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West Belconnen Community Plan

Part 2 - Creating a socially sustainable community

Client:
Riverview Projects

Date:
17 June 2014

Draft

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Disclaimer:

The development parameters (dwelling numbers, stages etc.) referred to in this report may vary over time. The figures contained herein are estimates; they represent a good approximation of likely development outcomes to a sufficient level of accuracy for the purposes of this report.

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Date	17 June 2014
Document name	West Belconnen Comprehensive Community Plan Part 2 - social sustainability strategy
Version	7

Contents

1   Introduction

This report forms part of the West Belconnen Community Plan. While the first report documented relevant project background and data, this report focuses on a strategy to achieve social sustainability at West Belconnen. It has been prepared to support and inform the master plan for West Belconnen, the rezoning of the site and subsequent development applications.

"Social sustainability is about people's quality of life, now and in the future. It combines design of the physical environment with a focus on how people live and use a space, relate to each other and function as a community. It is enhanced by development which provides the right infrastructure to support a strong social and cultural life, opportunities for people to get involved, and scope for the place and the community to evolve" (Dickson and Social Life, 2012).

The focus on social sustainability reflects the West Belconnen project vision and objectives and the projects inclusion in the Green Star Communities Pilot. The Land Development Agency (LDA) and Riverview Projects (Riverview) are seeking a six star rating reflecting international best practice. Social sustainability is prominent among the Green Star eligibility criteria and rating credits. The Community Plan provides strategies and actions to ensure that the relevant Green Star criteria are achieved and that social and cultural outcomes are met in a strategic and effective manner. It will be a key tool to ensure that the plans for West Belconnen translate into a real place that is vibrant, liveable and where residents enjoy a high quality of life.

In broad terms, the Community Plan sets out ways to build a strong social fabric in West Belconnen that will continue to develop and evolve. It describes how a strong and socially sustainable community will be created that offers an active and lively neighbourhood life and sense of belonging. It anticipates the likely needs of the future population for community facilities and human services and provides strategies to address those needs. It also identifies the strategies required for 'community creation', including the processes, mechanisms and arrangements required to activate public spaces, provide opportunities for residents to participate in community life and build the social networks and support systems required to sustain them.

Given that West Belconnen is in the planning stages, an emphasis on the design of the physical environment is recognised as a major opportunity. The master planning process is seen as a means to influence physical design of the new community and to promote social goals such as physical activity, healthy living, social interaction and community safety. The development of greenfield sites, even ones that constitute the effective continuation or completion of existing urban development, presents a number of both challenges and opportunities. This Community Plan will investigate how master planning for a large land release can be utilised to promote positive community outcomes and specifically how this will be achieved at West Belconnen.

This Community Plan provides a framework for how the planning for West Belconnen can help to create a supportive physical environment and provide the required community facilities in the most effective and timely way possible. While master planning and urban design are important, and a strong physical foundation for new communities is critical, a land use plan alone is not considered enough to ensure positive community benefits are achieved. While design can provide a physical foundation for addressing social issues, it cannot, in itself, enhance social resources and build a sense of community. Leading practice recognises the need to stimulate and support 'community building' in new areas, by providing resources and programs for community engagement and involvement, human services, and community development workers, in addition to providing facilities and public spaces for social interaction and community activities.

A key objective of this Community Plan is to enhance the liveability of West Belconnen for its future residents and to ensure West Belconnen contributes positively to its wider area. This development recognises that this development will be an extension of the existing Belconnen suburbs. In this context liveability refers to how easy a place is to use, how well it addresses residents' and the local area's needs, how safe it feels, and how well it fosters a sense of place and a feeling of community by creating a physical and social environment that is inviting, inclusive, welcoming and enjoyable. This Community Plan recognises that community wellbeing is fundamentally affected by the attributes of a place and that the early stages of planning for new communities are critically important and will provide the foundation which will influence the extent to which West Belconnen becomes a liveable and sustainable community into the future.

Importantly, this Community Plan considers the needs and interests of the future population of West Belconnen, as well as the residents of existing West Belconnen suburbs. The Community Plan includes a focus on how the new development at West Belconnen can be integrated with, and linked to (both physically and socially), the existing and established Belconnen communities.

This report, forming part 2 of the Community Plan, includes:

» A definition of social sustainability

» An analysis of the main components, or building blocks, of social sustainability and strategies and actions for how they can be applied to West Belconnen

» Commitments for community building and place making initiatives

» Other measures to create a socially sustainable community at West Belconnen.

2   Social sustainability

The World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) in 1987 is generally credited with introducing the concept of sustainable development to international dialogue. This original concept was based on 'three pillars' (the 'triple bottom line' of environment, economics and social) with sustainable development seen as promoting economic growth while maintaining social inclusion and minimising environmental impact. However, since its earliest days, the environmental dimension has dominated not only the sustainability debate but also the development of policy and planning initiatives. While this emphasis is both valid and important, it has meant that we have paid less attention to other aspects of sustainability including the social dimension. Holden (2012:528) observes that "the widespread embrace of sustainability has unseated the prominence of social concerns in development to assert the importance of environmental concerns in their stead."

Increasingly research and practical experience is demonstrating that the physical and social fabric of a community are, in fact, highly interdependent. A challenge is that the planning and development industries have become more competent at delivering the former (the physical) than the latter (the social). Much progress has been made on developing good quality, energy efficient homes and well-designed housing estates. In research undertaken for the Berkeley Group, Professor Tim Dixon and the Social Life organisation[1] identify that the "challenge" now is "to build on this progress and ensure that new housing routinely creates strong communities" (Dixon and Social Life, 2012:9). There is a need to revisit the original concept of sustainability, 're-balance the triple bottom line', and renew our focus on social sustainability as a way to inform how we plan for strong and resilient communities.

> Social sustainability matters because people, places and the economy matter as much as environmental issues. If we are going to create sustainable places in our towns and cities then we really do need to 're-balance' the triple bottom line" (Dixon, 2011:16).

One of the recent and clearer conceptualisations of social sustainability has emerged from work undertaken in the UK through a collaboration of the Young Foundation, Social Life, Professor Tim Dixon[2] and the developer, the Berkeley Group. In a number of joint and individually authored projects, this collective of researchers and funders have created an important new knowledge bank on the contemporary understanding of social sustainability. Social sustainability as defined by this group (Dixon and Social Life, 2012:9) is:

> About people's quality of life, now and in the future. It describes the extent to which a neighbourhood supports individual and collective well-being. Social sustainability combines design of the physical environment with a focus on how people live and use a space, relate to each other and function as a community. It is enhanced by development which provides the right infrastructure to support a strong social and cultural life, opportunities for people to get involved, and scope for the place and the community to evolve.

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[1] Social Life is a social enterprise created by the Young Foundation in the UK to advance understanding of the social dimensions of urban development and assist local authorities and developers to consider how the social life of new places can be supported through practical interventions

[2] The Professorial Chair in Sustainable Futures in the Built Environment at the University of Reading in the UK

Following from this definition, West Belconnen's approach to achieving social sustainability is being guided by the following six key building blocks:

» Layout and design – the master planning and urban design stage of developing new communities which lays the physical foundation for integrating social elements

» Gathering places and amenity – the places and spaces that enable social interaction and provide a physical space for community gathering

» Supporting infrastructure – the transport services and community facilities, services, activities and programs that address local community needs and promote community health and wellbeing

» Social and cultural life – community and cultural events and activities (both formal and informal) that allow people to come together and celebrate their community

» Voice, influence and participation – the processes of engagement, leadership, governance and stewardship that foster involvement and ownership in communities

» Flexibility, adaptability and incrementalism –promoting some degree of 'incompleteness' in the planning of new suburbs that enables communities to evolve, and allows for residents to be involved in the planning and development of their community.

These building blocks, and some of the key elements within them, are represented in the diagram below.

The following sections of this report explores each of these social sustainability building blocks in more detail and identifies how they can be applied in practical ways to West Belconnen.

> A socially sustainable community is a place where people belong, are valued and can participate (From participants at the West Belconnen Planning and Design Forum – community building and placemaking session, November, 2013)

West Belconnen Planning and Design Forum, Community Building and Placemaking Session, November 2013, Photo: Elton Consulting

3 Layout and design

The potential of the urban environment to produce either social benefits or costs is well recognised. It is now standard practice for urban planning and design to consider the impacts of the built environment on a wide range of social issues including physical activity, accessibility, social isolation, feelings of safety, general health and wellbeing and the feeling of belonging that is often termed sense of community. An understanding of the potential social impacts (both positive and negative) of urban design provides an important opportunity when planning new communities like West Belconnen.

Planning for positive and enduring social benefits needs to start early and be considered as a core objective of the initial concept development and master planning of any significant land development project. There are a number of social planning frameworks that can be used to inform the design and planning of new areas like West Belconnen. These include: child friendliness, physical activity, communities for lifetime, universal design and safety by design as well as more specific policies like the ACT Government's recently released framework to combat obesity. Although each has its own focus, they are useful references to guide the urban design and physical planning process.

The urban planning and design elements of these frameworks provide an important physical foundation for social sustainability. Design features such as defined activity centres, local destinations, walking and cycling friendliness, quality streetscapes, spaces for gatherings and exercise, continuous paths of travel, etc. all add to general social health and wellbeing. However, as highlighted in the review of the English New Towns (Stott et al, 2009), design alone is a necessary but not sufficient contributor to the development of a socially sustainable community. There are limits to the social sustainability benefits that the physical environment can achieve and a holistic view of social sustainability and sustainability more broadly, also requires consideration of non-physical components of developing new suburbs.

An important consideration, in encouraging socially sustainable communities at the planning and design stage, is the impact of housing markets and land use policies on different socio-economic groups and the extent to which the planning of a new area may promote social inclusion and cohesion or exacerbate socio-economic divisions. New development like West Belconnen is an opportunity to create communities where people have a range of incomes, backgrounds and demographic characteristics, and where concentration of social disadvantage or isolation of vulnerable groups is minimised. Providing fair and equitable access to the community's resources is a further way of promoting inclusive and harmonious development and creating socially sustainable new suburbs.

A development of the size of West Belconnen is an opportunity to provide a mix of housing types to cater for a diverse and evolving population. Importantly, West Belconnen must also be viewed in the context of its location as part of the wider Belconnen area. Connections to the established Belconnen suburbs must be physical but also need to be social particularly in terms of relationships with community service providers, community groups, businesses and residents.

What does this mean for West Belconnen?

In considering how these different social planning frameworks can influence the planning and design of West Belconnen, a number of common features can be identified. These include:

» West Belconnen will be planned around defined centres that provide a focal point for community activity

» Walking and cycling routes including route continuity, accessible paths of travel, linking to local destinations and focal points, and providing safe and convenient non-automobile travel including use of transmission line easements for increased connectivity

» Quality streetscapes and 'people streets' including traffic calming, pedestrian operated lights, clearly marked crossings and landscaping including street trees, furniture and gathering places

» Open space including providing pleasant places for people to sit, meet and talk, connected to walking and cycling routes in the broader network, recreation opportunities for children, youth and older people, community gardens and other communal spaces including utilising the river corridor for appropriately planned recreation activities

» Public transport including access to bus service within walking distance for most residents, clearly signed, well lit and direct routes for people walking and cycling, clear crossing points, adequate lighting and surveillance for night time use

» The provision of a range of housing types that are more likely to attract a more balanced and diverse community structure including affordable housing and housing suitable for older people, single person households, families, people with disabilities, and a range of socio-economic levels

» Safety and wellbeing including design measures to enhance community safety and reduce crime including encouraging activity to enhance natural surveillance

» West Belconnen to be designed to be accessible to all, inclusive of age, culture, socio-economic status and mobility

» Opportunities for good health and mental stimulation including strategies to encourage physical activity and allowances for places for conversation and contemplation

» Civic, community, cultural, religious and recreational spaces and activities provided to meet the needs of a diverse range of households

» Fostering community spirit at West Belconnen through engaging community members early in the process, incorporate high quality community art programs, design places to accommodate community events and cultural development.

4 Gathering places and amenity

Providing quality public space is seen as one way to help to promote the social interaction and bonds of trust that are thought to be fundamental to a strong community. Social gathering and interaction are critical to the establishment of a sense of community, identity and place. Without social interaction, people living in an area are merely a group of individuals living separate lives, with little sense of community, pride or attachment.

While formal social infrastructure like community centres, libraries and structured community services are essential, many people do not use formal centres and services regularly. Public places that foster meetings, both planned and incidental, provide a physical space for the ties and relationships that form community. The full range of constituent parts that make a vibrant and viable place need to be considered in concert. These include streets, public spaces, shops, businesses, housing, community facilities, transport including pedestrian, cycling, bus and car; with these physical elements viewed through the lens of understanding how diverse groups of people (children, young people, families, older people) will use, interact, access and move between these different functions and places.

Discussion about West Belconnen has included a focus on the importance of streets and street life to the formation of community. Streets and other public spaces are considered to be the stage upon which the act of creating community takes place. Adding to our understanding of the social value of public space, the US urban sociologist, Ray Oldenburg described the importance of 'third places' in creating a sense of community and identity (Oldenburg, 1999). Oldenburg wrote of the "public places on neutral ground where people can gather and interact." Unlike home (the 'first place') and work (the 'second'), 'third places' allow people to put aside their concerns and simply enjoy the company and conversation around them. These are the places of "regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work." A 'third place' is inclusive, local and helps to bring people in neighbourhoods together.

Public spaces and amenity are essential in creating a feeling of place and identity in new areas. A common criticism of traditional estate development is that it lacks a 'heart' and 'character'. New estates need some form of centre or focal point for community activity. Whether that focus is retail, leisure or education, some form of centre is important to establishing identity and providing the type of vibrancy and social activity that is synonymous with genuine community. New suburban centres have to try harder to activate spaces and achieve vibrancy with fewer people. It is important to consider a range of approaches to encourage people to linger longer. While being key places for accessing shops, community facilities and services, ideally centres will also provide some space that encourages people to slow down and spend some time.

One way to think about attracting people to public space and encouraging them to stay longer is the 'power of 10'. The 'power of 10' is an idea promoted by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS). The essence of the 'power of 10' is a simple one that is not intended to be taken too literally but acts more as guideline or goal. Basically it says that for a place to work as an attractor for a range of people, and to be engaging and interesting, there needs to be ten reasons for people to go there or ten activities to undertake while there. The 'power of 10' idea encourages thinking beyond the physical and design elements of a place, to also consider what social initiatives (such as places to sit and talk, outdoor cinema, markets, a playground, kiosk or café, chalk festivals, musical and cultural events, etc.) can act as attractors and contribute to the vitality and vibrancy of public space. While the genesis of many of these 'placemaking' ideas is urban in origin, their application should not be restricted to that setting and should apply equally to new greenfield environments. While some of this power of 10 will come from design (and good people-centred design is critical to successful public spaces), design alone is unlikely to achieve the desired

outcomes. Fred Kent, the Director of the PPS, commenting in 2013, stated that 90% of the success of public space is about its management. While design is important, the management and programming of a space can significantly contribute to good community outcomes.

While business, community, leisure, and recreation attractors will always be critical in attracting people to centres in new areas, the quality of the experience there (the public space, streetscape, pedestrian friendliness, places to sit, people watching opportunities, safety, retail offer, comfort, conviviality, etc.) will influence people's desire to visit and the amount of time that they will spend there. While much of the planning for new centres is retail driven, in new areas (many of which have a focus on affordable family lifestyles) it is important to integrate 'places where you can spend time, but don't have to spend money'. Those places, the 'third places', contribute significantly to the creation of a sense of place within new estates.

Neighbourhood and local centres can function effectively as meeting places for the community and become hubs for both planned and incidental community activity, social interaction and celebrations. Recent trends have seen the return of the 'main street' to retail development and recognition of the importance of human scale, pedestrian activity and the economic and social benefits that can bring. All the constituent parts that make a vibrant and viable centre need to be considered in concert. These include streets, public spaces, shops, businesses, housing, community facilities, transport including pedestrian, cycling, bus and car; with these physical elements viewed with an understanding of how diverse groups of residents will use these spaces and places.

Valuing and enhancing the pedestrian experience is fundamental to quality centres that work for a diverse range of people. Centres are places of commerce but are also important for other forms of exchange, particularly the interactions between people that take place within the public environment of a neighbourhood or local centre. These commercial and people priorities are in no way exclusive but can in fact be highly compatible and mutually reinforcing. Safe, high quality street environments and interesting building facades that provide shelter and an interesting pedestrian experience attract people and business activity. When coupling public spaces that encourage social interaction and an interesting, supportive pedestrian environment that encourages walking, a vibrant and viable environment for both people and business is possible.

Critical to the overall success of a centre or centres in West Belconnen will be the relationship between public and private space. The quality of the public domain, such as parks, squares and plazas, and how they interact with shops, businesses and housing is a relationship that can help to reinforce the social value of a neighbourhood or local centre. As an example, places where parents can sit, relax and perhaps have a coffee in a space that is adjacent to, and overlooks, play space for children invites people to sit and enjoy the space, knowing their children are supervised and safe – all in an environment that their parents can also relax in and enjoy. The image following shows a simple example of this and also highlights that this relationship can work in a relatively low key and inexpensive way and does not necessarily require extensive infrastructure or landscape finishes to make it work. It does, however, require consideration of the relationships and interactions between different types of spaces in the early phase of centre design.

Central Park, Austin, Texas: Photo: Elton Consulting

The main centre in West Belconnen should be viewed as a destination. It should be a stimulating and engaging place that attracts both local residents as well as residents from the wider Belconnen region. Larger centres particularly have the capacity to host a diverse range of activities and events. While much of this will be retail based, it will also be important in West Belconnen that there is a focus on affordable family lifestyles. The Planning and Design Forum session raised the importance of planning for those 'places where you can spend time, but don't have to spend

money'. Those places (forms of the 'third places') contribute significantly to the creation of a sense of place within a new centre. These spaces include plazas, squares, parks, 'village greens' and play areas as well as buildings including community centres and libraries. While there is an inevitable tension between making 'valuable' potentially commercial space within a centre available for community use, a number of recent examples show how this can be done successfully and how the presence of non-retail space can add to the vibrancy and vitality of a centre and act as an attractor for people to the centre. The Rouse Hill Town Centre in western Sydney is an example of a main street model of commercial centre that includes a community centre and library facility in its heart, with direct access to the central town square.

Rouse Hill Town Centre, Photo: Elton Consulting

Ideally the centre in West Belconnen will provide some space that encourages people to slow down and spend some time. In West Belconnen there may not be the volume of pedestrian traffic of more urbanised and densely populated areas closer to, or in, central Canberra. What could, however, make a difference in West Belconnen is the amount and quality of time people spend in the centre, particularly its public spaces, rather than the quantity of people that pass through it. As Jan Gehl (2010:71), has commented 'how many' is an issue but 'how long' is also important:

> Many people moving quickly through a space can result in considerably less life in the city than a handful of people who spend time there.

Capturing many of the points made here, the Project for Public Spaces (PPS)[3] have developed a placemaking framework for 'what makes a good place'. In further development of a model or framework for centres within West Belconnen, the PPS framework may provide some guidance. A diagrammatic representation of the model is shown on the following page. It is based on four key attributes of place:

» Sociability

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[3] Project for Public Spaces, www.pps.org

» Uses and activities

» Comfort and image

» Access and linkages.

What makes a good place, Project for Public Spaces

The diagram shows the four key attributes that contribute to 'place' (sociability, uses and activities, comfort and image, access and linkages), the important but often intangible features that help to create those attributes (including fun, neighbourly, readable, and welcoming) and some of the data that can be used to measure progress (including number of women, children and elderly, local business ownership, and pedestrian activity). This concept of what makes a good place may help to inform thinking about what will make good centres in West Belconnen and although it should not be applied uncritically, it could provide some ideas that could be adapted to suit the specific circumstances of this unique location.

Placemaking

Much of what is discussed here, could broadly be termed placemaking. Placemaking involves the creation of places that have meaning to people, that promote community use and interaction and that foster genuine local identity. Placemaking brings together a range of disciplines including urban design, community and cultural development, economic development and community engagement. It bridges across these disciplines to create a focus on the specific qualities of a place that lead to a sense of identity and an authentic feeling of community.

While we cannot immediately recreate Melbourne's laneways in West Belconnen, we do need to understand what place means in this more suburban setting. It will be important to determine what design elements, initiatives, programs and activities can be introduced to create and reinforce a sense of place in West Belconnen and how it will evolve as a vibrant and liveable community, different from its neighbours, but linked to them and its own equally strong sense of place and community.

What does this mean for West Belconnen?

The implications for West Belconnen, which is likely to include one retail centre and several smaller 'village' centres which focus more on parks and community facilities rather than retail, is set out below:

» Planning streets and streetscapes to encourage social interaction and street life with the streets of West Belconnen seen as an important part of the public domain

» In planning centres for West Belconnen think of how concepts such as 'the power of 10' and 'what makes a good place' can inform planning, design and management

» Ensure centres in West Belconnen are planned to function as community meeting places that encourage planned and incidental community activity, social interaction and community events and celebrations

» Prioritising walkability and the pedestrian experience in planning streets and centres

» Carefully considering the relationship between public and private space and how parks, squares and plazas interact and integrate with shops, businesses and housing

» Recognise that good planning and design provides a critical foundation but for best outcomes consideration must also be given to programming and management.
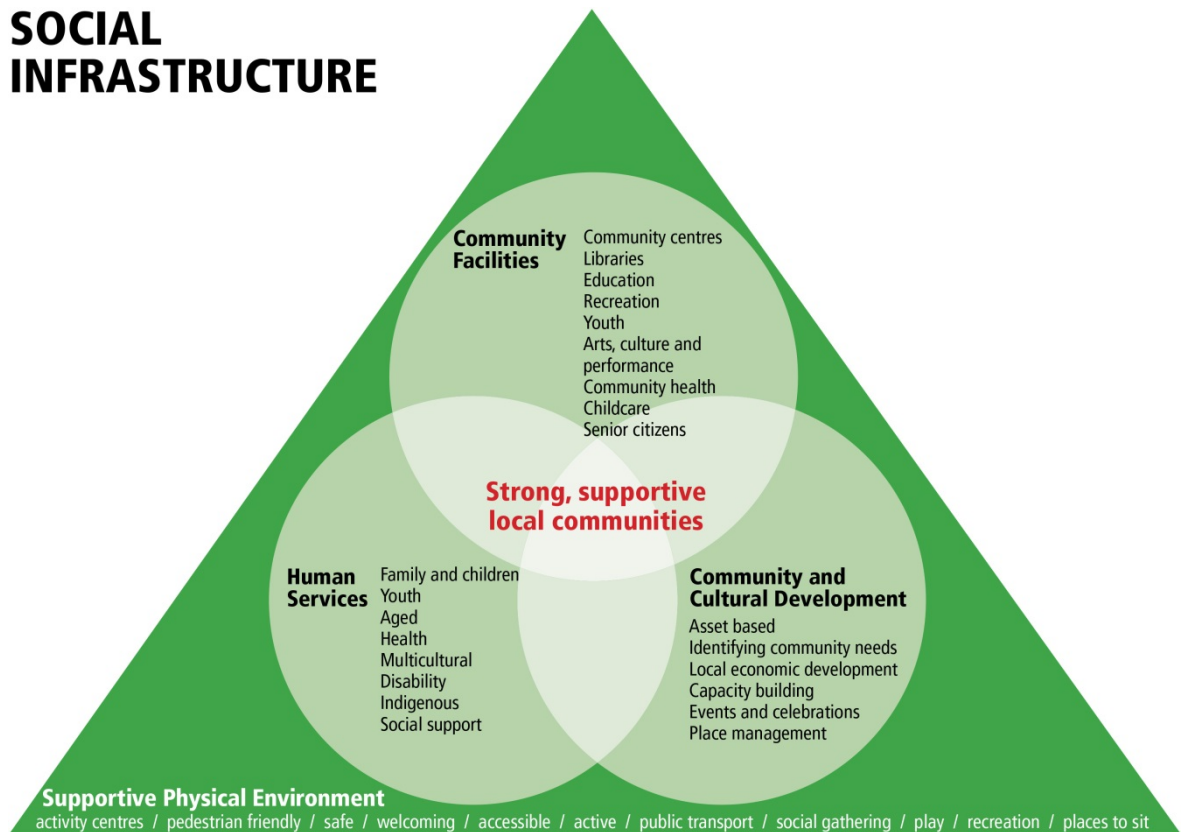
5   Supporting infrastructure

While a project the scale of West Belconnen requires a significant array of infrastructure to supports its development, the emphasis on social sustainability here means we will mainly focus on social infrastructure and other infrastructure that has significant social impacts such as transport.

The following diagram represents a definition of social infrastructure. The key elements of the diagram include:

» A supportive physical environment – following from the discussion about layout and design, this definition of social infrastructure emphasises that for best community outcomes, social infrastructure must be located or delivered within a supportive physical environment. Characteristics of that environment include safe, welcoming, accessible, active, etc.

» The circles in the diagram represent what can be considered to be the three interdependent elements that make up social infrastructure. They are:

> Community facilities – the buildings and spaces that provide the physical space for a range of informal and formal activities, programs and services to occur and that cater for a wide range of community members' needs and interests

> Human services – the programs and services that provide direct services to residents and are funded to operate out of community facilities and other places

> Community and cultural development – the activities and events that bring people in a community together to work together and celebrate their place.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Community Facilities
Community centres
Libraries
Education
Recreation
Youth
Arts, culture and performance
Community health
Childcare
Senior citizens

Strong, supportive local communities

Human Services
Family and children
Youth
Aged
Health
Multicultural
Disability
Indigenous
Social support

Community and Cultural Development
Asset based
Identifying community needs
Local economic development
Capacity building
Events and celebrations
Place management

Supportive Physical Environment
activity centres / pedestrian friendly / safe / welcoming / accessible / active / public transport / social gathering / play / recreation / places to sit

Graphic by Elton Consulting

The contribution of social infrastructure to the creation of places is summed up by the Growth Areas Authority and Department of Planning and Community Development (2008) in their guide for community infrastructure in Victoria's growth areas:

> From an urban planning perspective, neighbourhoods are planned around their community infrastructure nodes and hubs – the community goes to these nodes to work, shop, learn, play and socialise. The way the nodes look and function contributes to the neighbourhood and overall community sense of place, pride and connection. The design and components of community buildings and open space areas help to define the community's character and reflects an area's character and identity. The services and activities that are available in these nodes also contribute to the community's level of health and sense of wellbeing.

Getting this right provides an important physical foundation within which social infrastructure and other facilities and amenities can be integrated and consequently have the potential to provide opportunities for maximum community benefit. The physical planning process should also consider, from the earliest possible time, community facility needs, and the type, size, model and location of community facility space. A robust process of social infrastructure planning is required, part of which includes consideration and application of key location principles that include:

» Main street presence with maximum visibility

» Clustered with other activity generating facilities

» Proximity to open space

» Centrality to catchment

» Accessibility to public transport

» Connection to pedestrian and cycling networks

» Capacity for adaptation.

Early provision

Discussion at the West Belconnen Planning and Design Forum included a conversation about how quickly new residents' habits are formed once they move into a new area. This is a critical consideration in the timely provision of a range of supporting infrastructure. In the context of West Belconnen this is particularly relevant for key issues such as access and connectivity. The early availability of public transport (in this case bus service) to connect people to key areas such as Kippax, Belconnen Town Centre and Civic are important considerations. A lack of public transport at early stages of a development means that residents habits form around driving. Once those habits are formed it is thought that they are hard to modify, even when other transport options do become available.

The Young Foundation's (Woodcraft et al, 2012:26) research on new communities found that:

> A lack of social infrastructure to support new residents when they arrive slows the process of building a community and can create long term problems for the wellbeing and opportunities of new arrivals.

Schools and child care facilities are a critical form of social infrastructure in new communities and can play a significant role in reinforcing the liveability and establishing the identity of new places. The Young Foundation (Woodcraft et al, 2012:28) write:

> As well as attracting families to settle in new places, schools and nurseries create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet other parents and build relationships. Early provision of good quality schools and nurseries will encourage more affluent families to use community services and not seek out school places in neighbouring areas, which can create long term issues with the reputation of local schools. Schools can also provide a hub for community services or community groups, either in the short term while other facilities are being developed; or long term by co-locating with children's centres, community health workers or youth workers in the buildings.

Initial discussions with ACT Department of Education and Training have indicated that there is currently some limited primary school capacity in the area with this expected to change as the population ages and changes. Opportunities for the early provision of school facilities at West Belconnen will be an important consideration of the ongoing planning and negotiation about public infrastructure with the ACT Government.

Early provision also relates to key human services, social support and community development services that are important in influencing new residents' experience and perception of West Belconnen as a viable and liveable community. This Community Plan defines liveability as how easy a place is to use, how well it addresses residents' and the local area's needs, how safe it feels, and how well it fosters a sense of place and a feeling of community by creating a physical and social environment that is inviting, inclusive, welcoming and enjoyable.

Use of environmental areas

While not a traditional form of social infrastructure, West Belconnen provides an opportunity for creative use of environmental areas for compatible amenities and recreational uses. There are opportunities for a range of active recreational uses that can help to further promote the active and healthy living agenda. Possible uses include jogging and hiking trails, mountain biking, possibly a zip line and other 'adventure' type activities which could be accommodated within the river corridor. While environmental sensitivities would need to be carefully addressed, these types of uses could help to create a unique destination at West Belconnen.

What does this mean for West Belconnen?

For West Belconnen this means consideration of the provision of amenities and social infrastructure to stimulate a real sense of community including:

» Early provision of transport and communications services

» Early provision of key social infrastructure such as schools

» Master planning that integrates key social infrastructure and amenities into the urban fabric

» Planning for the provision of 'early attractors' that could include key amenities such as parks and other forms of public gathering places, community facilities and meeting spaces with, at least, some of these provided at West Belconnen during stage one

» Consideration of active recreational uses and similar amenities within the river corridor.

6   Social and cultural life

Good relationships between people and a range of local activities both formal and informal are seen to be key to thriving communities. 'Shared emotional connections' fostered by participation in community and cultural activities that allow people to come together and celebrate their place has been identified as one the key elements of a 'sense of community' according to seminal research by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Community events such as festivals, street parties, community barbecues, food fairs, outdoor cinema, neighbourhood Olympics, chalk art festivals and similar events can help people to get to know each other and celebrate their community. For community development programs in new areas it is important to ensure community members are involved in planning events and activities, rather than just being passive 'recipients' or 'consumers'. Beatley (2004) writes of the importance of engaging community members in community events:

> Community events can help to bring people and neighbourhoods closer together, help develop lasting community relationships, and build commitments to place. We need more community events that rally people together that call upon them to demonstrate (physically) their bonds to one another and to the community as a whole.

Community Workshop Ideas Wall, 11 November, 2013, Photo: Elton Consulting

Consultation for a variety of projects, including community development projects in Canberra, reveals a genuine appetite among residents for traditional notions of neighbourhood, belonging and community. In feedback from participants at the West Belconnen Community Workshop (November 2013), a number of participants made community-themed responses to questions about their vision for West Belconnen. Responses included:

» Encourage a sense of identity and belonging that supports a purpose and meaning that is shared

» Find ways for the community to develop a sense of 'us', 'we belong'

» Community and social spaces

» Sporting, community and social infrastructure that joins young and older people

» Spaces and places for shopping, education, leisure, food production, eating and work

» An accessible community that enables people with disability to participate in all aspects of community life

» The wellbeing of the people – services for young people, parents, working professionals, retirees, and early childhood

» Shared open spaces to gather, work and play

» Social needs – more services.

The Young Foundation (Woodcraft et al, 2012:34) conducted extensive research to understand what makes people feel like they belong and identified the following:

» Informal but strong ties of family and friendship

» Weaker, but still important, ties of association that bind people together in churches, clubs and voluntary bodies where they find connection and common purpose

» Positive messages from the local economy that offer entry level jobs as well as opportunities for advancement

» A political system where key roles are shared by people who people can identify with, share values and encourage feelings of belonging

» Messages from the broader culture and community that reinforce a sense of belonging

» Perceived and actual levels of community safety

» The design and quality of the physical environment including the provision of homes that are suitable for peoples' needs

» The provision of public services including schools, health care, policing, etc.

Urban design and physical infrastructure of West Belconnen will lay an important physical foundation for the development of a community, this Community Plan emphasises that design and hard infrastructure alone will be insufficient to create a real sense of community and identity in this new development setting. As reinforced by the Young Foundation (Woodcraft et al, 2012:27):

> Planning for the hard infrastructure alone would never build a community and that it would only be done by a matrix of formal and informal opportunities or supported activities. There was a strong imperative for designing facilitated activities to meet the needs of future citizens and their households if they were to take part in, and join together with, other households to build a strong and cohesive community or indeed different communities.

As previously noted, the success of public space and its capacity to contribute to a sense of community is as much about programming and activation strategies as it is about design. That programming requires active management which could fall under the role of a Community Development Worker or Place Manager.

6.1 Community Development

There are various ways of building social capital and encouraging this feeling of belonging in new communities. The UK Department for Communities and Local Government (2006:46), in a review of New Towns, recommended "community development workers; a 'community chest' for funding small scale community projects; working with the community and voluntary sector; working with church and faith groups; providing resources in terms of buildings, computers, etc." The review of New Towns by Stott et al (2009:44) also highlighted "the critical role played by community development staff in creating cohesive communities that are vibrant, engaged and empowered".

Community development workers have an important role to play in new communities by working with new residents to assist them to come together, to interact and to share in the social and cultural life of their new community. Community development workers also play an important catalyst role in facilitating the development of the social and cultural life of a new community through organising and encouraging participation in a range of activities, events and programs. Despite, and in some cases because of, the fast paced technology driven society that embodies 21st century Australian lifestyles, there remains a genuine appetite for traditional notions of neighbourhood, belonging and community. A range of social research suggests that people value feeling that they belong, living in communities they perceive as safe and friendly, and (without necessarily being in 'each others' pockets') knowing their neighbours and other community members. Good relationships between people and a range of local activities both formal and informal are seen to be key to thriving communities.

What is important is that the resources and support to encourage community building are available in new communities. There is a fine line between facilitating community development activities to make it easier for resident participation, and taking too much responsibility for organising and facilitating activities. Opportunities for community building and the creation of social capital do not always happen automatically in new communities and do need to be stimulated. The danger is that too much stimulation can lead to a feeling that 'community' is being manipulated or contrived. There is a balance to be struck between leaving residents without resources to undertake community building activities and controlling those activities to the extent that residents become passive observers and community building is undermined.

Community development plan

Place-making strategies can help create active public spaces that provide a sense of vitality, identity and civic pride associated with notions of community well-being. But beyond the 'buzz' and lifestyle factors of enjoying active and vibrant places that amuse and entertain, they do not necessarily build the social relationships, networks, support mechanisms or social capital required to create a strong, resilient and truly sustainable community. This will be the focus of a community development strategy for West Belconnen. Elements of community development and place-making will overlap and complement each other.

A well resourced community development plan will develop activities, programs, services and voluntary organisations to support community building and ensure that the community facilities are focal points for the whole community. The aims of a community development plan for West Belconnen include:

» Encourage new residents to feel a part of the community and become involved in community life

» Provide opportunities for social interaction and the development of social networks within the community

» Support the establishment and growth of community initiatives, interest groups and community organisations in the community

» Provide opportunities for people to become involved and participate in community building events

» Promote identity and sense of place through community and cultural development activities and strategies

» Provide a range of activities and programs that meet the social, leisure, learning and recreational needs of residents

» Develop strategies which assist the new community to integrate with the surrounding existing wider Belconnen communities

» Ensure there is equal opportunity for all groups within the community to become involved, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, younger people and older people

» Develop processes and structures for residents to participate in the on-going planning and development of West Belconnen

» Develop programs to inform and educate residents and to promote sustainable practices

» Complement existing services and contribute to an effective network of community resources

» Build capacity among residents and resident groups to ensure that community engagement initiatives are sustainable

» Develop an evaluation strategy to monitor community and stakeholder involvement

» Develop an 'exit strategy' to ensure that community development initiatives are sustainable and activities, groups, programs and events can sustain themselves in the long term

» Help to position West Belconnen as leading practice in community engagement and development.

To ensure that community development processes respond to the needs and interests of residents and those in surrounding areas, and engender a sense of ownership and commitment amongst them, it is proposed that the design and implementation of the strategy will involve residents themselves. A more detailed community development plan will be developed in subsequent stages of planning, with an initial focus on the first stage of the West Belconnen development.

Components of the community development plan are likely to include the following:

Community Development Worker

A key element of this strategy is the employment of a Community Development Worker who will resource and support community development and engagement activities at West Belconnen. There are a number of options for the employment of the worker including directly by Riverview Projects or the LDA or on a consultancy basis.

The Community Development Worker would be responsible for the following:

» Work with local residents to promote their integration into the West Belconnen community and the wider community of Belconnen

» Identify emerging needs and work with residents to address those needs

» Monitor the profile and characteristics of the incoming population, and seek to ensure programs and services are responsive to emerging community needs and interests

» Monitor and report to Riverview Projects (Riverview) and LDA on the movement of households into West Belconnen

» Implement programs to welcome new residents, provide them with information and put them in touch with others

» Be responsible for the on ground delivery of a Welcome Program to new residents and households

» Establish programs and activities to foster social interaction and networks among residents. The nature of these will respond to the expressed interests of residents

» Support the establishment of new community groups and provide support to existing groups

» Link residents with services and facilities in the wider Belconnen area

» Support and assist the administration of processes for residents to participate in decision-making about the on-going planning and development of West Belconnen

» Support initiatives of residents that will contribute to the identity and social capital of the community

» Work with residents and Riverview /LDA to organise community building events

» Assist with appropriate marketing strategies and the development of new resources to promote West Belconnen programs and activities

» Incorporate sustainability education into the community development program

» Assist with the production and distribution of regular newsletters to residents highlighting information such as calendar of events, introductions/profiles of new residents, community contacts, development updates, articles of interest, details of local interest/community groups, and local business directories

» Assist with the production and distribution of flyers and other promotional material to advertise local community activities and events

» Work with local community organisations and ACT Government agencies to ensure the needs of West Belconnen residents are addressed and linkages established with programs and services in adjoining areas

» Act as a broker to engage other delivery partners to participate in specific events or activities

» Assist with submission, tender and grant application preparation on behalf of the residents of West Belconnen

» Identify long term funding sources for community development activities at West Belconnen. Be proactive and forward thinking in the development of an appropriate and sustainable exit strategy to ensure the sustainability of community development activities beyond the initial funding period

» Provide regular reports to Riverview /LDA

» Attend project meetings as required.

Community development program

Taking the LDA's existing Mingle community development program as a guide, a community development program at West Belconnen will consist of the following key elements:

» Community events including outdoor cinema, Christmas Carols, fun fairs and food festivals

» Community development events and activities including smaller scale events (such as neighbourhood barbecues), seminars/classes (which could include sustainable living, growing

your own food, interior design), groups (including recreational walking groups, running groups, book club and neighbourhood watch) and other activities especially utilising the river corridor

» Welcome Program including welcome kit, welcome nights (to encourage sense of belonging and introduce residents to local resources) as well as a range of information on living in West Belconnen including information on opportunities for stewardship of the river corridor

» Information/communications including a web page, email list, Facebook and a range of newsletters and noticeboard to not only promote community activities but to facilitate information exchange on a range of issues such as trade recommendations, car pooling and tool sharing

» Community engagement/participation including ongoing engagement on the evolving plans for West Belconnen as well as establishing resident groups and similar forums for community involvement

» Promotion and involvement in existing programs and activities at existing facilities such as Strathnairn

» Activities, programs and events to activate and utilise key places in West Belconnen such as Strathnairn and the Belconnen Farm Heritage Precinct

» Community education and environment programs particularly to help residents understand their roles and responsibilities and the opportunities provided by living in proximity to the river corridor and also in relation to the site's cultural heritage

» Establishment of a range of community groups such as Bush on the Boundary to engage residents in conservation and corridor management activities

» Other initiatives including community initiatives fund (to seed fund community activities), tool library and other cooperative ventures.

A key focus of the community development program will be sustainability education. This could include:

» Development of homeowners' sustainability handbook for inclusion with welcome kit. This will promote understanding and use of sustainability features of housing and site as well as providing information on unique natural features of the site including the river corridor

» Planting, weeding, landcare and landscape restoration projects as opportunities for residents to become involved in community projects

» On-site nursery for production and storage of plants that has educational, training and community participation elements

» Environmental education opportunities associated with the river corridor and woodland areas

» Community garden program as a community enterprise for local food production and opportunity for social interaction and cultural expression.

Partnerships with local organisations

One of the key issues in the planning of West Belconnen is the integration of the new with the existing, established communities. Physical planning, including roadways, pedestrian and cycle links, as well as the type and location of social infrastructure, will be critical in ensuring strong links between the new community of West Belconnen and the existing surrounding suburbs. However, equally important are the social and cultural connections between new and existing communities.

Community building initiatives should encourage integration by focussing on both the existing and the new community. Strategic partnerships with key local organisations, such as Uniting Care Kippax, will be critical to community development initiatives that link the new West Belconnen with the existing. Organisations such as Uniting Care and Belconnen Community Services are uniquely placed to extend community services and activities that currently exist into the new community and facilitate access to services and activities for new residents. Strathnairn is another important existing facility and community resource that could become an important community asset for West Belconnen residents.

Community engagement

A community and stakeholder engagement strategy is currently being implemented by Riverview Projects and the LDA. This strategy will evolve to cover not only the planning stages of the development but also the subsequent staged construction of West Belconnen. This will ensure the incoming residents, people living in the surrounding district and wider Belconnen area and other stakeholders are provided with:

» Clear and accurate information on the ongoing planning and development of West Belconnen

» Mechanisms for providing meaningful input to the planning and development of West Belconnen.

It is envisaged that the engagement program will be integrated into the broader community development program of community activities and events. Key aspects of the program will include:

» Information updates via regular newsletters, media articles and social media

» Community and stakeholder consultation around planning milestones and the rolling program of DAs as required

» Ongoing community liaison and communication, including mechanism for community members to raise any specific development related issues

» Outcomes reported via a series of consultation reports and triple bottom line reporting.

Key community development lessons

Community development experience in new suburban development projects in Australia provides a number of lessons that are important to consider:

» Involve people early - Involving residents as early as possible in the community development process has been shown to be important to sustained community building in new suburbs. This includes working with people even before they have moved into the new development if possible

» Encourage residents to play an active role - For real community development to occur, residents of new suburbs will need to be more than just passive 'recipients' or 'consumers' of events and activities. Residents need to play an active role in planning, organising and delivering community activities and events. Community development needs to be done 'with' and 'by' residents rather than 'to' them

» Cultivate local champions - While the role of community development workers and other professionals is important to successful community development programs, real and sustainable change requires the participation of local people who are prepared and able to step up and play some form of leadership role in their local communities. An important role for community development programs is to assist with identifying these potential local 'champions' and providing them with the necessary support and resources they require

» Provide a range of opportunities for people to participate - Although there may be a genuine willingness by a number of (not all) residents to participate in neighbourhood activities, the realities of contemporary lifestyles mean that many people have little spare time beyond their work and home lives. Community development programs need to respond to this reality and ensure that there are a variety of events, activities and programs that offer a range of ways for people to be involved should they choose to. Events and activities of varying scales, types and focus should also be planned

» Maintain momentum and capitalise on enthusiasm - We have found a widespread and genuine appetite among residents (new and prospective) for community development activities and a real interest for living in a place with a strong sense of community. The initial engagement process to support the production of a community development strategy can generate a substantial amount of enthusiasm for community activities. There is no greater asset in community development programs than the energy and interest of local residents. However, that enthusiasm can quickly wane if not responded to

» Work with a strong delivery partner within a clearly defined project management regime - A well-managed community based organisation with local contacts and networks is, in our view, best placed to provide that service in a way that will also be sustainable into the future

» Use new technologies to foster communication and engagement - Information is critical to the shared experiences, collective understandings and networks that make up a community. Communication technologies can add significant value to a community development program. While social media, and other related forms of communication, should not be seen as a replacement for actual community engagement and involvement, it would be a missed opportunity not to see social media as an important additional tool for community building

» Link with key themes and priorities - A comprehensive community development program provides a number of important opportunities to raise awareness of key issues and priorities. Events like neighbourhood festivals or fairs can be 'themed' to an extent to incorporate awareness raising and public education initiatives on issues such as environmental awareness and conservation, sustainability, climate change, cultural diversity and social inclusion, innovation and technology and health and wellbeing

» Create a physical base for community development activities - The expeditious delivery of a community facility, even if it is an interim one, is important to the success of a community development program and this should be a key consideration for new suburban development. Early planning for community use of other facilities is another option. Possibilities could include shared use of other facilities such as schools as well as initiatives such as the use of a house for community activities.

What does this mean for West Belconnen?

For West Belconnen, stimulation of a vibrant social and cultural life as a key element of 'place', could include:

» Neighbourhood based design that engenders a feeling of ownership and identification and promotes opportunities for casual but regular interaction with others within that area

» Flexible open spaces that evolve over time to suit changing population needs and preferences

» Development of a detailed Community Development Plan (with existing and prospective resident input) and engagement of a Community Development Worker

» Development of partnership arrangements with key local organisations such as Uniting Care Kippax and Strathnairn Homestead Gallery

» Planning for community building activities, from community gardens and outdoor cinema to satellite events from Canberra festivals and events. Commencement of these activities early on including during early construction. Involve residents of the surrounding West Belconnen suburbs.

» Public art and landscaping treatments that create a distinctive sense of identity for West Belconnen

» Build upon the heritage of West Belconnen through community gardens and urban farming

» Community tree planting days and other opportunities for environmental stewardship such as the establishment of a 'Bush on the Boundary' group

» Schooling and recreational programs for children are likely to be a strong point of focus for community life particularly in the early stages of the project

» Farmers markets and food festivals that provide opportunities for local economic and community development

» Design of West Belconnen's neighbourhood and local centres should explore design solutions that are integrated with both urban and natural open spaces to provide a unique point of differentiation and key community focal points. This could contribute

7   Voice, influence and participation

Early engagement helps to foster a culture in which people expect to be involved in shaping their neighbourhood so that sharing their views and aspirations becomes a way of life. While this is difficult to achieve, it is essential for getting a new community off to a good start. It can help bring new and existing residents together and a proactive approach to engagement can help to provide accurate information about the developing community. Engaging with existing and prospective residents also establishes a 'culture' of participation that has lasting community benefits. Woodcraft et al (2012:39) found that:

> A growing body of research supports the assertion that community and neighbourhood empowerment – giving residents the opportunity to take part in collective activities that influence the areas they live in – contribute to the wellbeing of residents and communities.

To date, the West Belconnen project has undertaken an extensive engagement process with both formal and informal engagement methods. A formal engagement strategy has been developed that guided engagement during the master plan stage and will continue through the following stages. There is a strong culture of engagement associated with the project which fits well with a social sustainability approach.

Community Workshop, 11 November, 2013, Photo: Elton Consulting

The experiences of the early 'pioneers' of West Belconnen will have a significant influence on the long term reputation of the new community. A poor reputation can last many years and can be difficult to address. That is one of the reasons why Riverview Projects in particular has made a significant effort to engage with future residents before they have arrived as well as with existing residents in wider Belconnen. This approach will continue with those West Belconnen residents who are first to arrive and will be the 'pioneers' of this area. These first settlers will be dealing

with a site in various stages of construction over many years, so good information and communication about these activities and positive ways to engage these new residents will be critical.

In the earliest stages, simply providing information in the form of a 'welcome pack' to new residents about their homes, local transport and other resources available in the neighbourhood serves both a practical purpose for newcomers and can be a useful way of making the initial contact. Utilising a Community Development Worker to conduct welcome visits, information packs and welcome events can help to provide information to new residents and engage them in their new community. Early provision of key amenities such as parks and shops is also critical in enhancing the experience of the first settlers.

As will be highlighted in the following section, there is some value in leaving some aspects of a new community 'incomplete' in order to provide opportunities for new local residents to participate. While the broader master planning may need to be 'locked in' there are a range of opportunities for new resident participation in a developing suburb. These include design of local parks and playgrounds, design, use and function of community centres and other social infrastructure and the design of neighbourhood and district centres. As pointed out by Woodcraft et al (2012:43):

> Many of the aspects of social life that make communities flourish cannot be planned in advance – community projects, governance arrangements and other local institutions need to evolve, building on local relationships, recognition of common interests, a sense of mutuality and trust between residents and other stakeholders that again needs time to develop.

Early engagement helps to foster a culture in which people expect to be involved in shaping their neighbourhood so that sharing their views and aspirations becomes a way of life. While this is difficult to achieve, it is essential for getting a new community off to a good start. It can help bring new and existing residents together and a proactive approach to engagement can help to provide accurate information about the developing community. Engaging with existing and prospective residents also establishes a 'culture' of participation that has lasting community benefits. The Young Foundation (Woodcraft et al, 2012:39) found that:

> A growing body of research supports the assertion that community and neighbourhood empowerment – giving residents the opportunity to take part in collective activities that influence the areas they live in – contribute to the wellbeing of residents and communities.

For West Belconnen it will also be important to engage with people from the surrounding Belconnen communities. People living in areas where growth is planned are likely to have very different concerns and aspirations from those moving into the new part of the community. Working with existing communities and service providers is an important engagement requirement. It can help to provide a greater understanding of the existing communities, cultures and environment and how that could be represented in West Belconnen through initiatives such as a co-operative ventures, farmers market, new business opportunities and community and cultural events.

One possible avenue for engagement in West Belconnen that could involve both existing and prospective residents is to facilitate an engagement process, along with the ACT Place Names Committee and the Names Board of NSW, for the naming of suburbs and streets within West Belconnen. Consultation would need to be undertaken initially with the Place Names Officer as there is an established process for place naming in Canberra. Most of Canberra's suburbs are named after famous Australians who have contributed to the existence of Australia as a nation. Each suburb has a theme by which its streets are named. The theme may include people, places, flora, fauna or things relevant and important to the history of Australia. The criteria for selecting names include:

- The names of persons famous in Australian exploration, navigation, pioneering, colonisation, administration, politics, education, science or letters

- The names of persons who have made notable contributions to the existence of Australia as a nation

- The names of Australian flora

- The names of things characteristic of Australia or Australians

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander vocabulary.

The West Belconnen project team proposes to work with the Place Names committees of both the ACT and NSW to identify opportunities for community engagement in the process including eliciting suggestions from community members that address the above criteria. Community involvement in place naming is an important opportunity for greater community engagement with, and ownership of, West Belconnen and may also help to strengthen links with existing surrounding community members.

Co-operative models

One of those lessons from the existing, surrounding communities is the application of co-operative models of management to address local community needs. Kelly, in research on 'social cities' for the Grattan Institute (2012:27), writes:

> Another way to encourage a local sense of identity is to create opportunities for people to make decisions about their neighbourhood. Helping to shape the future of the local area creates a sense of stewardship and promotes connection with other residents.

While the ongoing engagement process for West Belconnen is critical to achieving this stewardship and connection, another way that this is being addressed in West Belconnen is through exploring the potential for a range of co-operative ventures. Co-operatives are jointly owned and democratically controlled associations of people who are united voluntarily to meet common economic, social and cultural needs. Members often have a unifying interest and form a co-operative to tackle problems or derive benefits that are difficult to achieve alone.

Members of co-operatives usually fund the enterprise through a share or membership fee and benefit from the services provided. Accordingly a co-operative is a self help organisation that integrates social and economic objectives by generating mutual benefits. Democratic control means that members can control the affairs of the co-operative with one vote allocated per members regardless of their investment or use of services.

Co-ops may be for profit or not for profit but all aim to operative profitably. Co-ops can operate in sectors as diverse as transport, agriculture, energy, water, retail, housing, community services, child care and health.

Co-ops could be fostered initially in the existing suburbs of West Belconnen and then extend and expand to incorporate the new suburbs and residents. Discussion on this issue and potential social enterprises that will benefit both the existing and new suburbs of West Belconnen are already underway between Riverview and Kippax UnitingCare.

West Belconnen Health Co-op (Derby, 2012:125)

In 2004, Brian Frith, the chemist in Charnwood, on Canberra's northern fringe, compared notes with the organiser of the Neighbourhood Watch group, Roger Nicoll, and with Michael Pilbrow, the chair of the local primary school's Parents and Citizens Committee. All three were concerned that in an area with a high proportion of public housing, there was not one practising GP.

Following a series of public meetings and a survey of 8,000 households in the local area, a cooperative model was identified as an appropriate model for providing primary health care in the area. Over the ensuing years the cooperative concept was further developed with the help of a feasibility study and business plan partly funded through an ACT Government grant. Advice and support was also received from Australia's first medical cooperative, Melbourne's Westgate Health Co-op.

With additional funding support from corporate sponsors and both Territory and Federal Government, the West Belconnen Health Co-operative opened in January 2010. From that beginning with a single doctor, two years later the co-op employed ten doctors and had 12,000 local people as registered members.

The health co-op is 'owned' by its members. Members pay an annual membership fee which then entitles them to bulk billed GP services, as well as bulk billed allied health services such as dietician and psychology consultations. No profits are paid to anyone. After expenses are paid any remaining funds are used to provide services. For example, dietician and psychology services not accessible through Medicare are provided at significantly discounted rates compared to private providers.

The co-op is run by a Board elected annually by members. The volunteer board provides strategic direction to its CEO who is responsible for day to day operations. Anyone can become a member of the co-op. Fees are $70 for a family and $35 for an individual (rates are halved for those with a Health Care Card). Membership enables unlimited free medical consultations.

In 2013, membership has reached over 16,000 and employs 13 doctors, a nurse practitioner, 7 nurses and 13 administration and support staff. The co-op now includes 6 medical centres at Charnwood, Belconnen, Page, Holt, Evatt and Chisholm.

What does this mean for West Belconnen?

Establishing or facilitating structures for new community members in West Belconnen to be able to participate in decisions about their developing community is recognised as important. This could take the form of:

» Participatory design processes for key infrastructure such as the main centre, parks and community facilities as a key part of the continuing engagement process for West Belconnen

» Ongoing involvement of both prospective West Belconnen residents and existing residents from Belconnen and other surrounding areas in engagement and communication activities

» Formation of working committees to plan for and conduct local community events and programs

» A Community Development Worker appointed to establish community/residents associations

» Development of a community website/portal or Facebook page for neighbourhood forums and information sharing

» Investigation of opportunities for community involvement in the suburb and street naming process for West Belconnen

» Investigating the feasibility of a range of social enterprises and cooperative opportunities from ride sharing to tool libraries as well as cooperative models for housing and services such as the West Belconnen Health Co-operative model.

8   Flexibility, adaptability and incrementalism

Reflecting a key purpose of this Community Plan, it is recognised that new communities need to be well planned to ensure that people-friendly spaces are included, essential social infrastructure is well integrated, and basic amenities are provided to support residents. However, consideration should also be given to ensure that the planning for new communities is not so fixed and rigid that it inhibits flexibility and impedes the capacity of a community to evolve and change. According to the Young Foundation (Woodcraft et al, 2012:43) new communities need the 'space to grow':

> To develop a distinctive character, to shape the place so that it better meets local needs, and have the scope to change as populations age and shift and new patterns of work and social life emerge.

As an example of this, new communities are often planned in response to the needs of young families and first and second homebuyer households who are often strongly represented in the 'early pioneers' of new development areas. However, as new suburbs evolve, their initial populations age and they attract more mature households, planning to cater for a more diverse age profile is an important consideration. As pointed out by the Grattan Institute, as new suburbs mature and stabilise they will need to become more flexible. Although they may serve initial residents well, new suburbs "must adapt over time to the shifting needs and preferences of changing populations" (Kelly and Breadon, 2012:2).

A greater variety of dwelling types is essential to the overall sustainability of new areas like West Belconnen. Traditional suburban development has been dominated by detached dwellings of a similar size. While limiting housing opportunities for new residents, these suburbs also make it hard for existing residents to move within their area, to downsize for example as their lifestyles evolve and their housing needs change. As Kelly and Breadon (2012:6) observe "new suburbs are designed to meet the needs and preferences of their first generation of residents. But an inability to adapt will become a problem in the future as those communities mature and change".

Suggestions for improvements are greater land use mix within new suburbs including incorporation of greater dwelling variety and more flexible zoning including mixed use zones that allow for different activities. Flexibility is the key and what Woodcraft et al (2012:43) describe as "a degree of ambiguity, uncertainty and openness to change". As Kelly and Breadon (2012:52) conclude:

> We cannot predict exactly how communities will change in the future but we can say with a high level of confidence that they will change. If today's suburbs are to be tomorrow's suburbs too, then they must be flexible enough to change with the people who live in them.

The need for flexibility is also important in the planning of social infrastructure. Community facilities that are planned to cater for a single purpose or use with limited capacity for adaptation are likely to become quickly redundant. Design for flexibility and multiple use is a key guiding principle for future planning of social infrastructure. Another aspect of this flexibility in design, and built in capacity for adaptation and evolution, is the 'meanwhile' or temporary use of otherwise underutilised spaces for community purposes. Residents in new communities can find themselves surrounded by various construction sites for many years. In this context, Woodcraft et al (2012:45) suggest that "intermediate or 'meanwhile use' of land and buildings can provide much needed temporary space for community activities and interaction".

In various parts of Australia, there has been a history of innovation with social infrastructure planning including the 'meanwhile space' use with the 'schools in shops' and 'schools and houses'. This is an example of using underutilised commercial or residential use for the provision of community services and facilities. A number of projects also exist focusing on the temporary provision of shopfronts and other commercial spaces for use by artists and other small and developing businesses. Renew Newcastle[4] and Creative Spaces[5] are local examples.

There may be opportunities in the centres of new suburbs for the use of 'meanwhile space' to provide needed social infrastructure and human service delivery points prior to the conventional demand thresholds being reached for some retail uses. As an example, underutilised shopfronts and other commercial type space (including Sales and Information Centres) can be utilised in an intermediate fashion as community facility space, pop up shops for retail, art or community uses and incubator space for small and home based businesses. Other examples include empty parcels of land utilised for community garden space and underutilised houses used for social enterprise or education space. As Woodcraft et al (2012:43) conclude:

> If a new community is to be successful and sustainable, the place – the physical space, the housing stock and amenities, the social infrastructure – needs to be able to adapt over time to new needs and new possibilities. As Saskia Sassen points out 'in that incompleteness ... lies the possibility of making.

It is recommended that planning for the first stage of the development of West Belconnen include some form of meeting and community activity space, even if in temporary form or as an adjunct to Strathnairn, to provide a focal point for the new community. At developments like Forde the Sales and Information Centre has doubled as a community centre and space for community meetings. Through the Community Development Worker, temporary or 'pop up' uses can also be introduced at the West Belconnen 'community space' on the first Saturday of every month.

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[4] http://renewnewcastle.org/
[5] http://www.creativespaces.net.au/

What does this mean for West Belconnen?

For West Belconnen, the implications of providing 'space to grow' include:

» Provision of temporary space for community facility use and human service provision prior to the establishment of the first formal/permanent community centre

» Allowing open spaces that will not be constructed out for some time to serve temporary recreational purposes. (With the caveat that users understand that such spaces are reserved for future alternative uses)

» A picnic ground or park with BBQs and a children's bike path or adventure playground

» A functioning sales nursery that is also a legacy nursery for street and park trees

» Utilising the Community Development Worker to program activities to promote social interaction and place activation including regular coffee van visits prior to the threshold for a retail café being reached.

» Promote Strathnairn activities and negotiate with Strathnairn about the use of its site and facilities

All these would help to impart to prospective purchasers a sense of what the community of West Belconnen will be and that the foundations of community already exist. Beyond the establishment phase, some longer term initiatives that will help contribute to the creation of a sense of place and ownership at West Belconnen include:

» Direct integration of centre or centres with the open space network

» Creation of a bike network throughout the open space system that could become a regional destination linking with the existing Canberra network. The West Belconnen bike way could incorporate points of interest and a variety of attractors such as simple but unique adventure playgrounds, mountain bike segments, a children's bike way etc.

» Creation of an equestrian network throughout the open space system that could become a regional destination and capitalise on the Bicentennial National Trail crossing the site. The West Belconnen equestrian network could incorporate points of interest and a variety of attractors such as overnight accommodation for riders and horses.

» Incorporate fruit trees, bush tucker plantings and community gardens throughout the open space network

» A community development program that will:

– Develop a program for people to plant a tree in open space to mark the purchase of their house or birth of children to foster links and identification with West Belconnen now and into the future

– Create plaques in footpaths to recognise the first 100 'pioneer' families to move into West Belconnen

» Provision in centres for informal markets (food, craft, small wares etc) that provide an opportunity for small business. There is also potential to link this in with different cultural groups from the area or as an interim use for any unleased retail.

9 Green Star Communities – Community Development

This social sustainability strategy component of the Community Plan helps to identify a pathway to address many of the requirements for the Green Star Communities Community Development credit. The community development criteria include:

» Development of a Community Development Plan – This document addresses many of the requirements of a Community Development Plan including:

> Aims of the plan

> Roles of the Community Development Worker

> Contents of the community development program

> Approach to community engagement

> Lessons from other community development programs to inform the West Belconnen program

» Community Development Officer – This document identifies the roles of a Community Development Officer at West Belconnen as the key person responsible for implementation of the Community Development Plan. The criteria state that the Community Development Officer must be employed for at least one day a week starting from (at the latest) when 50% of buildings are occupied. This Community Plan also flags a number of possibilities for how the worker could be engaged

» Community Group – Described in the criteria as a community group that is made up of stakeholders that are relevant to the local community and the initiatives within the plan. Through the engagement strategy, a 'people and place group' has been established to support the West Belconnen project. This group will address this criterion. The People and Place Group will also evolve overtime as new residents move into West Belconnen.

» Community Events – The criteria require a program of community events to be established and implemented that provides at least one free community event every two months. This Community Plan identifies the main elements of a community development program for West Belconnen. Precise scheduling will be undertaken at a later stage to coincide with development staging

» Community Information – this criterion relates to the distribution of information to the community. For the West Belconnen project the provision of information has already commenced. The project web site (already established) and regular newsletters (already commenced distribution) address many of the requirements for this criterion and will continue to evolve as the project progresses. For new residents community information will also be available via a community information pack detailed elsewhere in this report.

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