



The ACT Equestrian Association Incorporated

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Draft Variation No 351 (Notifiable Instrument NI2015-220) West Belconnen Urban Development

This Association (ACTEA) represents twenty affiliated equestrian clubs and associations with interests in equestrian and horse keeping facilities in the ACT. West Belconnen is the location for a major expression of those interests and Draft Variation 351 for re-zoning will expose individuals using those current facilities to major changes over the next few years. Our affiliates with particular interests in the area are the Belconnen Pony Club and the Government Paddocks User Group.

This comment reflects the views of this Association, the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) Board and Section Coordinator, and the Belconnen Pony Club. Much of this comment is based on the underlying commitment to the continuation of a recreational equestrian community in the ACT expressed in the memorandum of Understanding Between the ACT Government and The ACT Equestrian Association Inc signed in May 2014.

Equestrian interests in West Belconnen involve the unleased land used for Government Horse Holding Paddocks, known as the Parkwood paddocks, the Belconnen Pony Club grounds (Block 1333 Section 0, a concessional lease) and the BNT route. The BNT is a multi-use walking, cycling and equestrian route running from Cooktown in Queensland, circumnavigating the ACT from Mulligans Flat Rd via Hall, West Belconnen, Equestrian Park in Yarralumla and Namadgi National Park to Healesville in Victoria. ACTEA is the third party to a Memorandum of Understanding Between Territory and Municipal Services Directorate and the Bicentennial National Trail Ltd.

In West Belconnen the BNT currently runs from the Dunlop Grasslands, crossing Ginninderra Creek to the parking area and yards of the Parkwood paddocks, then passing the Belconnen Pony Club. From there it crosses Parkwood Rd and follows a rural fenced lane around the Transgrid Station past the western boundary of the West Belconnen Golf Club and then turns west towards Strathnairn exiting onto Stockdill Drive to its southwards route.

In developing this Draft Variation the proponents Riverview has kept representatives of ACTEA, the Belconnen Pony Club and the BNT informed of its plans. However we wish to make some comments on the Draft Variation and request further consideration and discussion as development occurs, of ways in which equestrian facilities can be retained or re-developed for the area.

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Re-Zoning Effects on the BNT

In the future the BNT route between Dunlop Grasslands and Parkwood Road is expected to cross under the proposed Ginninderra Drive extension on a more easterly route than the current route to Parkwood Road. This would appear to be an acceptable option.

From Parkwood Road to Stockdill Drive the effect of urban development is of immediate concern. Both O'Keefe Developments and Riverview Group are proposing housing construction which will have the effect of cutting the BNT route across approximately the last 200 metres of its route onto Woodhaven Drive at Strathnairn and thence onto Stockdill Drive. This construction, expected to begin late 2016, encompasses the area of Belconnen blocks 1606 and 1607. Riverview has proposed a BNT alternate route a considerable distance to the west of construction. This would lengthen the route for long distance BNT travellers and local agistees and over the years of construction may be subject to disruption and change before eventual stability. There are many local horse riders, including pony clubbers from south Belconnen who ride north to the Parkwood paddocks and Dunlop Grasslands using the current BNT route from Stockdill Drive and Woodhaven Drive. We wish to avoid the uncertainty of the proposed, but currently non-existent route further to the west, and keep continuity of the current direct route between Stockdill Drive and Parkwood Road. This is essential for BNT users and also for local riders, particularly if the Belconnen Pony Club is moved further north.

We urge use of unleased land in the area between the O'Keefe (Golf Club) development and Riverview development on Blocks 1606 and 1607 to provide a trail route direct onto Stockdill Drive. It is recognised that suburban streets may connect the O'Keefe and Riverview housing developments in this area but a permanent route offers considerable security of access without interference from continual change as urban construction continues in the western areas. Direct access to Stockdill Drive and adequate road signage of the horse crossing then enables a crossing of that road to the BNT route along the southern verge of Drake Brockman Drive. Riverview proposes that when Stockdill Drive becomes a dual carriageway a signalised horse crossing would be provided.

After some period of urban development the main BNT route may be changed to route it from Parkwood Road to Belconnen Farm and Strathnairn. Lengthening of the BNT westwards makes short stay camping in West Belconnen essential for BNT travellers; suggestions have been made that this should be possible at Belconnen Pony Club or Belconnen Farm. Even with the current route with a 36 km distance between campsites at Hall Showground and Equestrian Park, Yarralumla, a campsite is needed in West Belconnen.

Re-Zoning Documentation and Local Equestrian Trails in Open Space

We welcome inclusion in the DV 351 references to general principles and policies, landscape and open space, including principles of equestrian use along with pedestrian and cycle use e.g. Structure Plan 6.6 no.42,43. However this concept of equestrian use is not followed through in the Concept Plan R8 with C8 referring to Urban open space and "opportunities for pedestrian and cycle paths to connect to activity nodes within the estate..."; this is where we would wish to have potential equestrian use also mentioned.

In the Concept Plan considering Rules no.5 Horse Trails it is stated that there is no applicable rule. This Association welcomes provision of local horse trails but suggests there is no need to seek endorsement "by the relevant authority" in the re-zoning application as current "rules" for horse rider use of open space are provided under Australian Road Rules. The Territory and Municipal Services website indicates that horse riders may be near shared use paths.

Re-Zoning Effects on the Belconnen Pony Club

There is no specific reference in the DV 351 Structure Plan or Concept Plan to future plans for Belconnen

Pony Club though the area (Block 1333, Section 0) it currently occupies is marked as Future Urban Area. Verbal information from the proponents is that a new site, the old Fassifern Equestrian Centre west of the junction of Gininderra Drive and Kerrigan St is being investigated for a replacement site. It is understood the Belconnen Pony Club may be moved from its current location within a comparatively short time and discussions need to continue on its future home.

Some remarks in the Draft Variation suggest that there could be consideration of a different configuration for a pony club and associated competition grounds. Currently the pony club has a club house facility, shed, toilets, horse yards and wash bay, an arena area, car and float parking, and limited open space for riding activity. For some competitions additional level land is needed. In the DV 351 Structure Plan 6.6 no.40 we note the proposed use of open space as providing for “diversity of sport and recreational activities, offers opportunities for flexible and shared use of space...” Other remarks in the Structure Plan, 7.9 Open space and recreation, no. 94 suggest scope for integration of Belconnen Pony Club grounds within the community, with the ability to hire/use a larger adjacent area for competition days without the financial responsibility for a large area allocated solely to the pony club. The arrangement for the Canberra Lakes Pony Club adjacent to the major Equestrian Park facility provides a possible model for investigation.

Re-Zoning Effects on Horse accommodation

The Parkwood paddocks are proposed for adjustment and change over the 40 years of the urban development of West Belconnen. ACTEA considers the district needs to provide horse accommodation to continue the life style which is popular in Belconnen. Pony and horse ownership contributes to the economy and to social, physical health and mental well being for those owning a horse. Currently an ACT-wide Government Horse Paddock review is underway and may contribute proposals for horse agistment which could be adapted to the future planning of West Belconnen. ACTEA considers the Government Horse Holding complexes provide a valuable community asset, and grazing horses can assist in control of bush fire fuel.

The re-zoning proposals as a whole suggest West Belconnen could become a model for an urban community in a natural landscape area of spectacular beauty and equestrians of the future will be very fortunate to share in enjoyment of the proposals for a conservation area along the Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra valleys allowing for the development of trails and recreation, and preservation of historic centres such as Belconnen Farm and Strathnairn.

This Association and its colleagues look forward to more discussion about how equestrian facilities can be integrated into the West Belconnen urban development.

Beth Stone
Secretary
6 July 2015