



FINAL REPORT

Future use of Canberra Technology Park site

Chief Minister, Treasury and
Economic Development
Directorate

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FINAL REPORT:

FUTURE USE OF CANBERRA TECHNOLOGY PARK SITE

Government Decision

The ACT Government knows that the Canberra Technology Park, formerly the Watson High School, is an important site for many Canberrans - whether they used to attend the school, live in the area and use the oval, or are involved in one of the many businesses on site.

After extensive community consultation, site investigations and careful consideration, the ACT Government has made three key decisions about the future of Canberra Technology Park:

- to demolish and remediate buildings on the site, prior to sale;
- retain responsibility for public green space, including any upgrade and ongoing maintenance; and
- enter into direct negotiations with AIE with a view to reaching agreement on the terms for the direct sale of land to AIE.



Background

The Canberra Technology Park site, on the corner of Windeyer Street and Phillip Avenue, is a public asset that was previously occupied as Watson High School from 1965 to 1988. Shortly after, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) took over the site. The Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) and Canberra City Band have been the main tenants at the site in recent years.

In 2018 the ACT Government consulted the community about the future use of the site for two reasons:

1. the need to revitalise and renew the Canberra Technology Park's ageing infrastructure
2. the Academy of Interactive Entertainment (AIE) approached the government with a concept that would enhance their current operations on the site through renovating existing buildings, upgrading public green space and adding student accommodation.

We consulted the community over a six week period from 5 February - 16 March 2018. The purpose of the consultation was to give Canberrans an opportunity to participate in a robust and open discussion about the future of the site and to consider the conditions and options that any future sale of the site might include.

There were two specific consultation objectives:

1. to seek views from the Canberra community on whether to proceed to redevelop and revitalise Block 1, Section 13 Watson as a higher education and enhanced community precinct, including student accommodation
2. to determine how to best deliver the public green space the community wants for the future on this site.

The government invited all Canberrans to share how they use the site and sought the community's view through a variety of ways, including conversation stalls at local shops, a community picnic, stakeholder and community group meetings, plus an online poll, survey and interactive mapping.

What we asked

We asked local residents, key stakeholders and the wider community for their views on upgrading and modernising the site, including:

1. Do you support the redevelopment and revitalisation of this site as a higher education and enhanced community precinct?
2. Would you prefer that student accommodation is built multilevel to preserve more public green space or a lower level building that occupies more of the public green space?
3. How do you currently use the site?
4. How often do you use the site?
5. What features would you like to see included in the public green space at the site?

How we engaged

We provided a range of opportunities for the community and key stakeholders to participate in the consultation including:

- Hosting an information stall at the Flix 'n' Dickson Outdoor Family Movie night on 10 February 2018
- Attending the North Canberra Community Council meeting on 21 February 2018
- Pop-up conversation stalls at the Watson and Hackett shops on 24 February 2018
- Hosting a community picnic on the site on 4 March 2018

The community was also able to participate through an online quick poll, survey or interactive map on the YourSay website.

Current tenants of the AIE, local community groups and nearby businesses received an email notification inviting them to attend consultation meetings onsite in February 2018, as well as inviting them to provide written or verbal feedback at any time.

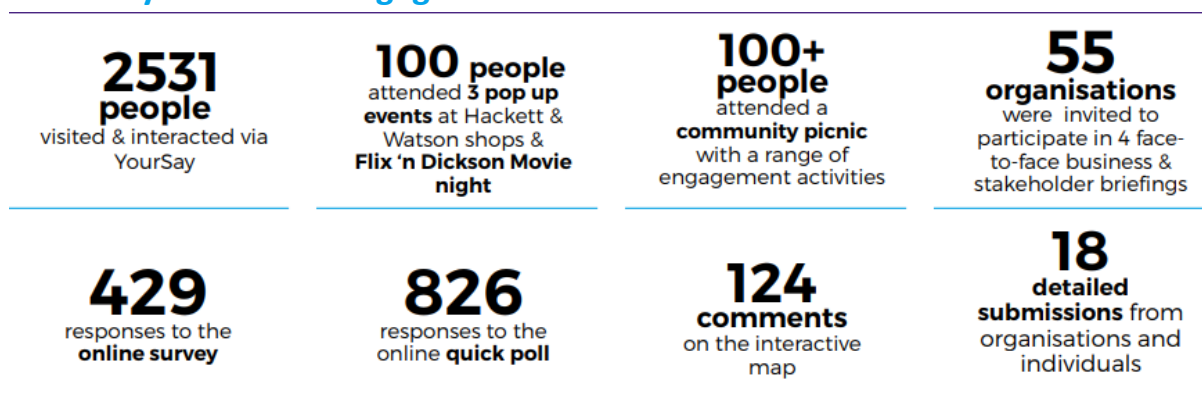
The Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) prepared a hard copy invitation to the community picnic which also included information on the online feedback mechanisms. This was distributed to 6,700 households in Watson and the neighbouring suburbs of Dickson, Downer and Hackett. The government's central consultation portal, YourSay, was the primary vehicle for promoting the consultation online.

Particular effort was made to engage young people in the consultation to help ensure feedback received was representative of the whole community. Phone calls and invitations were sent to target schools and local youth organisations, including the Multicultural Youth Service, Youth InterACT, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Dickson College, and Daramalan College.

Each group was encouraged to include information about the community picnic and online feedback mechanisms on their Facebook pages and newsletters. The Principals of neighbouring schools, Rosary, Merici and Emmaus were also invited to attend the stakeholder meetings and include information in their newsletters and Facebook pages.

Social media posts promoting the consultation on ACT Government social media channels reached over 7000 people and achieved positive engagement through shares, likes and comments.

Summary of how we engaged



What we found

Key insights from the community

1. There was overall support (over 85 per cent) across the different engagement activities for the redevelopment and revitalisation of this site as a higher education and enhanced community precinct, including student accommodation.

Green space/community facilities

2. There was general agreement amongst responders that improved community facilities would attract more people to use the site.
3. There was strong interest in the type, locations and scale of future community facilities on the site.
4. There was strong support for green space and outdoor activities, and moderate support for built structures such as community meeting rooms.
5. There was strong support for higher multi-level student accommodation if this meant that more green space would be preserved.
6. There were some concerns about the potential loss of community facilities and a keen interest in community facilities.

Use of the site

7. There was opposition to the site being used for other purposes such as aged care, public housing or private accommodation developments.
8. There was support for musical performance spaces to be included and for the continuation of accommodation for Canberra City Band.
9. Traffic and parking was a major concern for residents with the potential impact on surrounding residential streets considered to be a significant issue.

Phone survey

Separate to the insights gained from the engagement activities, a phone poll showed either full or moderate support of 85% by over 500 respondents for the use of this site as a higher education and enhanced community precinct, with student accommodation.

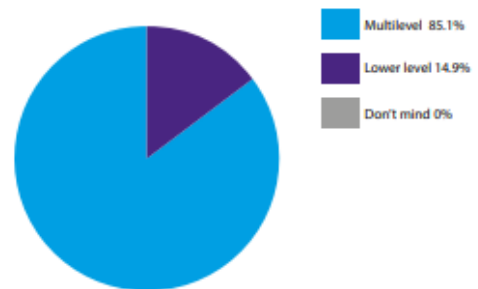
ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

Includes entry of hardcopy surveys that were completed at face-to-face engagement activities.

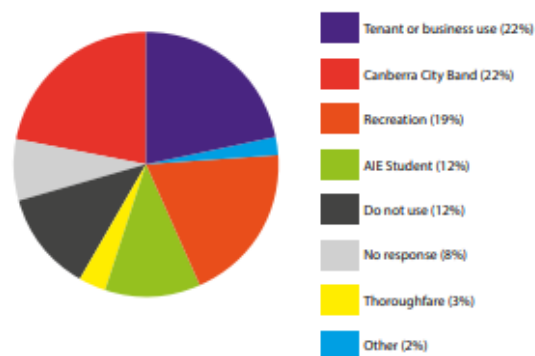
Q1. Do you support the redevelopment and revitalisation of this site as a higher education and enhanced community precinct?



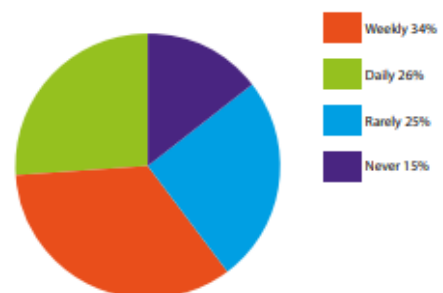
Q2. Would you prefer that student accommodation is built multilevel to preserve more public green space? Or a lower level building that occupies more of the green public space?



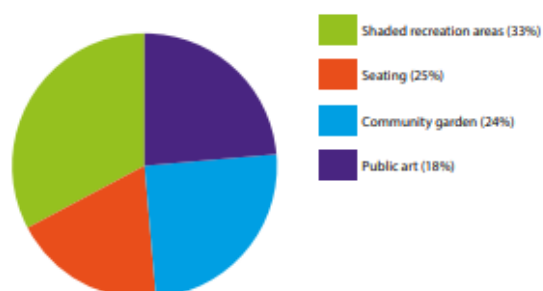
Q3. How do you currently use the site?



Q4. How often do you use the site?



Q5. What features would you like to see included in the public green space at the site?



Government response to consultation insights

Support for the redevelopment and revitalisation of this site as a higher education and enhanced community precinct.

Community Response/Key insight	Government response
<p>Key Insight 1: There was overall support (over 85 per cent) across the different engagement activities for the redevelopment and revitalisation of this site as a higher education and enhanced community precinct, including student accommodation.</p> <p>Key Insight 7: There was opposition to the site being used for other purposes such as aged care, public housing or private accommodation developments.</p> <p>Other feedback: The Watson Community Association (WCA) conducted a survey in April 2017 with 248 participants. There was significant support for maintenance of green space and further development of community facilities both in general in Watson, and specifically on this site.</p> <p>The Downer Community Association (DCA) wants the current green space protected from any development and for development to be kept within the margins of the existing building and car park footprint.</p> <p>The Canberra City Band recommends the government not offer the site for sale unless it includes a permanent home for them as a condition of sale.</p>	<p>Response to Key Insight 1: We acknowledge the strong community support for the overall concept.</p> <p>The community's preferences for the upgrade and maintenance of public green space has helped to shape government's decision that the Territory will retain responsibility for public green space.</p> <p>Response to Key Insight 7: Community concern about the site being used for other purposes such as aged care, public housing or private accommodation is acknowledged.</p> <p>Community responses indicated a wide range of preferences for use of the site, though some preferences received a low level of support. For example, Key Insight 7 showed opposition to the site being redeveloped for aged care. Government has decided that the site be offered for sale as a higher education and community precinct, including student accommodation as proposed and, as supported by the outcomes of community consultation.</p> <p>Response to other feedback: The government has committed to ensuring public green space is preserved at this site and has decided the Territory will retain responsibility for public green space.</p>

Options for future site structures and green space

Community Response/Key Insight	Government response
<p>Key Insight 5: There was strong support for higher multi-level student accommodation if this meant that more green space would be preserved.</p> <p>Other feedback: Other comments received including advice from WCA, supported multi-level development, if it leads to more community public green space, which is highly valued.</p> <p>WCA and DCA sought assurances that any multi-level development would not adversely impact on the amenity of the neighbouring residential area, existing facilities, and infrastructure/services.</p> <p>The Dickson Residents Group (DRG) highlighted the importance of the student housing segment in the market.</p> <p>Discussion at the community picnic also indicated a preference for the location of student accommodation to be closer to Phillip Avenue, as opposed to the oval.</p>	<p>Response to Key Insight 5 and other feedback: The community's preference for multilevel student accommodation, if it means more green space would be preserved, is acknowledged.</p> <p>The Territory Plan currently restricts buildings in Watson to a maximum of 4 storeys (2 storeys within 30 metres of any residence).</p> <p>Community preferences, and the Territory Plan requirements, will be considered in settling sales parameters.</p> <p>The community's preferences for the upgrade and maintenance of public green space has helped to shape government's decision that the Territory will retain responsibility for public green space.</p> <p>Any redevelopment proposal will require a DA including both pre-DA and DA community consultation.</p> <p>The importance of student accommodation within the housing market is also recognised.</p>

Nature of current community use

Community Response	Government response
<p>Of 429 survey responses received online and hard copy (refer to survey results graph on page 7):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22% (94) indicated they used the site as a tenant or as a business • 22% (94) indicated they used the site for Canberra City Band purposes • 19% (82) indicated they used the site for recreation purposes • 12% (51) indicated they used the site for AIE purposes • 12% (51) don't use the site • 8% (35) did not respond to this part of the survey • 3% (13) use the site as a thoroughfare • 2% (9) use the site for other purposes. <p>The WCA noted that the site is poorly used at present, but felt this would change if it were more attractive and varied.</p>	<p>It was noted that of the 429 survey responses received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% are existing tenants or use the site for purposes offered by tenants • 19% use the site for recreation • 17% don't use the site, use it as a thoroughfare or use it for other purposes • 8% didn't respond to this question. <p>The survey results have clarified how people currently use the site, and have helped to inform the Government's decision on the way forward for the future use and sale of the site.</p>

Frequency of community use

Community Response/Key insight	Government response
<p>Of 429 survey responses received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34% (146) use the site weekly • 26% (112) use the site daily • 25% (107) use the site rarely • 15% (64) never use the site <p>The WCA noted that the site is poorly used at present but felt this would change if it were more attractive and varied.</p>	<p>Response to the survey results:</p> <p>It was noted that 60% of respondents use the site regularly (daily or weekly) and 56% of all respondents are existing tenants or use the site for purposes offered by tenants.</p> <p>This information was considered by government in determining the way forward for the future use and sale of the site.</p>

Features of public green space

Community Response/Key insight	Government response
<p>Key insight 2: There was general agreement among responders that improved community facilities would attract more people to use the site.</p> <p>Key insight 3: There was strong interest in the type, locations and scale of future community facilities on the site.</p> <p>Key insight 4: There was strong support for green space and outdoor activities, and moderate support for built structures such as community meetings rooms.</p> <p>Key insight 6: There were some concerns about the potential loss of community facilities and a keen interest in community facilities.</p> <p>Survey results showed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% of respondents would like shaded recreation areas • 25% of respondents would like seating • 24% of respondents would like a community garden • 18% of respondents would like public art 	<p>Response to key insights 2,3,4,6 and the survey results:</p> <p>Community responses indicate a wide range of preferences for use of the site, though some preferences received a low level of support.</p> <p>It is unlikely that all of those uses could be accommodated together in a redeveloped and revitalised site. However, the community's preferences will be taken into account in any future planning and design process for how to upgrade green space.</p>

<p>Summary of other suggestions from the survey and face-to-face engagements with the community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21% of respondents would like sport or exercise facilities • 15% of respondents would like an arts space –music, cinema, public art • 12% of respondents would like a playground • 10% of respondents would like a garden or water feature • 8% of respondents would like toilets, bins and Water • 6% of respondents would like BBQs • 5% of respondents would like community events and markets • 4% of respondents would like a skate/BMX Park • 4% of respondents would like bike paths and footpaths • 3% of respondents would like a dog park • 2% of respondents would like a café • 10% all other suggestions <p>Other comments received including from the WCA raised concerns about the adequacy of future maintenance of community facilities and green space.</p> <p>One respondent did not support the suggestion of a dog park, particularly as there is a dog park on the track at the back of nearby Piddington Street.</p>	
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Existing tenancies

Community response/key insight	Government response
<p>Canberra Business Chamber submission</p> <p>The Canberra Business Chamber's (CBC) submission stated that by 2020, Australia's digital economy is forecast to be worth \$139 billion and account for over 7% of GDP.</p> <p>CBC stated that AIE is a well-regarded institution and a local training provider keeping the ACT on the cutting edge and helping develop and attract skilled workers.</p>	<p>The standing of AIE as a specialist educator, attracting students and investment to the ACT and to contributing to the growth and diversification of the ACT economy is acknowledged.</p> <p>Government agrees that the AIE is a unique higher education provider in the ACT, contributing to the growth and diversification of the ACT economy.</p> <p>The feedback from key stakeholder groups regarding AIE's long term presence on the site and in the Territory, was considered by government in reaching a decision to enter into direct negotiations with AIE, with a view to progressing a direct sale of land to AIE.</p>

<p>Academy of Interactive Entertainment submission</p> <p>The AIE’s submission outlined their long history on the site and their record of success having twice won the National Training Awards. The AIE would like to see more jobs for students and better retention of talent in Canberra to further grow the creative digital industries. The AIE support the site being used as a higher education and community precinct with student accommodation and refer to their current unsolicited bid aspiring to revitalise the site.</p> <p>Watson Community Association submission</p> <p>The WCA advised they have not received any adverse response from the community about AIE’s long-term presence or their operations on the site. The WCA expressed concern about the future of existing tenants.</p> <p>Key Insight 8: There was support for musical performance spaces to be included and for the continuation of accommodation for Canberra City Band.</p> <p>Canberra City Band submission</p> <p>Canberra City Band (CCB) expressed their strong connection to the site, over a 30 year period. They use the hall as a rehearsal space as well viewing it as a musical and artistic hub for the community. They expressed a strong desire to remain on the site under any future arrangement.</p> <p>Additional comments:</p> <p>AIE has indicated its willingness to work with CCB regarding their ongoing tenancy on the site (if AIE is successful in acquiring the site).</p> <p>Data collected during the consultation show the following results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22% of respondents identified as Canberra City Band members. Of 124 interactive map respondents, 6.45% (8) indicated they support CCB using the site. Of 81 community picnic respondents, 4.34% (1) indicated they support CCB using the site. 	<p>The CCB’s current tenancy on the site expires at the end of 2019. Given the government decision to demolish and remediate the aging buildings on the site, government will work with CCB to identify and transition it to suitable alternative accommodation.</p>
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Planning and development approvals

Community response	Government response
<p>Community consultation</p> <p>The WCA stated there should be detailed community consultation before any DA is prepared, and continued community involvement before a DA is finalised and lodged for approval.</p>	<p>Any redevelopment proposal will require a DA including both pre-DA and DA community consultation.</p>
<p>Regulation of multi-use of the site</p> <p>The WCA held some concern about how the multi-use (education and community use) would be regulated to ensure continuing public access. There was also a view that the site is 'public land'.</p>	<p>The site is not reserved as 'public land' under the Territory Plan. However, the site is currently an ACT Government asset and has been managed under the custodianship of the Canberra Institute of Technology.</p> <p>Government has considered the community's feedback and decided the Territory will retain responsibility for public green space on the site.</p>
<p>Potential future need for other community use</p> <p>There were questions raised by the Dickson Residents Group, the Downer Community Association, the Watson Community Association, and during one of the stakeholder meetings about whether the site is needed, and should be retained, for other community uses such as a public school or aged care facility.</p> <p>An April 2017 survey undertaken by WCA found that respondents, when asked about <i>'things you would like to see developed in Watson'</i>, disliked the lack of local educational facilities and questioned whether the site should be reserved for such purposes. Development of local education facilities was the fifth most common suggestion.</p>	<p>Community responses indicate a wide range of preferences for use of the site, though some preferences received a low level of support. For example, Key Insight 7 showed opposition to the site being redeveloped for aged care.</p> <p>The community's preferences for the upgrade and maintenance of public green space has helped to shape government's decision that the Territory will retain responsibility for public green space.</p> <p>The feedback from key stakeholder groups regarding AIE's long term presence on the site and in the Territory was considered by government in reaching a decision to enter into direct negotiations with AIE, with a view to progressing a direct sale of land to AIE.</p> <p>In reaching its decision, government considered a range of matters, including potential future need for other community uses.</p>

<p>Adequacy of existing planning controls, development codes and future strategy for student accommodation</p> <p>The Dickson Residents Association has expressed concern about the adequacy of existing planning controls for boarding housing in the multi-unit housing, and that the Territory Plan contains no specific plan for future student accommodation in a growing and profitable investor-owned student accommodation market.</p>	<p>The ACT Government recognises the importance of ensuring a variety of future housing needs, including student housing, are met. Particularly given Canberra's growing tertiary education sector, its importance as a study destination and its significant student population.</p> <p>The views of Dickson Residents Association have been shared with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) as part of the Housing Choices and Territory Plan review.</p> <p>Recommendations for Housing Choices were released in July 2018. A review of the Territory Plan will begin in 2019 and will further build on implementing the recommendations. More information can be found at www.yoursay.act.gov.au/housing-choices</p>
<p>Capacity / Adequacy of Existing Infrastructure / condition of buildings</p> <p>The Downer Community Association sought assurance regarding the upgrade and remediation of infrastructure such as stormwater, sewerage, electricity and traffic management.</p> <p>One respondent was concerned about possible asbestos on the site given the age of the buildings.</p>	<p>Any requirements for infrastructure would be addressed prior to and as part of any sale conditions.</p> <p>Government has agreed that the Territory will take responsibility for demolition and remediation of asbestos contaminated buildings at Canberra Technology Park.</p>
<p>Congruence with City and Gateway Plan</p> <p>The Downer Community Association asked if the proposal had been considered in the context of the City and Gateway plan and does it take into account the future population growth in the Inner North?</p>	<p>The City and Gateway Urban Design Framework released in December 2018 following community consultation, sets the policy context for the city and gateway corridor. It informs the development of an infrastructure plan to ensure broader urban renewal and community benefits are achieved, including new business and lifestyle opportunities.</p> <p>As outlined in the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework, Canberra's population growth is anticipated to reach around half a million people by 2031. The population of the city and gateway study area, currently about 54,000, is projected to reach 71,000 by 2031. Population growth in the city and gateway corridor must be carefully managed to ensure it builds, rather than diminishes, the attractiveness and liveability of our city. It is important to ensure that development through the City and Gateway corridor delivers a variety of housing, services and facilities that support a diverse urban community, and generates economic benefits.</p>

<p>Better planning and opportunities for active travel</p> <p>Watson Community Association advised that its 2017 survey showed strong support for active travel links, including bike/pedestrian pathways linking residents to public transport and public amenities (schools/shops).</p> <p>The Downer Community Association stated there should be an integrated and holistic approach to planning to ensure the development is functional and beautiful including good pedestrian/cycle links between this site and the shops, light rail and Downer.</p>	<p>Transport Canberra and City Services have identified two potential future cycling network routes that would improve cycling access to the site as well as provide better connections between Watson and neighbouring communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> protected bike lanes on Phillip Ave to connect with Light Rail and EPIC to Downer, Hackett and Watson; the Garden City Cycle Route, a combination on-street and off-street route along Bradfield St / Windeyer St connecting Watson, Downer and Dickson with the City. <p>The site is less than a 10 minute walk from the Phillip Avenue light rail stop. The walking environment between that stop and Phillip Avenue is adequate. While there are currently no cycling facilities, as indicated above, there are plans to address this in the future.</p>
<p>Traffic and parking</p> <p>Key Insight 9: Traffic and parking was a major concern for residents with the potential impact on surrounding residential streets considered to be a significant issue.</p>	<p>Response to Key Insight 9:</p> <p>The impact of traffic on and around the area must be adequately addressed as part of any development on the site.</p> <p>Any redevelopment proposal will require a DA including both pre-DA and DA community consultation.</p>

Other feedback received

<p>Capacity of Yoursay website to receive and host detailed submissions</p> <p>Downer Community Association raised concern that the website did not have capacity for a submission to be lodged onto the website.</p>	<p>While there was no mechanism for submissions to be published on the website, the opportunity to make a submission was provided through directly emailing YourSay.</p>
<p>Old Watson petrol station (Block 1 Section 17 Watson)</p> <p>During consultation, a number of respondents expressed concern about the status of the old unused service station site and its impact on the precinct as a whole.</p>	<p>The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and Access Canberra have advised that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the old petrol station is zoned <i>CZ4 Local Centre</i>. the DA201019221 for a two storey building with shop, restaurant and offices over a basement was conditionally approved in September 2011. Plans were approved on 27 October 2011. The approval has lapsed. remediation work on the site was completed in April 2016, and the site is now ready for redevelopment.

Other considerations

In addition to undertaking community consultation, the ACT Government conducted site investigations to fully understand the features of the site. This included the identification of any constraints that may impact on how the site can be used currently or in the future.

The buildings on the site are known to contain residual asbestos. The ongoing use of the buildings is currently managed in accordance with an Asbestos Management Plan and a regular survey of the buildings is conducted as an important part of monitoring and managing their current use.

The government consulted environmental experts as part of its site investigations. The investigations included some physical geotechnical work on the site in April 2018 to test the soil for contamination. This involved establishing test core holes and pits one at a time by using a drilling machine and excavator, which were filled once testing was completed.

The geotechnical investigations of accessible areas of land on the site did not identify the presence of contaminated material.

In consideration of the findings and expert environmental advice about the buildings on site, and given their age, the government has decided it will demolish and remediate buildings.

Next Steps

The Territory has now commenced negotiations with AIE. Once negotiations are concluded, the community will be updated on the outcome and on next steps for implementation. This will include further opportunities for community consultation as part of any planning and development approval process.



The ACT Government acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we work on, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.