational management more difficult. Unfortunately the site constraints have required that the 48 bed accommodation units must be two storeys. The current design attempts to balance the access and management requirements against the desirability for additional open space.

5.2. Car Parking:

The additional car parking spaces should be sufficient for the proposed staffing and forecast visitor levels and thereby reduce the current parking impact on neighbouring streets. The design of the car parking areas will be arranged so as to retain the maximum possible number of mature trees and minimise the need for changes in ground level.

5.3. Pedestrian Links to Public Transport:

The proposed redevelopment will include the provision of footpaths from the front entry at Birmingham Avenue up to the main entrance. It is not the responsibility of the Commonwealth to pay for footpaths to local public transport.

5.4. External Way Finding Signage / Entry:

As part of the redevelopment Finance and DIMA will meet with the Council to agree the appropriate signage and will meet any associated costs.

5.5. Lighting Spill:

As indicated in Paragraph 100 of the Statement of Evidence "External lighting will be designed to minimise glare and colour distortion, particularly with respect to light spill on neighbouring properties." The impact of lighting will also be taken into consideration with the locating of the proposed habitat boxes for native fauna.

6. Landscaping:

Landscape screening will be provided around the whole VIDC site perimeter. A landscape master plan will be developed for the site in consultation with the Council's Landscape Architect and Bushland Officer and where appropriate indigenous natives sourced from local provenance will be used. It should be noted however that the proposed landscape master plan cannot compromise the security of the facility.

7. Interface and Security to Recently Rezoned Residential 2(a) Land:

7.1. Recreational area:

The security of the VIDC does not rely on passive surveillance by neighbours. The Detention Service Provider (DSP) will monitor the recreational area using both staff and technology. It is also proposed that there will be a screening wall on the boundary side of the recreation area to provide a visual barrier to adjoining neighbours.

7.2. Perimeter Fencing:

The perimeter security fence will be designed so as to balance the need to be visually unobtrusive and non-institutional while achieving its primary function of containment.

8. Amenity for DIMA Personnel:

8.1. Office Conditions:

The proposed design of office accommodation and amenities for the DIMA and DSP staff will comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* and all other appropriate standards regarding health and safety at work and in an occupational environment. The current office design is preliminary and is yet to be developed.

8.2. Staff Canteen/Cafeteria:

A staff canteen/cafeteria is not included within the scope of the project, as the need for such a facility has not been justified. The impact of any staff related traffic movements on adjoining streets would be minimal should staff seek meals outside the centre.

8.3. Staff Recreation and Meal Facilities:

Appropriate meal areas within the administration building and access to external courtyards will be provided for DIMA and DSP staff. Staff will have access to change rooms to support participation in recreational activities outside the perimeter security fence.

8.4. Access to Public Transport Facilities:

Refer Item 5.3.

9. Construction Activity:

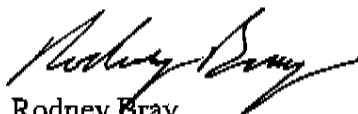
9.1. Construction Hours:

It is intended that normal construction hours will be consistent with those applicable in the local area. However, as the Council is aware, particular construction activities (eg. concrete pours in Summer) will require work to be undertaken outside normal hours. We will consult with the Council prior to these activities being undertaken and also inform adjoining residents.

9.2. Waste Disposal Management:

A Construction Environmental Management Plan will be prepared by the building contractor which will identify all the management measures to be undertaken to control the impact of construction, including waste generation and disposal. The building contract will require that the management plan needs to be developed in consultation with the Council.

Yours sincerely



Rodney Bray
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Major Projects Branch - Immigration
3 April 2006