DICKSON
Neighbourhood Plan

A sustainable future for Dickson
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those who have shared their views, aspirations and ideas during the development of the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan.

In particular we wish to thank the members of the Dickson Interim Community Reference Panel, and staff of the various ACT Government agencies, including the Department of Urban Services, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, Department of Health and Community Care, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, Department of Justice and Community Safety and ACTION. We also acknowledge the Neighbourhood Planning and Community Partnerships Team and the Urban Projects Team within the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA), and also those members of the ACT Government and interested community members who volunteered their time as workshop facilitators.

We also extend our gratitude to those who provided submissions during the draft Neighbourhood Plan public testing period from 29 May to 19 June 2003. A number of changes were made to this Plan as a result of the feedback received.

ACT Planning and Land Authority
July 2003

Participants in the Dickson Neighbourhood Character Study took all photographs appearing in this document, unless otherwise stated.
DICKSON
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A sustainable future for Dickson

Prepared by the Neighbourhood Planning & Community Partnerships Team
Neighbourhood Planning is about enhancing the quality of life of a neighbourhood and its social, environmental and economic sustainability. It is based on partnerships and collaboration between the ACT Government and those who live, work, learn, play and invest in a neighbourhood. A Neighbourhood Plan is a document that provides a future direction for a neighbourhood and the strategies required to create that future.

Since May 2002, the Neighbourhood Planning and Community Partnerships Team from the then Planning and Land Management (PALM) worked with all those with an interest in Dickson to develop the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan. This involved a series of collaborations including two open forum workshops, two focus group sessions, school-based activities, and a householder and a business and employee survey. The Neighbourhood Planning process highlighted five key issues in Dickson:

- Open space;
- Shops and community facilities;
- Traffic and parking;
- Housing; and
- Landscape.

The issues and initiatives raised during these collaborations were provided to ACT Government agencies and the Dickson Interim Community Reference Panel for their consideration. The most feasible options are incorporated in the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan as ideas to explore further. Planning strategies have been developed to assist Dickson achieve its vision:

“Dickson should enhance its cohesive community where people of mixed age, income and cultural backgrounds will value its history and will be safe and settled. Dickson will provide a range of quality, environmentally sustainable residential areas that will retain a tranquil leafy ambience. The business, government and community sectors will be vibrant and progressive, providing a variety of employment, education, shopping and leisure choices, serving as a hub, both for locals and people from the surrounding region.”

The layout of the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan is guided by three general questions. Part 1 is based on the question of ‘Where is Dickson now?’. Part 2 provides an answer to the question ‘Where does Dickson want to be in the future?’ by outlining Dickson’s vision. It also responds to the question ‘How can Dickson achieve its vision?’ by detailing planning strategies and ideas worth exploring. The Appendix describes the Neighbourhood Planning process and methodology.

The Majura Community Planning Forum (CPF) will incorporate the suburbs of Dickson, Downer, Watson and Hackett and will be responsible for assisting with the implementation of the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan and its ongoing review. It is proposed that existing or proposed studies and local area master plans – such as Section Master Plans – relating to the Dickson neighbourhood will form an integral part of the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan.

Please note, this plan refers to the Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 200, often referred to as the ‘Garden City Variation’ (May 2002).
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Dickson: a unique suburb in a unique city

Neighbourhood Planning in Dickson is not occurring in isolation. The beginning of the new millennium saw an increasing recognition that the pace and type of change occurring in Canberra may not be sustainable without an overarching strategic framework to ensure a socially fairer community, an economy that is nationally and internationally competitive, and an environment that is maintained and enhanced.

During 2002 the ACT Government, in partnership with the community, started to develop a strategic framework for the ACT by commencing work on a suite of inter-related strategies including the Canberra Social Plan, the Canberra Economic White Paper and the Canberra Spatial Plan. These three strategies are jointly known as the Canberra Plan. The Sustainable Transport Framework is also being developed simultaneously with the Canberra Plan and will form a major component of the Spatial Plan. The ACT Sustainability Policy was completed in early 2003. It establishes new levels of performance that will bring long-term conservation benefits. Pivotal to all of the above is the Territory Plan, which provides policy to guide future development in the ACT.

The fundamental purpose of the Territory Plan is to manage land use change and development in the ACT in a manner consistent with strategic directions set from time to time by the ACT Government. The Land Act, National Capital Plan and Territory Plan provide a comprehensive and transparent framework for consideration of development proposals. The National Capital Plan (NCP), prepared and administered by the National Capital Authority, establishes a broad framework for land use and development throughout the Territory. The NCP is binding on both the Commonwealth and the Territory. The Territory Plan must avoid any inconsistency with the NCP.

The neighbourhood of Dickson started work on developing the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan in 2002, not long after the commencement of work on the Canberra Plan. One of the suite of integrated strategies that makes up the Canberra Plan – the Spatial Plan – which is due for release after the finalisation of the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan, may ultimately influence the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan as it provides a Canberra wide context for change management. The Dickson Neighbourhood Plan therefore needs to be dynamic to respond to the changes proposed in the Canberra Plan. This means that the Dickson Neighbourhood Plan will be reviewed and refined regularly in order to respond to change. For more information regarding the review process refer to Part 3: ‘Where to from here?’
THE CHANGING FACE OF CANBERRA

The population of Canberra is expected to grow by approximately 63,000 people over the next 25 years. This means that the population of Canberra may increase from the current population of 322,600 people to almost 380,000 people by 2026 (Source: A City Like No Other: Your Canberra Future Direction Summit Workbook: PALM: May 2003: in publishing). Population growth is anticipated to be highest in Gungahlin and the population of both North and South Canberra is also likely to increase, assuming that redevelopment continues. In comparison, the populations of Woden, Belconnen and North Tuggeranong are expected to decrease.

The surrounding region, particularly the Yarrowlumla and Eurobodalla Shires and Queanbeyan City, is forecast to experience more modest growth with a projected increase of approximately 15,000 people. However, restrictions in the land supply in Canberra due to environmental, geographic and social constraints may force the population of the ACT to flow across the border into New South Wales. This may have profound social, environmental and economic consequences for Canberra and the ACT sub-region. To ensure a sustainable urban form, land-use densities may need to increase in certain parts of Canberra. This would not only address the need for future housing supply and reduce development costs but also increase housing choice in established areas.

In the ACT the population is forecast to age with the median age increasing from the current 33.1 years to 40.4 years in 2016. The proportion of people aged over 75 years is likely to more than double between 1996 and 2016. Conversely, the number of young adults aged between 18 and 24 years is forecast to decline by 30%. This will result in a change to the housing types required. A higher emphasis will be placed upon older persons accommodation and the requirement for group households will decline.

In common with other Australian cities, Canberra has experienced declining average household size. There were 4.0 persons per dwelling in 1961 and 2.7 persons per dwelling in 1996. It is projected that this will decline to 2.4 people per dwelling by 2021. One and two person households have increased substantially and they will represent nearly 66% of all households by 2021. This trend is a consequence of the ageing of the population, later marriage, declining fertility, and increased separation and divorce. It has implications for planning for the provision of services such as schools, childcare centres and playgrounds, and aged care.

Changes in household size, combined with high numbers of the population in the household formation age groups, have led to a new dwelling being constructed for every additional 1.2 people living in Canberra. Based on current forecasts Canberra will need an additional 44,500 dwellings to meet housing demand by 2026. Detached dwellings are the dominant (but declining) housing form.

Demographic data used in this section is sourced from ‘Your Canberra Your Future - changes and challenges - the Canberra Spatial Plan’, July 2002 (Planning and Land Management).
DICKSON AND THE INNER NORTH

The Dickson shopping centre and its neighbourhood is essentially a gateway to Canberra as it is the first large centre reached as one drives south along Northbourne Avenue after entering the ACT. It is also the nearest centre to where the Barton Highway joins Northbourne Avenue. Dickson is located about six kilometres north of Civic and attracts people from all over Canberra because it has such a wide variety of facilities to offer – a range of restaurants – including a "Chinatown", and retail outlets (such as a chemist, post office, supermarket, doctor and real estate agents amongst many others), professional offices, a commercial area (eg, Telstra, TransACT) and a number of community and recreational facilities including a health centre, library, community centre, art gallery, gymnasium, swimming pool and sporting fields that host a number of regional sporting activities.

Dickson is also part of what is known as the Inner North. The Inner North comprises a group of established suburbs located within approximately a five or six kilometre radius from Civic, all of which are highly sought after because of their proximity to services and the high-quality established suburb environment.

Figure 1 shows the population changes that have occurred in Dickson and the forecasted population. The large rise in population that occurred from 1948 to 1964, is a result of more dwellings becoming available as Dickson was developed. Dickson was one of the early suburbs formed in Canberra. As Canberra grew, more suburbs became available for residency allowing the population to disperse to other areas.

The gradual decline in population can also be attributed to the changes in demographics for Dickson. The average household size has declined and is now 2.2 people per dwelling. As a result the household size declined and the number of people living in the suburb declined. Once development started to take place in Dickson, the population size started to rise again as more dwellings became available. This can be seen in the graph above.
The net residential density for Dickson as at June 2000 was 11.3 dwellings per hectare. This compares with 12.3 dwellings per hectare for North Canberra.

**FIGURE 4** Household Size and population density

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Average Household Size persons/dwelling</th>
<th>Net Population Density persons/hectare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dickson</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nth Canberra</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census*

**FIGURE 5** Dickson ~ Dwelling Types

*Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census*
### FIGURE 6  Dickson’s household mix in context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Family (no.)</th>
<th>Lone person (no.)</th>
<th>Group households (no.)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean (persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dickson</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>925</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackett</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downer</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1434</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census

### FIGURE 7  Dickson’s dwellings in context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Occupied private dwellings</th>
<th>Unoccupied private dwellings</th>
<th>Non-private dwellings</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dickson</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackett</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downer</td>
<td>1434</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1526s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census

### FIGURE 8  Dickson’s family types in context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Couple family with dependant children</th>
<th>Couple family with non dependant children</th>
<th>Couple family without children</th>
<th>One parent family</th>
<th>Other family</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dickson</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackett</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downer</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census
Families occupy approximately 55% of households in Dickson. This is similar to other suburbs in the North Canberra district except for Hackett, which has 65% of dwellings, occupied by families. There are a relatively high proportion of group households in Dickson, 10% in total. This may be explained by the close proximity of major educational institutions and the numerous services provided by the Group Centre at Dickson.

Approximately 14.9% of the population of Dickson are between the ages of 15 to 24. By the year 2010 North Canberra is forecast to overtake North Tuggeranong and South Belconnen to become the region with the largest number of youth. This trend is expected to continue due to Dickson’s close proximity to Central Canberra and the many services, employment opportunities and easy access to the inner-city lifestyle that this suburb provides. Furthermore, increased diversity in housing types is expected to entice more youth to the area. Dickson has maintained the Australian trend of a declining household size and the average size for Dickson is now 2.2 persons per household.

Broadly, throughout the ACT the proportion of people aged over 75 is increasing and the proportion of people aged 18 – 24 is declining. Demographic forecasts indicate a growth in couple and single person households occupying dwellings that have a higher tendency to be one and two bedroom in size. It can therefore be expected that the number of family households will decline. The number of lone person households can be expected to increase while the number of group households may decline.

Currently, there is a high requirement for rental properties in Dickson. The decline in group households, which are usually rental properties, may decrease the need for rental properties.

### The changing face of Dickson

In consultations held by Urban Services and compiled in the *Dickson Shopping Centre Refurbishment Project – Community Consultation and Cultural Profile Report* (Susan Conroy, April 1998) and through Neighbourhood Planning collaborations during 2002, people regard the diversity of the population living in the Dickson neighbourhood an asset and one that should be retained. This is reflected in the Vision for Dickson.

In the 2001 Census, 1329 people (71.5%) stated that they were Australian-born. This compares with 1355 people (69.8%) in the 1996 Census and 1459 people (72.5%) in the 1991 Census. The number of people born overseas in the 2001 Census was 431 (23.2%) compared with 448 (23.1%) in the 1996 Census and 496 (24.6%) in the 1991 Census. Of those born overseas, the three main countries of birth in the 2001 Census were the United Kingdom with a total of 94 (5.1%), New Zealand with 22 (1.2%) and Vietnam also 22 (1.2%).

Recent collaborations undertaken by the Neighbourhood Planning and Community Partnerships Team have revealed there is a perception that facilities for the aged are inadequate. Interestingly, the median age of people in Dickson, in both the 1996 and 2001 Census was 34 years. The 2001 data also shows that the median age for North Canberra Statistical Division is 32, an increase of one year since the 1996 Census.

The following table shows the different types of dwellings in Dickson:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Separate houses</th>
<th>Semi-detached/town houses</th>
<th>Flats/units or apartments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 on page 7 indicates that over recent years there have been minor changes in housing types in Dickson. However, this will change because of the changing demographics and land-use policies in Dickson. As the population gets older, there will be a change in the requirements of housing types. More of an emphasis will be placed on flats, units or apartments, creating higher density housing. This will allow Dickson to maintain its population whilst undergoing a decline in average persons per dwelling. The sections bounded by Northbourne Avenue, Wakefield Avenue, Majura Avenue, Cowper Street and Morphett Street have been zoned either B13, B12 or B11. Generally speaking, B11 allows for multi-unit development of up to three storeys, B12 allows for multi-unit development up to two storeys. B13 allows development up to nine storeys. These area specific policies form a key component of the ACT Government’s commitment to concentrating housing density along key transport corridors to increase sustainability of the city as a whole. As such, the areas of Dickson that are designated B11, B12 or B13 can expect to experience a change in density and housing form in the future. These residential area specific policies are shown on page 18. The Dickson Section Master Plan for Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (part), 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 provides section specific planning and design guidance supplementary to the controls contained in the Territory Plan for these B11 and B12 urban housing areas. The Section Master Plan has been developed as part of the Neighbourhood Plan and responds to neighbourhood concerns related to urban housing redevelopment. More information regarding these areas is contained in Part 2 - Neighbourhood Precinct 3.

COMMUNITY VIEWS ON CHANGES

The issue of type and form of housing is significant to the Dickson neighbourhood. The neighbourhood has expressed concern regarding the quality of change in recent times – particularly in nearby suburbs. The B areas and the The Garden City Variation (or Variation to the Territory Plan No. 200) land-use policies have been clearly stated as being not negotiable in the Neighbourhood Planning program. There has been mixed reaction to the development of the Variation to the Territory Plan No. 200 Government land-use policy. However, there has been some opportunity throughout the program to review the Garden City Variation ‘Residential Core’ areas so Dickson can take up the opportunities presented by this Variation. (Please refer to Part 2, Neighbourhood Precincts for more information.)

The issue of housing cannot and should not be divorced from the issue of landscape. In all collaborations held, the neighbourhood has clearly stated that Dickson’s tree-lined streets, larger gardens and wide verges are greatly valued. Collaborations and much discussion by the Dickson Interim Community Reference Panel have revealed that new residential developments should complement and enhance the existing landscape amenity, particularly the existing mature tree-scape on both public and private land and redevelopment should be of a very high quality – both in terms of design and sustainability.
The main concerns regarding housing and landscape raised during our collaborations and working with the Dickson Interim Community Reference Panel include:

- reduction of front, rear and side setbacks;
- the articulation of the front building line to prevent ‘walls of development’ (ie long, uninterrupted and unbroken building frontages produced by redevelopments);
- achieving appropriate solar access;
- preservation of significant trees both on verges and on leased land;
- ensure a mix of dwellings (suitable for families, couples and singles, including public housing); and
- ensuring adequate on-site carparking for multi-unit developments.