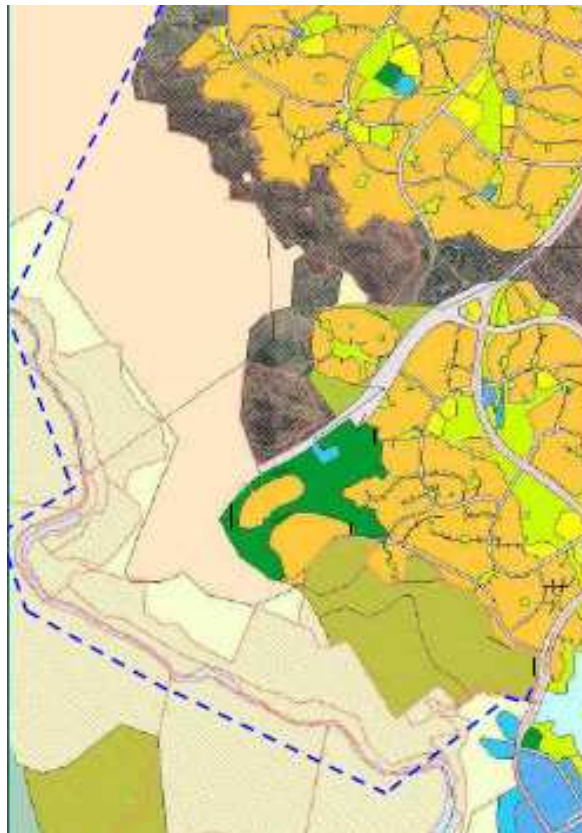


Learning from Our Land

A visionary strategy for West Kambah

A rare opportunity to set up an environmental learning and well-being precinct



Concerned Residents for West Kambah (CROWK)

*The articulate earth
the resonance of what we do not see
but which informs us,
writing our existences*

Paul Hetherington 'Resonances'

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1. Introduction

This short concept paper has been prepared by the community organisation, Concerned Residents for West Kambah (CROWK). It proposes that **an environmental learning and well-being precinct** be developed in West Kambah to help make the Australian Capital Territory a sustainable place in which to live and work. The proposed precinct would also encompass parts of Weston Creek.

CROWK has received funding from ACT Health Promotion grants to help develop our precinct proposal over three years.

Our project is entitled “**Learning from our Land**” because it includes not only our suburbs, but the exceptional natural areas which surround them. There are many histories associated with the area we live in. How can we learn from these histories to ensure a vibrant and sustainable precinct?

Views and comments are sought from all in our community on the ideas presented in this concept paper.

Contact CROWK with your ideas, comments and views on the concept explained in this paper. Join our journey over the next three years and help us develop an agreed view of the future for our sub-region.

2. Aim

In essence, Learning from Our Land aims to involve the people of West Kambah and parts of Weston Creek in participating in the development of the sub-region in a sustainable way which makes the most of its particular physical and social assets and results in a healthy community.

It aims for a mind shift on the part of the residents of the sub-region and of local planners and managers to see the area in regional terms and to value its very special qualities.

It also aims in the long term to realise the opportunity to make the sub-region a community asset, managed under a community-based arrangement in close collaboration with local stakeholders from all sectors of the community and the ACT Government. No other sub-region in Canberra at present has a focus like the one we suggest and the proposed West Kambah-Weston Creek initiative could be a pilot program.

3. The proposal

The paper proposes a radical strategy for a sub-region of the ACT, centred on West Kambah and parts of Weston Creek and encompassing the Murrumbidgee River corridor and adjacent areas. The proposed area is bounded by the Tuggeranong Hyperdome through to Cooleman Court in Weston Creek and the suburbs west of the Tuggeranong Parkway as shown in the map on the front cover of this paper.

This region has environmental and social assets which provide the community with an opportunity to make it a showcase area for the national capital. It has high quality natural environment features such as the Murrumbidgee and surrounding hills and land. These provide biodiversity corridors and also attract recreation activities like swimming, kayaking, cycling, golfing, walking, bird watching and equestrian sports and many others. Facilities and infrastructure already exist. There are also many social assets such as community and business organisations located in the area and successful government supported, community implemented, programs.

The West Kambah-Weston Creek sub-region is both geographically and residentially a clearly bounded area. In metropolitan planning terms these contiguous districts were uniquely designed and have evolved together, with much potential yet to be realised and sense of continuing vulnerability to inappropriate external decision making to be overcome. What is lacking is a holistic regional approach.

CROWK proposes that this West Kambah sub-region, including parts of Weston Creek, be developed as an environmental learning and well-being precinct. This means that the area would be sustainably managed.

What would some of the benefits be? Community development, increased social capital – that is, the increased skills, better networking and improved knowledge of the local community – local self reliance and responsibilities, improved health, wellbeing and security are just some of the benefits associated with cooperatively managed projects. The project will encourage recreational activities, community development and sustainable suburban living. An important element of the proposal would be that the sub-region becomes a focus for research and learning and a demonstration area for positive ecologically sustainable economic returns. The community health aspects of recreation and general enjoyment of the area would be promoted, together with the management practices, making it an exemplar from which other areas could learn.

Our proposed initiative encompasses a wide spectrum of environmental, social, economic and health aspects. Specifically it will:

- position the sub-region as a widely supported and utilised recreational asset for the community as a whole, on the basis that it will build strong ownership including from among the broader Tuggeranong Valley and Weston Creek communities;
- reverse downward social capital trends in the sub-region;
- foster a healthy community;
- give the community a chance to take control of its own neighbourhood
- establish new economic paradigms, and investment opportunities and strategies;
- require no change in existing land zoning; and
- build models of ecological sustainable practice.

4. Expanding upon the concept

It is anticipated that through this initiative the sub-regional area can become an icon of innovation, ecologically sustainable action and building social capital.

The approach proposed by CROWK has a sound economic base. While rejecting past paradigms, such as unsustainable housing and development, it is grounded on developing extensive community linkages. These provide the potential to stimulate opportunities for significant community well being through ecologically sustainable development, businesses, employment and social activity.

Putting such a vision into practice would involve the opportunity to implement:

- leading edge sustainable land and water use strategies;
- sustainable catchment management encompassing both flora and fauna;
- urban and site eco-design;
- pioneering bio-building construction and operation;
- sustainable retrofitting innovation;
- student education and research;
- wider community health and well being activities; and
- business development round the many activities of the precinct.

On the ground this would mean:

- consistent with ACT Government strategies and assistance, sustainable, comprehensive management of the wider Murrumbidgee River Corridor, including around the Kambah Pool, and along adjacent ridges, hills and plains;
- fostering well being through physical and other interaction with the environment
- planning and managing the sub-region based on recycling and waste management processes e.g. for soil refurbishment, and consequent flora and fauna rehabilitation;
- identifying and establishing the sub region as a major gateway with links to various walking and riding tracks. These would include both local smaller tracks to the Tuggeranong Hyperdome and Cooleman Court, as well as links to national routes such as The Great Alpine Walking Track through the Snowy Mountains, and the Bi-centennial Equestrian Trail which starts at the top of Australia;
- encouraging existing enterprises such as the Murrumbidgee Country Club to develop as a pre-eminent environmental model and recreation node;
- developing eco-management strategies in surrounding suburbs including constructing bio-based buildings, undertaking sustainable retrofitting and smart use of spaces;
- catalysing new business based on sustainable knowledge and technologies;
- catalysing business partnerships in the Tuggeranong Valley and Weston Creek, e.g. eco-businesses, a wide range of health and well being businesses, partnerships to improve tourism offerings, recreational opportunities, events etc;
- involving students of all ages from schools and tertiary institutions in practical, hands-on science and other curricula related programs; and
- promoting cultural, art and craft activities, both at professional and recreational levels.

5. Implementing a sustainable development strategy

To make the proposed vision a reality requires not only maintaining and protecting the visual and physical amenity of the existing environment, but also taking initiatives to enhance these qualities and present them as outlined above, so the region can become a model. CROWK proposes a three staged approach to taking our proposal further.

Stage 1 Launch the project in September 2006.

Begin the process of getting input from all in the community, and distribute this Concept paper for comment, which expresses in general terms what we want our community to look like in the future.

Stage 2 By May 2007

Complete a study of our sub-region. Such a study will require an audit of existing assets identify and scope possible environmentally healthy sustainable activities, identify and scope the potential links among regional stakeholders, commence building social capital, continue to foster a healthy community and identify economic opportunities and catalyse the actions to

achieve this proposed outcomes, as well as Identifying further potential future actions. It will be a pro-active process to build upon already existing networks, fostering actions through the process of the feasibility study

An initial focus of this study will look at associated infrastructure in the sub-region such as:

- existing and potential recreational options covering walking, hiking and riding trails, and other sustainable sporting facilities;
- the business development and infrastructure needs of local businesses;
- physical and social infrastructure in the region;
- transport issues;
- social trends in recreation and sport; and
- health and safety issues of local communities.

The study will look for partnerships and collaborative activity such as:

- links to the clubs and associations in the Tuggeranong Valley, eg with clubs in packaging a wider range of experiences to focus on developing tourism, recreation and health-related opportunities;
- training and service providers to identify their needs and whether there are opportunities for collaboration via use of available infrastructure and developing new markets because of location (health, food, personal development);
- using the sub-region for undertaking research and even piloting of research outcomes eg universities in the ACT, CSIRO, Government Department officers, private sector;
- opportunities to carry on businesses via facilities not elsewhere available, based on visually significant amenities, to display or pilot new techniques and products eg recycled water equipment, bio-building materials;
- opportunities to connect with core business nodes in the wider region eg Hyperdome, Cooleman Court, Erindale, Kambah, Woden and other regional businesses;
- social activities and infrastructure which might be linked into the project eg urban land care, wood working groups, health groups; and
- government departments to link up existing programs such as a very wide variety of health and education programs, including for young people, covering many aspects of the curriculum, sport, youth development programs, work experience.

Stage 3 June 2007.

Hold a community-based forum where the ideas that have been collected are reviewed and reality checked and prioritised and put into a coherent format. Identify a small number of key projects which will help us make this vision a practical matter.

Stage 4 **Starting July 2007**

Begin to implement the selected projects.

Stage 5 **Starting July 2008**

Review progress and how are we going with respect to our aims and objectives.

6. Why undertake a project like this?

A key motivating factor for CROWK is that this region has outstanding potential to benefit a wide range of residents in our part of Canberra and beyond. It is now timely to seize this opportunity.

The Canberra fires of 2003, drought reflecting a changing climate, an uncertain world, greater disparity of wealth and health, declining social capital, increased distance from

decision-making and a need for different thinking to achieve sustainability, are all factors which can stimulate us to look anew at our neighbourhood. It is an opportunity to re-engage the local community and take an holistic approach in doing this

West Kambah is not yet widely recognised by the wider Canberra community for its special assets. However CROWK believes it has natural qualities that are second to none in Canberra. This provides a rare opportunity to collaboratively apply ecologically smart thinking now in response to the wider bio-physical, social and economic changes challenging the world, and impacting on the ordinary person. Establishing an environmental learning and well-being precinct as we propose would provide great benefits to the region and would make West Kambah a model for others.

In the end we want to learn from our land and help others to do the same.

**Remember: Make you views known. Send them to
PO Box 2115 Kambah 2092 or email them to
pryorknowledge@netspeed.com.au**

For further information, contact Geoff Pryor

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