

Construction of housing for Defence at Voyager Point, Liverpool, NSW

- 4.1 The proposed construction of housing for the Department of Defence at Voyager Point, Liverpool, NSW, by Defence Housing Australia (DHA) aims to provide housing for members of the Australian Defence Force (and their families) serving in the Liverpool area. The estimated cost of the project is \$45.1 million (including GST).
- 4.2 The proposal was referred to the Committee on 18 March 2010.

Conduct of the inquiry

- 4.3 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* and submissions sought from those with a direct interest in the project. The Committee received two submissions and one confidential supplementary submission detailing the project costs. A list of submissions can be found at Appendix A.
- 4.4 The Committee undertook a site inspection, public hearing and an in-camera hearing on the project costs on 8 April 2010 in Sydney.
- 4.5 The transcript of the public hearing as well as the submissions to the inquiry are available on the Committee's website.¹ Plans for the proposed works are detailed in Submission 1: Defence Housing Australia.

Need for works

- 4.6 The DHA submission states that the works are necessary because, whilst the demand for DHA houses in the Liverpool area will decline

1 <aph.gov.au/pwc>

significantly over the next ten years, much of the current stock does not conform with the Department of Defence's housing standards, and some leases for rented properties will expire. As a result, DHA needs an additional 65 dwellings in the Liverpool area between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

4.7 The Committee finds that there is a need for the proposed works.

Scope of works

4.8 The proposed scope of the works is detailed in Submission 1: DHA. In short the project proposes the following:

- subdivision of Lot 7 of Deposited Plan 803038, on Sirius Road, Voyager Point, into 120 freehold lots, including 17 lots suitable for duplex dwellings;
- provision of a new 11 kilovolt electricity supply connecting the site with existing electricity infrastructure on the neighbouring Department of Defence site;
- construction of 59 houses comprising:
 - ⇒ 25 detached houses; and
 - ⇒ 34 semi-detached duplexes;
- sale of the expected 78 surplus unbuilt lots.

4.9 Construction is expected to commence in March 2011 and be completed by December 2013.

4.10 The Committee finds that the proposed scope of works is suitable to meet the needs of the Voyager Point project.

Cost of works

4.11 The total estimated out-turn cost for this project is \$45.1 million (including GST). The Committee received a confidential supplementary submission detailing the project costs and held an in-camera hearing with DHA on the project costs.

4.12 The Committee is satisfied that the costings for the project provided to it are adequate.

Project issues

Housing for people with disability

- 4.13 In its seventh report of 2009, regarding a proposal for Defence housing at the Gordon Olive Estate in McDowall, Brisbane, the Committee recommended DHA designate a proportion of its housing to be accessible by people with disability.² When an expediency motion relating to that project was moved by the Hon Dr Mike Kelly MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, in the House of Representatives, he advised the House that DHA accepted and would implement this recommendation made by the Committee.³
- 4.14 However, DHA's submission to this inquiry states that the recommendation regarding housing for people with disability 'is currently under consideration by Defence and DHA'.⁴ The Committee is aware that DHA and the Department of Defence manage housing for thousands of members of the Australian Defence Force and their families, and does not wish to prejudice the effective and efficient provision of housing for these individuals and families. Nonetheless, it is imperative that these agencies implement the Committee's recommendations in a timely manner. The Committee looks forward to seeing a workable application of its recommendations to DHA's planning and construction activities in the near future.
- 4.15 In discussions during the site inspection and hearing, DHA told the Committee that a small percentage of clients needed disability-access housing. However, such housing also enables elderly relatives and friends to visit. The Committee encourages DHA to take a broader view of the value of 'accessible housing' to their clients.
- 4.16 The Committee is also concerned by DHA's suggestion that its clients 'without special needs' would not be satisfied if they were 'required to live in a house that incorporates facilities for the disabled' (when not used by a client needing disability-access).⁵ This reinforces a stereotype that disability-access housing is inferior or substandard. The Committee has

2 Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, *Report 7/2009 Referrals made August to October 2009*, November 2009, Canberra, p.9.

3 Dr the Hon Mike Kelly MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, *Official Hansard*, House of Representatives, 25 November 2009, 13 000.

4 Submission 1, Defence Housing Australia, p.23.

5 Submission 1, DHA, p.23.

previously reported on the integration of universal accessibility into housing, resulting in no reduction of amenity or aesthetics. The Committee encourages DHA to work to reverse the perception that accessible houses are by their very nature less aesthetically pleasing.

- 4.17 The Committee is undertaking to have further discussions with DHA on this issue.

Site contamination

- 4.18 The project site was remediated when DHA acquired it from the Department of Defence, and according to DHA's submission, the entire site has been investigated by environmental consultants,⁶ and has an environmental audit certificate stating that the site is suitable for residential use.⁷
- 4.19 DHA nonetheless advised the Committee that there remains the possibility of contaminants existing on the site (such as asbestos fragments from demolished buildings). It is paramount that future residents have absolute confidence in the safety of the site, and underlines the fundamental importance of DHA rigorously attending to any possible contaminants on site. DHA advised the Committee that the contractor will provide a management plan for contaminants found during construction works.⁸

Road access

- 4.20 The DHA project at Voyager Point will add to an existing suburb, and the Committee is concerned that DHA adequately provide for safe road access into and out of the site. Whilst there will be only one paved road connecting this subdivision to the rest of the Voyager Point, DHA will also provide an emergency access road which will connect to an existing Voyager Point paved road. Under an agreement with the local government authority, this road must 'be four metres wide, has to be able to take a 13-tonne fire appliance and has to have vertical clearance of six metres at all times to allow movement of appliances.'⁹

6 Submission 1, DHA, p.7.

7 Mr R. Bollen, National Manager, Land Provisioning, DHA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2010, p.8.

8 Mr R. Bollen, National Manager, Land Provisioning, DHA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2010, p.8.

9 Mr V. D'Arcy, Development Manager, DHA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2010, p.9.

- 4.21 The Committee notes that access to the suburb of Voyager Point is currently by an un-signalised intersection with Heathcote Road. The Committee is aware that this is primarily a matter for the local government authority, and encourages DHA to be proactively involved in any future provision of additional road access to Voyager Point.
- 4.22 According to DHA's submission, there is a possibility that the intersection of Heathcote Road and Macarthur Drive (near Voyager Point) will in the future need to be reconfigured with traffic signals. At the public hearing, DHA indicated that it has made an allowance in the project budget to contribute to such road works if necessary.¹⁰ The Committee commends DHA on this prudent and responsible provision which will ensure that DHA will contribute to the upgrading of local infrastructure where necessary.

Committee comment

- 4.23 Overall, the Committee is satisfied that this project has merit in terms of need, scope and cost.
- 4.24 Having examined the purpose, need, use, revenue and public value of the work, the Committee considers that it is expedient that the proposed works proceed.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives resolve, pursuant to Section 18(7) of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, that it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work: construction of housing for Defence at Voyager Point, Liverpool, NSW.

¹⁰ Mr R. Bollen, National Manager, Land Provisioning, DHA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 April 2010, p.6.