

CONVENOR'S MESSAGE

As I write this in late June 2006 we are lined up against two significant items and many other items are still active.

One of the two top items is the proposed development of the Darwin Golf Course and the sell-out by the NT Government over Little Mindil. **PLan** calls for government to release the survey details that government claims gives it a mandate to sell off one of our gems of open space.

I am incredulous that the Chief Minister is threatening to legislate over the location of a skate park in her electorate; it seems so insignificant when compared to the long-term damage to our place of abode that is being carried out under her watch. I never thought the previous government did any better, but now that the cup is overflowing with money so much more, attention to detail is required.

The SBS adverts for world cup soccer brought a smile to my face—history, tired and worn out, chasing fit young soccer players; history admonishes the players for not understanding their place in the scheme of things.

Well, students of history may remember a then aspiring politician, Clare Martin, the late George Brown and citizens at a public meeting at Little Mindil.

Was that meeting concerned about preserving public amenity and access to the foreshore, and what was the then-hopeful Clare Martin's position?

By the time you are reading this, the Planning Scheme draft amendment (significant item #2) may well have become legislation. This is a sad document, which reflects poorly on all those involved in its drafting, promotion and defence. As a solution to the mess we are in, it offers very little. Promoted as a simplification of zoning with no policy change, a whole raft of anti-community change is involved.

When it was pointed out to me that the Chief Minister had created a Capital City body composed of Darwin City Council and NT Government (with no community input) and that this body had been active for months producing a document which directly writes changes to planning legislation, I was gob-smacked. So many public meetings and consultation, was it all just a farce, while the real business of government occurred in secret?

Why does Darwin City Council sit on this without calling for community representation? Further, I can't believe that the members of the legislative authority, as represented by the government today, has zero opinion on community involvement the planning of our city.

If I worked for Spotlight, and if John Howard has legislated to allow Spotlight to rip the dollars out of my pocket, I need to attempt to discourage John Howard. If Clare Martin legislates to turn the NT into some gaudy take-away joint, a sad example of the worst of development excesses as so expertly carried out by the "she'll be right" Australian with a dollar to spend, again I need to try and discourage this sad behaviour.

As a Territory we need to stop being so concerned about lying on our faces in the mud so that the mighty dollar can multiply itself on our open space and then depart for other locations post haste. Darwin Airport Corporation and Darwin City Council have let loose yet another commercial zone right in the middle of our drive to work, past some open space with trees. Remember them? Would you have approved two new entrances to the airport and the destruction of a forested area, that, by the way, had been previously assigned as open space—I hope not. So why do our elected representatives approve this rubbish?

It is clear that the work-load carried by Margaret in dealing with these items for **PLan** is huge, and the opportunities for assistance that an expanded membership might offer bring the issue of obtaining and retaining new members to the forefront of my thoughts.

Please give some thought to joining **PLan**.

Regards, Nick Kirlew
Convenor, **PLan**



'Little Mindil' (July 2006)—community space, a species threatened by 'eco-tourism' proposal.

LITTLE MINDIL

Next to the Gardens Golf Links, and also threatened, is so-called 'Little Mindil', between the casino and Myilly Point. It runs down to the Darwin public foreshore. Some call it the 'Horse Paddock', because of racehorses being swum off the beach. Although partly reclaimed, it has strong Aboriginal associations, especially near the creek. This is a favourite 'secret', 'back-to-nature' retreat for many of us. Sunsets are magnificent here, and the sea air delightful. Families enjoy free and easy, 'no frills' picnics. It makes you feel good just being there.

The NT ALP Government now proposes an eco-resort on this crown land, possibly in association with the casino. Public responses to the 2004 government survey on use of the land were based on a promise of continued public access to the foreshore. With car access denied, family picnicking is impossible. Thus the survey results are no longer valid. There were always doubts about interpretation.

Skycity Darwin already prevents public access through its grounds to Mindil Beach. We understand perpetual access was guaranteed when the casino was built on the public camping ground.



'Little Mindil': should public access to this fast-vanishing type of environment around Darwin be denied for an 'eco-resort'?

Who benefits?

Years ago, CLP's Mike Reed's suggestion as Planning Minister, to develop Little Mindil, meant **PLan** held a public rally. Clare Martin, whose electorate this is, was there. The late, fearless George Brown, then the Lord Mayor of Darwin, was there too. We hope his spirit is not far away.

People relaxed when the CLP Cabinet, on the recommendation of then-Planning Minister Tim Baldwin, declared

Little Mindil for the people. He described it as an essential part of the arc of public recreational land behind Mindil Beach. The place for any natural eco-resort is across the harbour.

In cyclone-prone Darwin, building any accommodation on low ground is a cavalier tidal surge risk. Building on Darwin's escarpments is out. Fill and rock walls are costly, and not always effective. Putting in basic infrastructure and moving power pylons is costly, making for another big-

ticket, Chief Minister's Office-type project, perhaps attracting calls for wet season low-occupancy subsidies.

The Waterfront Project already weighs heavily on the NT Budget. A Mindil Beach resort could well be a white elephant after two/three years.

CITY PARKLANDS & GREEN SPACES

Growth in inner-city living is welcomed by shops, night-clubs, cafés, and takeaways, etc., but with overall population increases, additional parklands are essential for outdoor physical recreation. It is the developers' responsibility to provide these, and other essential facilities, under Section 51 of the *Planning Act*.

This provision has not been happening, except for some in-house facilities. Parks and facilities should be at ground level, and shared with the community. After all, new city residents share our public open spaces provided for earlier, smaller populations.

Recent Northern Territory Governments have lacked effectiveness in achieving city plans, including public facilities, both in Palmerston and Darwin. Both have facilitated development, and mostly ignored the rest. Development enterprise does not take care of community needs because its focus is on maximising profit. Some recent development outcomes show little regard for local character and civic impact. Government has yet to pick up on its role of ensuring good physical layouts, functional linkages, public facilities and amenity.



The edge of a block of dense concrete jungle, McMinn Street, Darwin (or Bondi?): minimum amenity, maximum profit.

DARWIN HARBOUR ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Recent public outrage about macerated sewage from the Larrakeyah outfall raises questions. What has happened to priorities on closing this outfall? Is the delay due to government budgets, or perhaps the privatising of PowerWater? Should it have priority over undergrounding electrical power?

That Darwin people care about their harbour is well documented, at least since about 1982. Many have worked hard towards a Darwin Harbour Management Plan. **PLan** has worked on this for about eight years, itself and with other groups, such as the NT Environment Centre. The Darwin Harbour Alliance educated the community about mangroves, catchments, and the health risks of living on tropical harbour flats. It helped stop the damming of the Elizabeth River for development at Weddell (that's the campaign with the light blue, big fish stickers). **PLan** worked also with the Save Darwin Harbour Group (SDHG).

6,500 people petitioned the NT Government for an independent assessment on the best site choice for the LNG plant. A multi-use marine park, like the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, was suggested as the best management model for Darwin Harbour. This petition was ignored. Instead, Chief Minister Clare Martin seems proud to call our harbour a 'working harbour'. Few wish to share this view.

In 2003/4, after genuine community consultation, and reference to existing research, the NT Government formulated a Darwin Harbour Regional Plan of Management, covering harbour, waterways and catchments from Charles Point to Gunn Point. Minister Scrymgeour states there is government protection of 98% of the mangroves. However, much of the plan is general policy, lacking action steps to protect actual situations and locations.

A Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee was appointed, with stakeholders from relevant businesses and non-government groups. Information seminars were held in February/March 2006. However, since the committee is advisory, we are still short on actual management.

WATERFRONT PROJECT

This is making interesting progress. We have a promise of Goyder's Camp as a park, but the NT Government wants us to wait until 2008. We ask the Government to give us a public guarantee to remove any doubt.

It is whispered that the pipelines along Kitchener Drive are to be removed. As they are something of a local icon, and a reminder of the past, people are bidding the government to leave them in place when the new pipes go underground.

We have asked that the Port of Darwin interpretation centre, featured in the winning Waterfront Project model viewed by thousands, go ahead as originally planned. Public art is no substitute for authentic, on-site interpretation.

PROPOSED NEW NORTHERN TERRITORY PLANNING SCHEME

In his explanatory comments introducing the proposed scheme, Planning Minister Chris Burns states:

'It essentially converts what exists now under the current Scheme into a more logical, less confusing, consolidated draft scheme without any major policy changes.'

The Minister emphasises the need for the uniformity of zone terminology across the NT. Former Planning Minister Palmer asked for this uniform scheme. Most people do not think uniformity a priority, because they only need to look at the zones in their own area, not the whole NT.

Unfortunately the Minister's assurances are not correct. In fact, huge changes of policy come with this draft document. Most work against a proper role for the community in planning.

Some of the changes in policy:

1. Dropping the land use objectives (LUO'S) process as the core of area planning, and, consequently, ultimately the place of LUO's, in zonings and area plans.
2. Redefining the 'specific use' (SU) process—a non-conforming alternate parallel planning process, as legitimate. The draft 'disappears' legitimate LUO's by rewriting them as SU-area descriptions, as if they are non-conforming.
3. Dropping the written LUO statements of actual outcome objectives which define uses and local character.
4. Setting up a second 'alternate' set of lot sizes 'identified' with 'integrated estates' in conflict with the normal standards for established areas.
5. Changing categories of land set aside for the 'future use' (FU) into 'future development' (FD).
6. Cutting out huge undifferentiated areas of land for future industry.
7. Retiring specific-area LUO's less than ten years old to a 'Reference' list, that has no legal status in the scheme.
8. Substituting a Capital City Charter for the Central Darwin group of LUO's. This charter is a flimsy policy document with no detail and unknown to the community. The community has had no input into it at all. Unlike in the LOU process, it has not been exhibited or made subject to comment. The public have been sidelined from having any say in the planning of our own city.
9. Without open due process, and right of response, it appears residents would be denied a 'level playing field' in the planning of all but narrow domestic situations in the suburbs.
10. Genuine consultation is out, at best the community gets a 'briefing' on a finished proposal.

There are more issues, as yet unspecified, as this is a massive document. Departmental briefing for this document has concentrated on zone terminology, rather than explaining the massive policy changes and their impact on planning for sustainable communities for the future. This is totally unacceptable.

GARDENS PUBLIC GOLF COURSE

There is outraged anger amongst the community at the proposal to use this golf course land for a 100-bed commercial resort. This is public land, held by Darwin City Council only in stewardship for us. It is not for sale. It is zoned for Community Purposes (CP).

Roger Dee, the recently-elected Council alderman now holding the golf links lease, can see no conflict of interest in his proposal. It is so 'commercial in confidence' that you and I, who, as the community, own this land, cannot even see it. Behind it, however, appear to be development interests who have already swallowed parts of our green and heritage public estates. Such special 'deals' may seem easier than buying land on the commercial market. But remember how the last attempt was scotched by Lady Jessie Kearney and her supporters.

These family golf links are part a big arc of land lying in the low bowl fringed by the Escarpment. It starts from Myilly Point, goes around the George Brown Botanic Gardens and the football ovals, includes the tennis courts, and the Mindil Beach markets, and runs up towards Darwin High School. This is all public recreational land, set aside by wiser city fathers, for the enjoyment of all the people.



• Wide vistas in a tropical garden setting are available for golfers by day and cultural events at other times. One of the few open public spaces close to Darwin still available for broad community amenity. (L): Iconic raintrees, shady havens with peaceful, uncluttered views of the golf lawns and gardens for all—or of another poorly-planned, tacky, tourist dollar-earner for the few?

THIRD PARTY APPEALS

For many years, the planning process allowed no appeals against Development Consent Authority decisions, except by developers. In addition, appeals initiated by developers ignored the original objectors.

The community worked long and hard for third party appeals. The NT Government heralded them recently as a feature of the most recent amendment to the *Planning Act*. A closer look shows that this government's third party provision is an insult to our intelligence.

Third party appeals are virtually restricted to residential issues in the suburbs, and do not include CBD and industrial areas. Details are hidden in a regulation. In fact, Litchfield residents found recently that even they are barred from

appealing against a commercial development to be thrust into their midst.

This situation reveals what has been so long suspected—that this present government is pro-development at all cost, and so committed to developer interests, that it seems prepared to disregard the Northern Territory community's right to a role in planning.

This type of stance, replicated by some senior bureaucrats, means the wisdom and general aspirations of the community are being ignored. This lack of understanding and sensibility is far from the level playing field the community should have, and is expected from an ALP government.

ROLE OF LANDCARE VOLUNTEERS

PLan admires the work of Landcare. It is a national network of groups volunteering in the environment. Working together to reach targets builds community spirit. However, without adequate support, Landcare groups can founder, and their work stop.

In January, 2006, about ten Greater Darwin groups jointly asked the NT Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts not to reduce staff support, allowing voluntary work to continue. A refusal to address the need has meant some of the groups are folding, for want of co-ordination support.

HERITAGE AND TOURISM

We compliment Paspaley interests for refurbishing the Vic Hotel Arcade, opening up the historic hotel, and giving us back the Aviators Signature Panel at the arcade entrance. Some arcade brightening up—perhaps with a few colourful potted plants, would make a nice finishing touch.

Random history/heritage tours run during Law Week, and by the National Trust, have proved very popular with locals, and visitors. The Convention Centre will bring to Darwin the type of visitors interested in authentic history/heritage. Publicly documenting our history/heritage in town will help us benefit from these tourists.

Tourists everywhere are interested in visiting authentic heritage, and learning about the history of the place. The old Commonwealth Bank building is ideally located for an interpretation centre for Darwin. Unlike the Reserve Bank building, it has the space, and is available now.

Now is the time for a government-sponsored partnership between heritage and tourism. A relatively small investment would be welcomed by our whole community, as a recognition of place for ourselves, as well as tourists, and would be a boon to nearby businesses. While we want the Civic Precinct to reflect its historical, and its administrative functions, the community does not want commercial or high-rise buildings in this area. It would spoil its unique character.

Very few see Old Admiralty House, stripped of the dignity of its tropical garden, as a good outcome for the Esplanade, or the community. There is more to come from the master plan that has been kept secret from us. People are weeping.

So many Parliamentarians have protested, on the Hansard record, how committed they are to heritage, and still the destruction goes on. How many more years must we wait for Parliament to pass an updated *Heritage Conservation Act*?

NT ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY (EPA)

In the life of the ALP Government, Kon Vatskalis, as Planning Minister, promised an EPA. An October, 2005 media release from Marion Scrymgour, Minister for Environment and Heritage, announced the forming of the EPA Board, saying 'The Board will oversee the development of the final model of the EPA, bringing the Territory into line with the rest of Australia, and delivering an important election promise.' She added that this demonstrated 'the Government's commitment to our unique environment.'

Public participation should help shape an independent and effective EPA. Submissions are due by 4 August, 2006. A discussion paper 'Towards an EPA for the NT', is available at: www.nt.gov.au/nreta/environment/epaboard. An EPA making decisions based on research and evidence, not political pressure, is essential for the future wellbeing of the NT.

The website also includes information on environmental assessment, climate change, waste management, water quality, the McArthur River Mine, and pollution hotline (1800 064 567).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Whilst the real estate industry trumpets 'success' in the building boom, many locals and new arrivals cannot find affordable housing. They wonder, as they rent, if ever they will ever be able to buy. We need to preserve the tropical green Darwin lifestyle, at fair cost.

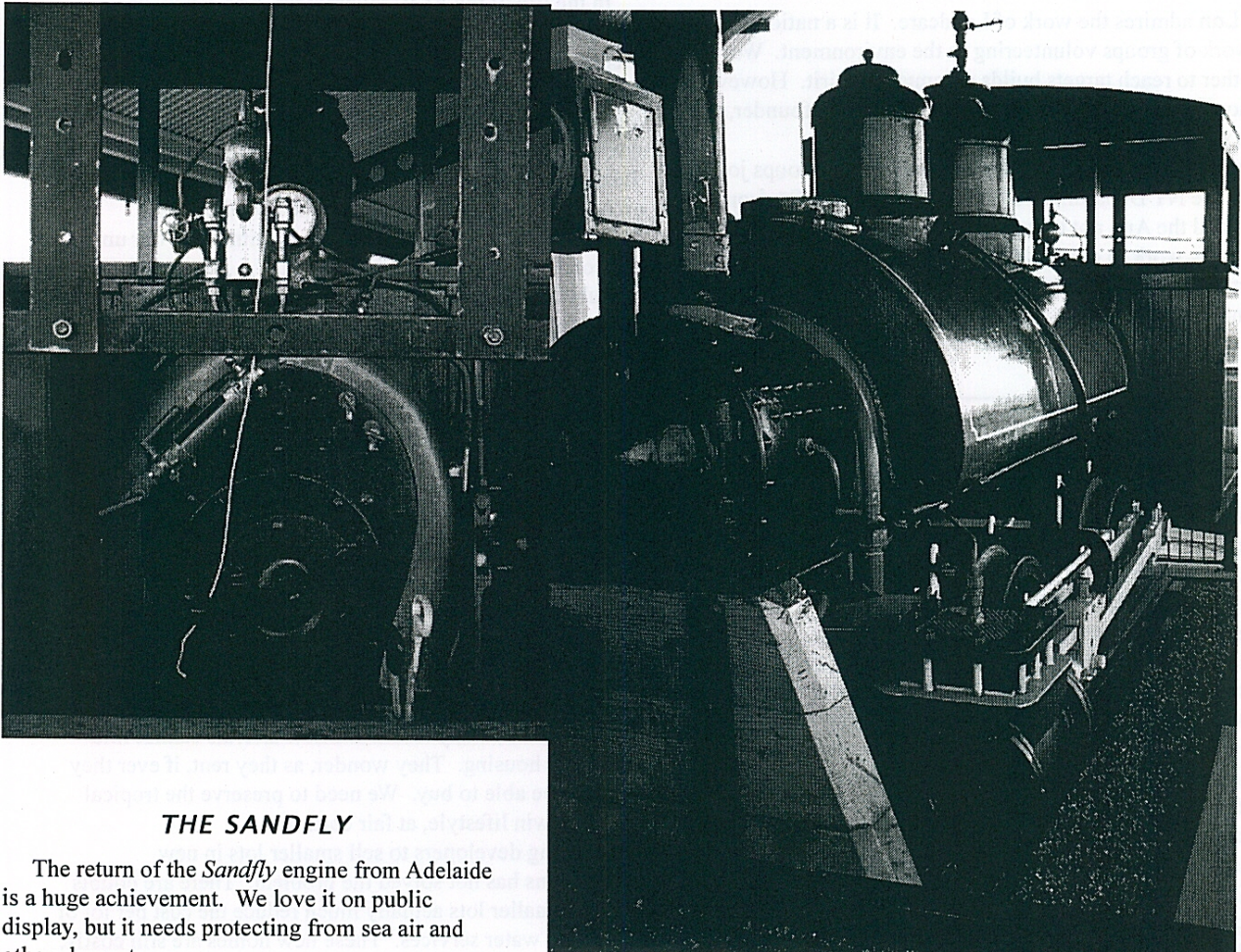
Allowing developers to sell smaller lots in new subdivisions has not solved the problem. There are doubts whether smaller lots actually much reduce the cost per lot of power and water services. These new homes are still costly, as shown in the *NT News Real Estate Supplement* each Saturday.

In new subdivisions, large houses are being built on lots less than the standard 800 m², leaving no room for gardens for adults to relax in, children to play in, trees for shade, and for cross ventilation from natural breezes. This is not the tropical Darwin lifestyle.

There is a lack of useable parks and facilities, with piggybacking on facilities in older suburbs which forces people to drive instead of walking to them. Air-conditioning contributes greenhouse gases. People prefer not to live in multi-storey blocks in the suburbs. Perhaps more cluster dwellings are the answer, so that people can step up as they save.

A subdivision is not a suburb. We need parks and facilities, standard size lots, and even footpaths. The government must supervise the roll-out of new suburbs by developers. A full investigation of price structures on lots turned off crown term leases is essential for public accountability.

Crown land is released at very low rental to developers. Far greater control is needed over this alienating process. Land of special natural significance, including waterways, should be quarantined from development from the beginning. The *Crown Lands Act* needs immediate amendment.



THE SANDFLY

The return of the *Sandfly* engine from Adelaide is a huge achievement. We love it on public display, but it needs protecting from sea air and other elements.



**HOW GREEN IS MY VALLEY?
A BIG WIN FOR THE COMMUNITY**

PLan was thrilled last week. The Development Consent Authority (DCA) rejected an application from Delfin/Lend Lease at the Chase/Gunn to subdivide a bush valley, with central waterway, to build 17 houses. This valley is below the Palmerston Escarpment, beside Chung Wah Terrace, and next to public pathway. Local residents had already fought this battle in 2004. The developer had then withdrawn the application for this particular site (7.6), apparently to achieve the rest of stage 7.

The small site is covered by pandanus and other riparian vegetation, and, even in June, wet underfoot. Development would have meant huge filling, big drains and a retaining wall, completely spoiling the natural ecology. Residents of Gunn were previously promised that this site would not be built on. Our case was apolitical, with James Burke (ALP), Terry Mills (CLP), Ted Warren (ALP), Gerry Wood (Independent) and Annette Burke, Mayor of Palmerston) all 'on side'.

TALL BUILDINGS

Buildings 30 storeys and more in height are sprouting up all around Darwin City. Neither the *Darwin Town Plan*, nor the proposed new *NT Planning Scheme* cover buildings over eight storeys.

What are the special rules for, eg. air-conditioners, massive underground car-parking, antennas, emergency facilities on rooftops, beacons, fire and cyclone evacuations, outside fixtures which might detach as debris, and managing building maintenance? How will our current infrastructure cope with water, sewerage and electricity needs? Are developers paying for upgrades or are we?

The community is asking who actually lives in the tall unit buildings.

TRANSPORT

Lack of public transport is serious in Outer Darwin. High fuel costs are increasing the needs for better services.

A light rail linking Palmerston, Casuarina, and Darwin can be looked at whilst the corridors still appear open. Such a people-mover would lessen traffic and parking problems, and reduce greenhouse emissions. Cycle paths are also in demand.

**ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLANS
(EMPS)**

PLan has contributed to many Environmental Impact Studies (EIS). These result in particular EMPS. The community wants to see the regular public reports from these EMPS. Is there a full report on Bayview Stage 1? What about Wickham Point?

LNG PLANT LEAK

Months ago we heard about the LNG leak at Wickham Point. LNG is dangerous. It is invisible, and can form into vaporous clouds. The public needs to know if the leak really has been stopped. What emergency services does the company provide at the plant?

TANK FARM

Great progress has been made with the re-siting of 'oil' storage at East Arm, and the clearing of the Shell Depot site. Soon the area will be available for redevelopment. The 1999 planning concepts specified medium density housing in this 'valley', with just a few higher buildings.

STELLA MARIS SITE

The Heritage Advisory Council has recognised the heritage significance of the old railway house on the Stella Maris site, by having it listed on the *NT Heritage Register*. PLan is against a proposed road down the Escarpment through this area, from Harry Chan Avenue. It would take out the last public viewing place of Frances Bay. Too much of this area has already been destroyed by development interests.

FISH FARM IN DARWIN HARBOUR?

Marine Harvest—an international aquaculture company—proposes a fish farm between Channel Island and Wickham Point. They have asked for a lease, with open sea cages, above the NT Heritage-listed SS *Ellengowan*, and part of the important Channel Island Coral Reef. There is a potential to damage both through excess food, chemicals, droppings from thousands of fish, and from cages sinking. This area is used by recreational fishers and divers.

Issue of a lease depends on the current EIS. Land-based aquaculture is more ecologically efficient for pollution. The company's two-year, sea-cage experiment in Port Hurd on the Tiwi Islands was abandoned, with cage damage and thousands of fish escaping. Reports show a poor company environmental record in Scotland. It was recently bought by Japanese PanFish.

Few things are more ridiculous than putting the 'farm', of all places, over the almost 120-year, heritage-listed wreck of the SS *Ellengowan*, and the important Channel Island coral reef.

LEE POINT

In Lyons, PLan was disappointed when the DCA refused a conservation zone (03) for Sandy Creek, took 1800m² out of the park for a commercial child care centre. Then the Heritage Advisory Council (HAC) refused to save a unique gun emplacement by, in strange circumstances, not recommending it for heritage listing.

Muirhead, on the other side of Lee Point Road is now advertised.

PARAP

Proposed developers of the OTC site between Gregory and Weddell Streets Parap, in pre-application consultations, have shown Parap residents three options with varying combinations of density. Detached dwelling lots are less than 800 m². Parap is a leafy suburb with large lots, so this is out of character. There are traffic concerns too.

Elsewhere residents are concerned about activities of highway commercial business affecting their suburban homes.

COUNCIL WALKWAYS

Darwin City Council is again advertising a possible closure of two walkways, this time in Wagaman and Nakara. **PLan** is against permanent walkway closure, because these walkways were planned for pedestrian use, and infrastructure is usually housed under them.

In Wagaman, there have been walkway troubles for many years. Perhaps there should be night closures. This is a police matter.

Earlier in the walkway debate, Council mapped and analysed its walkways, rating their community value. Walkways leading to facilities ranked high. The Nakara walkway, near the corner of Buchanan Terrace and McCredie Street, leads from lower Nakara to an equipped 'littlies' park, an oval used for soccer, a pre-school and a primary school. It also leads towards Nungalinya College, a place where Aboriginal people come in from the bush to live with their families whilst studying.

Why then should it be considered for closing? No walkway should be closed because neighbours want the land. This may not be the only reason here, but walkways are part of the community framework. In a time of growing obesity and the greenhouse effect, the community should be able to walk more, not less.

LITCHFIELD SHIRE

Current pressure for Litchfield's subdivision has raised many planning issues, although there are new *Litchfield Land Use Objectives*. Issues include seasonal inundation, water-logged ground, drainage problems, natural features and catchments, limited power and water supplies, bores and wells, a dropping water table, septic tanks, land clearing, mixed uses, horticultural spraying, extractive industries, existing small estates, demand for industrial land, road access, services for dispersed populations, and varied community aspirations, etc.

We are surprised by the DCA approval of 60 dog-boarding kennels in a well-established RL1-zoned community. Noisy barking, and pollution from wash-downs is feared. Residents discovered the new *Planning Act Regulations* exclude Litchfield RL1 residents from a third-party appeal. If they lived in an RL1 zone in Alice Springs, they could appeal.

Other locals oppose a new army repair complex near Robertson Barracks, sited on low-lying land with significant natural features.

DISPOSAL OF COUNCIL'S LEANYER WORK DEPOT

We are pleased with Darwin City Council's residents consultation on this matter. Residents have spoken up for community facilities catering for all ages. Proximity to the swamp limits residential uses.

DUNDEE BEACH AND DOWNS

Residents of Dundee still await an all-weather road, and had to deal with medical emergencies in the Wet. Like Cox Peninsula, they need an emergency shelter.

GET ACTIVE FOR GOOD PLANNING !!!!

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
HINTS FOR WHAT YOU CAN DO,
AND HOW YOU CAN DO IT,

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