



**ACT**  
Government

Environment and Planning

# Belconnen Town Centre

Draft Master Plan



SEPTEMBER 2015





## Have Your Say

The Environment and Planning Directorate (EPD) welcomes comments on this draft master plan.

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Post: Belconnen Town Centre Draft Master Plan  
PO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601

Comments can be made until 20 November 2015

All comments will be taken into consideration when revising the master plan. The master plan is anticipated for consideration by the ACT Government in late 2015. If adopted, implementation of the master plan can commence.

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## Definitions

**Active frontages** occur when people can interact between the buildings and the streets and public spaces, such as shop fronts, building entrances and transparent building facades.

**Active travel** is travel that involves physical activity such as walking and cycling. Active travel can also include the walking and/or cycling involved when using public transport.

**Active uses** are uses that generate activity at the ground floor. Active uses include cafes, shop fronts and building entrances.

**Built form** relates to the buildings, associated structures and surrounding public spaces.

**Blocks and Sections** are how areas of land are identified in the ACT. The city is divided into divisions, suburbs, sections and blocks. The Territory Plan zoning determines what activities/uses can occur on the blocks. Blocks are usually leased to one entity.

**GFA** or Gross Floor Area means the sum of the area of all floors of the building, measured from the external faces of the exterior walls.

**Human scale** reflects a sympathetic proportional relationship between the built form and human dimensions where people are not overwhelmed by the built form. Human scale contributes to a person's perception of buildings or other features in the public domain. It is typically referred to when discussing the bulk and scale of development.

**Land use zones** are allocated by the Territory Plan to all land within the ACT that define what land uses can or cannot occur on a piece of land. Zone categories are residential (RZ), commercial (CZ), community facility (CFZ), industrial (IZ), parks and recreation (PRZ), transport and services (TSZ), and non urban (NUZ). Sub-categories provide more specific controls, for example RZ1 is a residential zone for low density housing in suburban areas while RZ5 is a residential zone for high density housing in urban centres and along major transport routes. See more about the zoning system at [www.legislation.act.gov.au/ni/2008-27](http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/ni/2008-27)

**Mixed-use development** involves a mix of complementary land uses, such as residential, small offices or convenience stores. This can include a horizontal and vertical mix.

**Podium or building base** refers to the lower storeys of a tall building that people passing by see and interact with. It is designed to present an appropriate human scale to the streets and public spaces. Podiums can be used to transition down to lower-scale buildings, and minimise the impact of parking and servicing areas.

**Shared-use path** is a path that is restricted to non-motorised transport, with the exception of motorised wheelchairs and power assisted pedal cycles. Both pedestrians and cyclists share these paths.

**Shared zone** (or shared spaces) is a road or place where the road space is shared safely by vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. A shared zone may include the removal of traffic lights, pedestrian barriers, road markings and kerbs to give equal priority to all users and require negotiation between users.

**Solar access** is the ability of a building or public space to receive sunlight without obstruction from other buildings.

**Spatial framework** sets out the long term structure of the centre. It shows how land use, public domain and connections could be arranged and delivered.

**Surveillance** (or passive surveillance) is the 'eyes on the street' from residents and people going about their daily activities to create a sense of safety on streets and public spaces.

**Transit-oriented development** is the creation of compact, walkable communities located around high-quality public transit systems.

**Urban grain** is the street pattern, size and distribution of blocks, scale of buildings and their relationship to each other. Urban grain includes the hierarchy of street, the pedestrian connections, public places and linkages to public transport.

**Visual cues** are elements in the public domain that contribute to a person's understanding of a place. For example, buildings may gradually get taller as you travel closer to the town centre, providing an understanding that you are approaching a major centre.

**Water sensitive urban design** is an approach to urban planning and design that aims to integrate the management of the urban water cycle into the urban development process.

**Wind shear** refers to the potential for down draughts from taller buildings or accelerated winds from tunnelling between buildings onto public spaces.

*'Dancers on the Lakefront', in front of the Belconnen Arts Centre*







## Executive summary

The ACT Government has prepared a draft master plan for the Belconnen town centre. The draft master plan includes a review of previous master plans, including the 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan. It provides an opportunity to address current issues, pursue remaining issues identified in the 2001 plan and aims to provide a new vision, planning principles and spatial framework for the centre.

The draft master plan seeks to provide clear planning strategies and policies to inform the future development and character of the town centre. A considerable number of comments were provided by the community during the initial engagement period, providing valuable evidence of the issues to address for the Belconnen town centre (the centre).

With its lake and recreation, employment, health and retail facilities, the centre provides significant amenity for the 97,000 residents of Belconnen. The centre's setting, nearby institutions and size offer advantages unmatched by many other urban areas in Australia.

These advantages should be strengthened and capitalised on to ensure the centre improves and grows, that small business can thrive, natural areas be enhanced and the centre becomes an even better place for the Belconnen community to visit, work and live. This will help meet the key ACT Government priorities for sustainable economic growth, urban renewal and transport improvements.

While the centre has great opportunities, it also faces considerable challenges. The ACT Government has prepared this draft master plan to guide how these challenges and opportunities can be met.

The draft master plan provides an opportunity to improve the public domain and increase the 'liveability' of the centre to make it a place where people want to visit or live. A range of strategies have been developed to guide and improve the future development of the centre, which include:

- Introducing incentives for developers to provide public domain improvements, better design outcomes, more sustainable buildings and to enable more active destinations to grow.
- Improving cycle and pedestrian connections and infrastructure to help change the focus from cars to healthier alternatives of walking and cycling.
- Introducing measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change and reduce our large ecological footprint.
- Introducing a better strategy for parking to ensure supply meets demand.
- Improving employment diversity.
- Providing clear building height requirements and design guidelines to provide certainty for the community, developers and government.

The draft master plan provides a new vision for Belconnen town centre:

*Belconnen town centre's features and potential set it apart from other places. The lake, open spaces, layout and nearby institutions provide unique economic and environmental advantages. These will be improved and strengthened to ensure the town centre is an attractive, accessible and desirable place for people to live, work and enjoy.*

Lake Ginninderra from Emu Bank







# 1. Introduction

In 2001, the ACT Government released a master plan for the Belconnen town centre (the centre) that analysed a series of planning considerations and made recommendations to guide the future growth of the centre. The centre's development has been guided by several master plans, each building on earlier planning. The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan provided valuable structural changes, including road extensions and changes to bus infrastructure and services.

Since then, the centre has experienced considerable growth, with developers showing strong confidence in the centre through significant investments. The ACT Government has also provided substantial improvements including a new community health facility, police station and public transport infrastructure, as well as rebuilding lakeside recreational areas. These improvements provide the centre with the amenity to support continued growth.

In 2012, key strategic planning documents for the ACT were introduced including the ACT Planning Strategy, Transport for Canberra and AP2: A New Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for the ACT. The ACT Planning Strategy encourages a more compact city by focusing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along major public transport routes. A review of the 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan was identified as a key outcome of the ACT Planning Strategy.

Work on this master plan started in November 2014 with a series of engagement events to gain an understanding of the community's concerns and aspirations for the centre. This feedback has been valuable and provides direction for the future of the centre.

This draft master plan has considered these community comments, together with background studies. It recommends a series of planning strategies that set a framework for how the centre should grow and improve into the future, while retaining the unique Belconnen character.

In 2014, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranked Canberra as the best place in the world to live, due to a range of reasons including employment, housing and environment. We are fortunate to live in a city with the opportunities, diversity and environment that Canberra has, and it is vital we keep and improve these advantages.

The Belconnen town centre reflects a lot of what is good about Canberra, as well as what needs to be improved. While the centre has good amenity and potential, it also faces challenges that this draft master plan seeks to address.

The ACT Government would like to acknowledge the organisations that helped raise community awareness of the draft master plan, particularly the Belconnen Community Council and Pedal Power.

The community can now consider the recommendations of this draft master plan and provide feedback. The draft master plan and feedback will inform the preparation of the final Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan.

## 1.1 Master plan study area

The master plan study area for the Belconnen Town Centre Draft Master Plan is illustrated by the dashed blue line in Figure 1. The study area is located in the suburb of Belconnen and bound by Belconnen Way, Coulter Drive, Ginninderra Drive, Aikman Drive and Eastern Valley Way.

The study area includes the core Belconnen town centre area, the Belconnen service trades area, Emu Ridge and Totterdell Street residential areas, Emu Bank and Lake Ginninderra and surrounds.

While focused on the suburb of Belconnen, the draft master plan also considers the centre's important relationship with the University of Canberra, other institutions including Calvary Hospital, the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), and the surrounding suburbs, as indicated in Figure 2.

The centre has diverse uses, with large areas of open space and recreational areas surrounding Lake Ginninderra, a distinct service trades area, Australian Government office area, medium density housing, Westfield Belconnen and the higher density residential area emerging towards the east of the centre.



Figure 1: Master plan study area

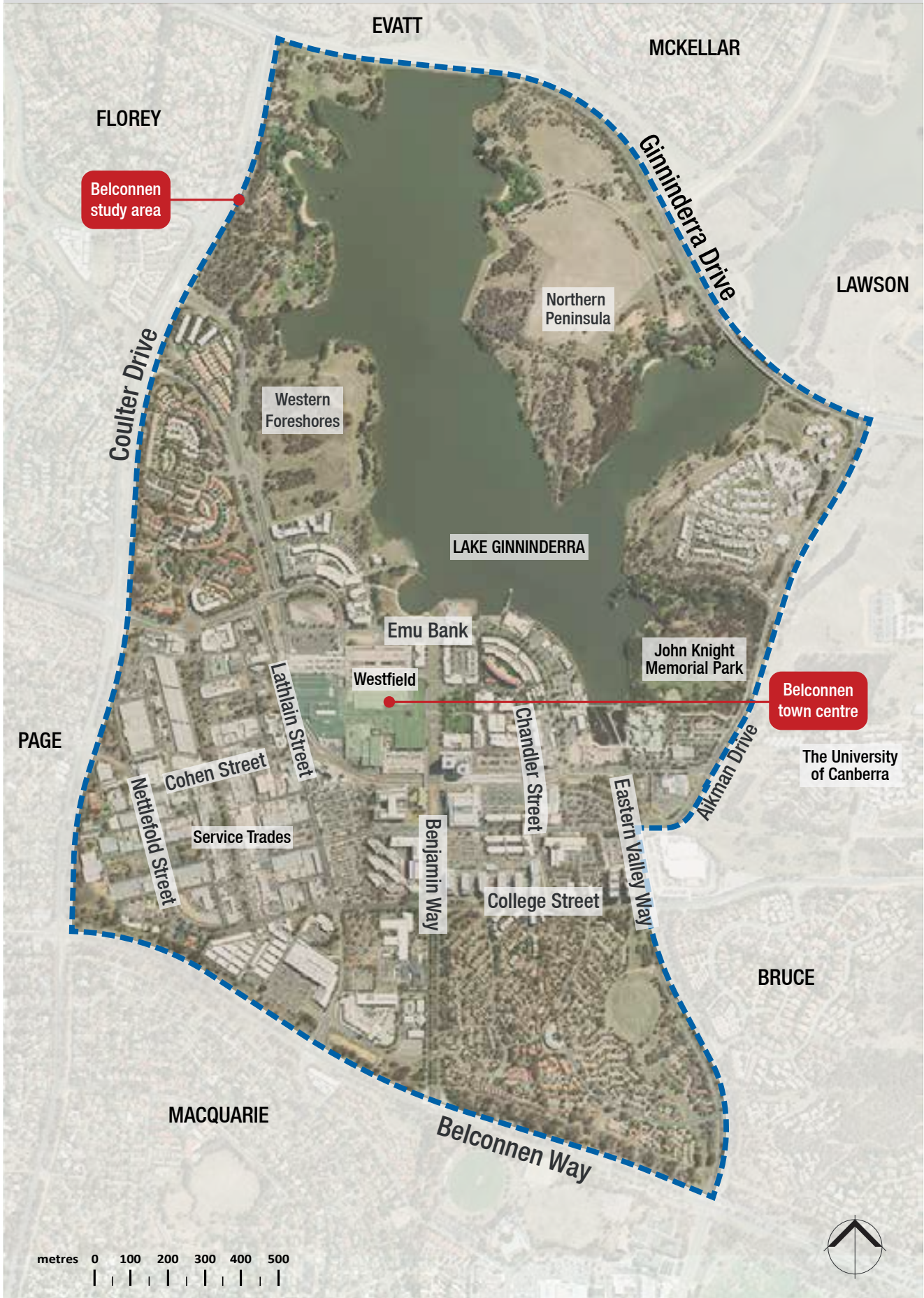




Figure 2: Master plan study area and surrounds

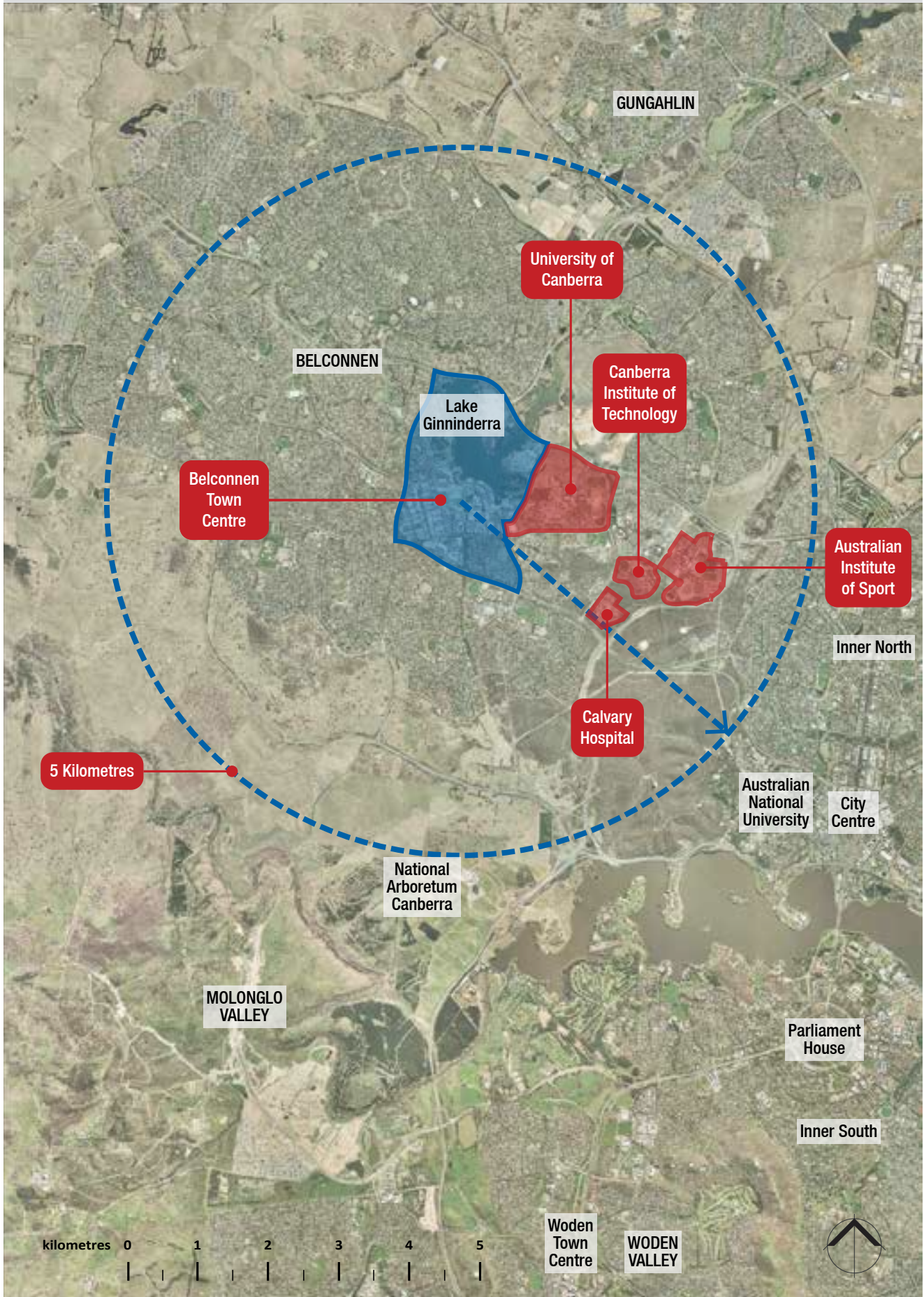
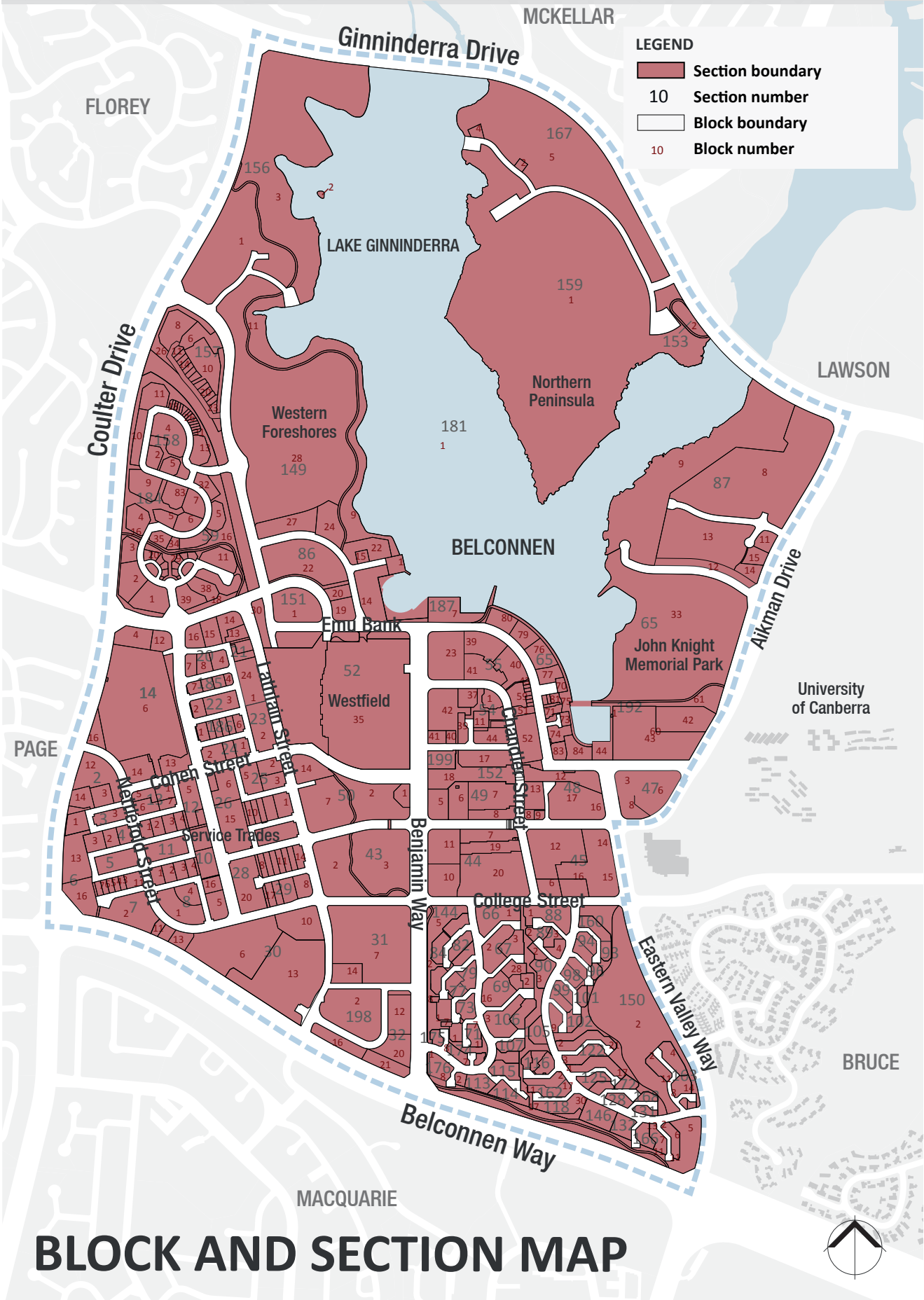




Figure 3: Block and section map





## 1.2 Block and section map

Under the Territory Plan, Canberra is divided into divisions, suburbs, sections and blocks, with blocks usually leased to one entity. Blocks and sections are referred to in this document. Figure 3 provides a quick reference to help the reader identify blocks and sections within the master plan area.

## 1.3 What a master plan does

A master plan defines what is important about a place and identifies opportunities for preserving and enhancing the quality of that place. A master plan offers town and group centres long-term planning frameworks for urban renewal. It is guided by key actions and strategies identified in the ACT Planning Strategy for a more compact and efficient city by focussing urban intensification in these areas.

This master plan provides a vision, a spatial framework and strategies to guide the development of the Belconnen town centre over the next 20+ years.

A master plan is a non-statutory planning document that can recommend the following:

- **Planning policies**

Potential changes and inclusions in the Territory Plan take the form of a new precinct code. The Territory Plan is the key ACT statutory planning document that provides the policy framework for the administration of land use and planning in the ACT. It specifies what can and cannot happen on each block of land. A precinct code sits within the Territory Plan and provides place-specific planning controls. This draft master plan makes recommendations for a new precinct code for the Belconnen town centre and considers appropriate land use, building heights, building setbacks and location of active frontages.

- **Opportunities for land release**

Land release is the sale of Territory-owned land, otherwise known as land release.

- **Public domain upgrades**

Infrastructure and public space improvements are required to realise the vision and some of the strategies of this draft master plan. There are opportunities for the private sector to contribute to the public domain through partnerships with the government or as part of off-site works. Works undertaken by the ACT Government will involve further investigations by various government agencies and funding consideration through future government budget processes. Public domain upgrades that are undertaken by the ACT Government are based on a number of considerations including population growth, the age of existing assets and infrastructure and the wider budget context within the Territory.

- **Further studies**

These may be required to progress some strategies that are either outside of what a master plan can achieve or that may take more time to investigate.

The Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan responds to broader strategic planning policies for the ACT and background analysis on issues and opportunities in the centre. Community and stakeholder engagement played an important role in the development of the draft master plan, with the Environment and Planning Directorate consulting with Belconnen residents, local businesses, community groups, ACT Government agencies and private interest groups. Background analysis and community engagement processes helped identify priorities for improving the centre, which informed this draft master plan.



## 1.4 Master plan process

The master plan process includes three main stages as illustrated in Figure 4, with opportunities for stakeholders and the public to provide input in stages 1 and 2.

Stage 1 involved gathering and analysis of information, including community engagement, to help inform the preparation of this draft master plan.

This draft master plan represents Stage 2 of the process. Feedback is sought from stakeholders and the community and will be used to inform Stage 3, the development of the final master plan for government consideration.

Implementation of the master plan may include land release, capital works (subject to future budgets) and new planning controls in the form of a precinct code in the Territory Plan.

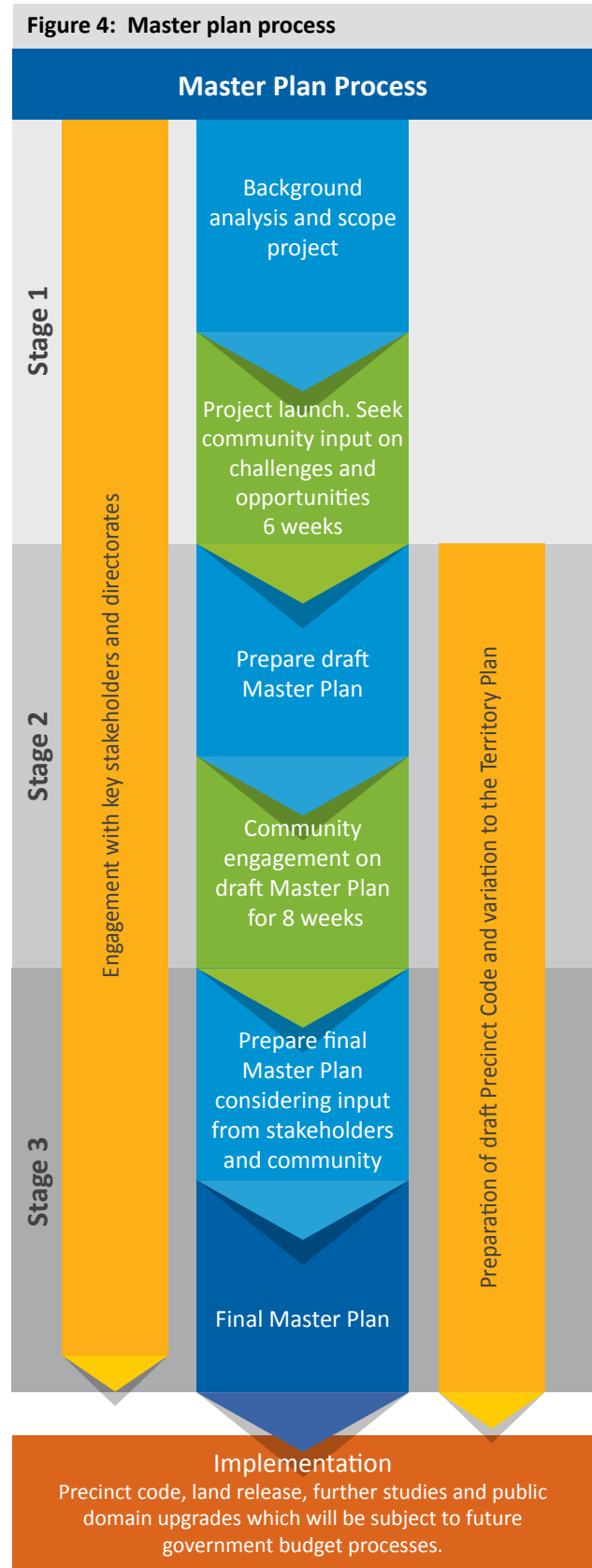
Figure 4 shows how the preparation of a precinct code can run concurrently with the master planning process.

### 1.4.1 Community engagement

Community engagement forms a critical part of the analysis in the early stages of the master planning process and in refining recommendations in the draft master plan.

The background and analysis section of this draft master plan and the Community Engagement Report – Stage 1 provide details of how community engagement has been undertaken and a summary of messages received during the first stage of community engagement. The engagement report can be found at [www.act.gov.au/Belconnen](http://www.act.gov.au/Belconnen)

Figure 4: Master plan process











## 2. Planning context

### 2.1 Strategic planning

A master plan is a strategic policy document that seeks to translate the ACT Government's broader metropolitan policies at a local level.

The following section outlines the policy context that applies to the Belconnen town centre.

#### 2.1.1 ACT Planning Strategy

The ACT Planning Strategy (2012) responds to the changes in the ACT's economic, demographic and environmental circumstances. The strategy outlines a series of directions that will create a more sustainable city:

- focusing urban intensification in town centres and group centres supported by public transport to improve the vitality of centres
- improving the urban quality and liveability of Canberra
- managing the land and natural resources of the area to conserve where appropriate and to manage growth to ensure a prosperous region
- supporting convenient access to a range of facilities, services and opportunities for social interaction by reinforcing the role of group centres as community hubs.

The ACT Planning Strategy's first direction is of particular relevance to this process and promotes a more compact and efficient city by focussing urban growth in town centres, around group centres and along main transit corridors, as illustrated in Figure 5.

#### 2.1.2 Transport for Canberra

Transport for Canberra (2012) is a companion policy to the ACT Planning Strategy (2012). It seeks to integrate urban planning and transport to improve services in Canberra over the next 20 years. Its key policy directions include:

- integrating land use and transport through the Frequent Network of public transit corridors
- making walking and cycling the easiest travel options to encourage active travel, and
- strategically managing the road network and parking.

In addition the importance of building an Integrated Transport Network will help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Canberra's transport network. Integrated transport networks generate economic opportunities and jobs. They are also a catalyst for creating vibrant and attractive urban environments.

**Figure 5: ACT Planning Strategy focuses growth in town centres, around group centres and along transport corridors.**



#### 2.1.3 Climate change action plan

AP2: A New Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for the ACT (2012) is the ACT Government's strategic policy on climate change. AP2 guides the Territory's strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% of 1990 levels by 2020 and to transition the ACT to zero net emissions by 2060.

AP2 provides a pathway to achieve emission reductions through energy efficiency and increased use of renewable energy. It also identifies opportunities for improved environmental performance of buildings and infrastructure.

The projections for the ACT and region are for an increasingly hotter and drier climate with more extreme weather events. Since 2009, the ACT Government has been taking mitigation actions and assisting the community to increase its resilience.



Examples of significant mitigation measures are:

- legislating emission reduction targets for the ACT in 2010: zero by 2060; 80% by 2050; 40% by 2020 (based on 1990 levels)
- investing in renewable energy sources (solar and wind) to meet the ACT's renewable energy target of 90% by 2020 (introduced in 2013)
- introducing the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme obliging ACT electricity retailers to help customers save energy
- adopting the Carbon Neutral ACT Government Framework with its target of zero net operational emissions by 2020, and
- investing in public transport, including Capital Metro light rail, and improving the cycle and pedestrian networks.

#### 2.1.4 ACT water strategy

The ACT Water Strategy 2014–44: Striking the Balance was endorsed by the ACT Government in July 2014. The strategy incorporates three themes and a detailed implementation plan. It will guide the management of the Territory's water supply, water resources and catchment practices over the next 30 years. It builds on the original ACT Water Strategy, Think Water, Act Water. While the emphasis on the original strategy was on water security following the 2003 bushfires and the Millennium Drought, the new strategy also focuses on improved water quality in lakes and streams and greater community participation in a number of key components, such as improving catchment health.

## 2.2 Statutory planning

### 2.2.1 National Capital Plan

The National Capital Plan is the strategic plan for the ACT that is managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA). It ensures Canberra and the Territory are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance.

The National Capital Plan includes 'designated' areas, which are areas considered to be of national importance and include the central national area, national institutions, diplomatic areas, Lake Burley Griffin, approach routes to the city and hills, ridges, and buffers.

The National Capital Plan also includes areas that are considered 'National Land' due to the use of these sites for Australian Government offices. Several of these sites are in the Belconnen town centre.

The NCA prepares development control plans (DCPs) to guide the future development of sites on National Land and assesses all development proposals unless the status of National Land has been revoked. Where a DCP applies to land under control of the ACT Government, development proposals are assessed by the Environment and Planning Directorate and must be in accordance with the DCP.

DCPs identify a range of issues that new development must comply with, including building height, landscaping, pedestrian and vehicular access points.

Figure 6 indicates the sites where DCPs are in place in Belconnen, as well as where the 'National Land' status has been revoked.

### 2.2.2 Territory Plan

The Territory Plan is the ACT Government's key statutory planning document, providing the policy framework for the administration of land use and planning in the ACT. The purpose of the Territory Plan is to manage land use change in a manner consistent with strategic directions set by the ACT Government, Legislative Assembly and the community.

The Territory Plan provides the controls that govern development outcomes. It provides direction on the use of certain locations and requirements for specific development types.

The Belconnen town centre is mostly zoned for commercial land uses, as shown in Figure 7, however there are also large areas of land zoned as residential and urban open space.

While some land is under NCA control, it is also zoned under the Territory Plan and must comply with aspects of the Territory Plan.

A variation to the Territory Plan is a likely outcome of the master plan if land uses or substantial changes to development controls are proposed. The variation will implement a new precinct code into the Territory Plan to update the current Belconnen Precinct Code.

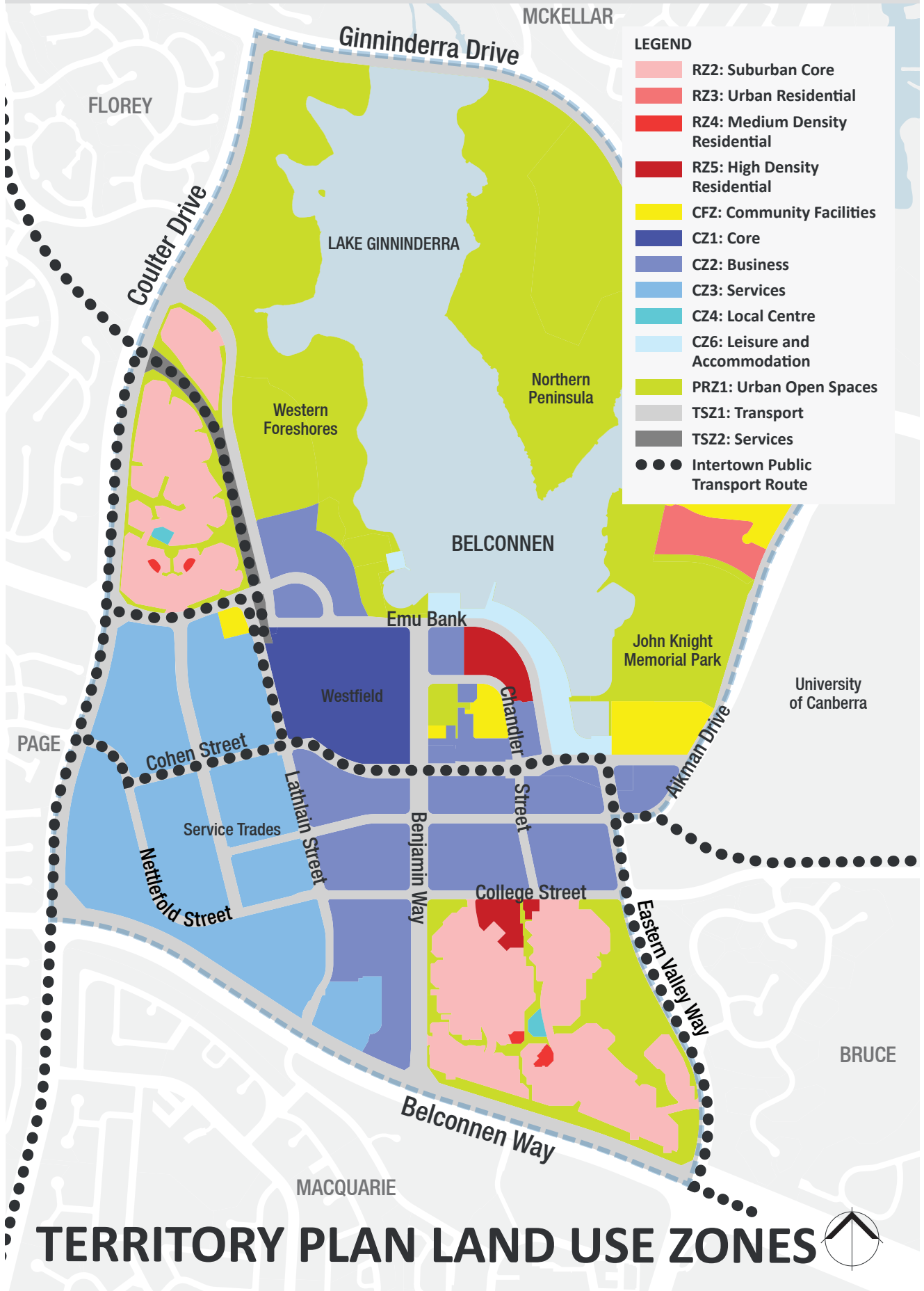


Figure 6: Sites where DCPs are in place in Belconnen, as well as where the 'National Land' status has been revoked.





Figure 7: Territory Plan land use zones





### 2.2.3 The Belconnen Precinct Code

A precinct code outlines place-specific planning controls such as land use, building heights, building design elements, building setbacks and where active frontages should be located. Precinct codes generally take precedence over other codes.

Development applications for development in the centre are submitted and assessed against the Belconnen Precinct Code and other general codes of the Territory Plan, including the parking code.

The Belconnen Precinct Code provides 13 rules and criteria for the town centre, providing direction on additional uses, active frontages, heights and setbacks.

The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan proposed good aspirational qualities for the centre, but these were not all able to be translated into the precinct code, which is reliant on quantifiable measures such as building heights or setbacks.

Recent development applications have revealed the limitations of the current precinct code, particularly in regards to building heights and the interpretation of the term 'desired future character'. Other aspects of the code, such as the extent of required 'active frontage', could be dispersing uses such as retail too broadly across the centre.

A review of the Belconnen Precinct Code, informed by the final version of this master plan, is expected to provide better outcomes and increased certainty to the community, developers and the government.

## 2.3 Spatial context

The need to accommodate Canberra's growth was carefully considered during the early 1960s by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) through the Metropolitan Plan for Canberra.

Each district was planned with a hierarchy of commercial centres comprising town, group and local centres. This structure helped to develop strong communities that had good access to services and jobs, and reinforced Canberra's relationship with its setting. Town centres serve their wider district as the main commercial focus. Group centres provide shops and services for a 'group' of suburbs and local centres typically cater for a single suburb or precinct.

Belconnen was one of several districts identified for development, each linked by arterial roads and separated by open space.

Importantly, this planning also considered that each district should have a core centre to provide employment, recreation and retail services. This decentralised approach provides transport efficiencies and has been adopted by other cities, including Perth and Brisbane.

The ACT Planning Strategy supports the centres hierarchy approach and encourages a more compact city by focusing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along the major public transport corridors.

The centre is located towards the middle of the Belconnen District, and is well served by surrounding arterial roads that provide a good relationship with the city centre. Locating these roads at the perimeter avoids arterial roads separating sections of the town centre.

The centre is separated from Inner North Canberra and the Molonglo area by the bushland of the O'Connor and Bruce ridges to the east and the Pinnacle/Mt Painter to the south. The topography is relatively flat towards the north, with the view of One Tree Hill providing a backdrop.

The centre is an important employment location, with 13,550 people employed there in 2014 from a total Canberra workforce of 227,300. The major employers in the town centre are the Australian Government and retail.

It is estimated there is currently 221,000m<sup>2</sup> of floor space available for retail and services in the town centre, which is a significant attractor for people beyond the Belconnen district. The developing high density residential precinct between Chandler Street and Eastern Valley Way will possibly accommodate an additional 3300 residents (more than the current population of Aranda), which may support additional retail uses in the area, such as a small supermarket.

The centre also provides a significant level of cultural, recreational, educational and health services to the wider district.

## 2.4 Planning history

The creeks, grassland, woodland and forest areas surrounding the Ginninderra Plain area, where much of Belconnen is now located, fell within the tribal boundaries of the Ngunnawal people. Evidence of Aboriginal occupation and links with the land



remain, with several artefact sites located close to the town centre.

The name 'Belconnen' resulted from an early explorer asking a local Aboriginal what the name of the land was. They replied 'Belconen', translated as 'I don't know'<sup>1</sup>. The name was given to land granted to Captain Charles Sturt in 1837 and subsequently the district.

The first European settlers were graziers who were granted large areas of land during the 1830s. The *Free Selection Act 1861* encouraged the settlement of remaining land and establishment of local farming communities. This land was largely divided into square mile lots, influencing the location of the tracks, some of which carry through to current road locations.

The community was centred on the Weetangera School, built in 1875, and the post office. By 1881 the area had a population of 554 (half the population of Queanbeyan at the time). The Belconnen Naval Transmitting Station Village at Lawson was established in 1938 and demolished in the 1980s.

Canberra's increasing population and office space requirements led the NCDC to expand the plan for Canberra in 1959 to include the Belconnen and Woden districts. The site for the Belconnen town centre was selected due to its central location and proximity to watercourses, arterial roads and topographical features that could '*provide interesting urban and landscape design opportunities*'.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to development, the site was occupied by Ginninderra Station, with the station's Emu Bank homestead on a ridge close to where the Belconnen Library now stands. Creek lines either side of the ridge were piped under Benjamin Way and Eastern Valley Way, with an elm tree and plaque now marking the homestead site.

#### 2.4.1 Early planning reports

The first master plan for the centre, as indicated in Figure 8, was developed by the NCDC and endorsed in 1968. Roger Johnson, who designed the Canberra College of Advanced Education campus (now the University of Canberra), was a key contributor to the master plan.

The 1968 master plan sought to reinforce the site's characteristics by locating taller buildings and the core area along the main Emu Bank ridge line with parking, lower buildings and open space located in the valleys. The lake was seen as an integral part of the centre and was not to become a 'lake in a park'.

The core area was based on an upper level pedestrian spine along Chandler Street. This linked the residential area of Emu Ridge, offices, the bus interchange and retail mall to cultural and entertainment facilities at the lake edge.

Landscaping was integral to the early plan, with a distinctive Australian character providing a unifying element in the town centre. This was strengthened through plantings of eucalypts to the perimeter of the centre and around the lake.

While the 1968 plan identified towers up to 20 storeys, a key feature was large floor area office buildings surrounded by large surface carparks. Combined with the scale of the town centre, this resulted in streets that provided little pedestrian amenity. Another key feature was the intention to develop the areas to the north and west of the lake as residential areas.

A review in 1975 recommended the mall be relocated from the Margaret Timpson Park area due to topography limitations. This enabled a larger building, but diluted the initial core area planning.

A further review in 1986 directed future development to provide better pedestrian amenity and relationships to the street. It also clarified the intention to develop the Emu Bank precinct, which had been halted due to concerns from a community group. This was at a time when the centre was expanding and the intended uses such as restaurants opened in the service trades area instead.

#### 2.4.2 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan

The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan enabled significant changes to the structure of the centre and will have an enduring benefit to the town centre.

The 2001 master plan's key goal was to 'protect and strengthen the town centre's role as a diverse, vital and viable place' through better use of existing infrastructure, better links between areas of the centre and opportunities for development.

The master plan included strategies to:

- improve road connections
- provide an active frontage to the mall
- make Benjamin Way the 'Main Street'
- enliven Margaret Timpson Park
- improve the southern lake foreshore
- relocate the bus interchange
- change the character of Lathlain Street
- construct wetlands beside Eastern Valley Way
- place recreation areas on the western side of the lake
- develop the east side of the lake
- establish a location for an indoor swimming pool.

While the issue of heights and building design was considered in detail, maximum heights were generally not specified. Instead the plan detailed principles that should be considered on individual sites when assessing heights.

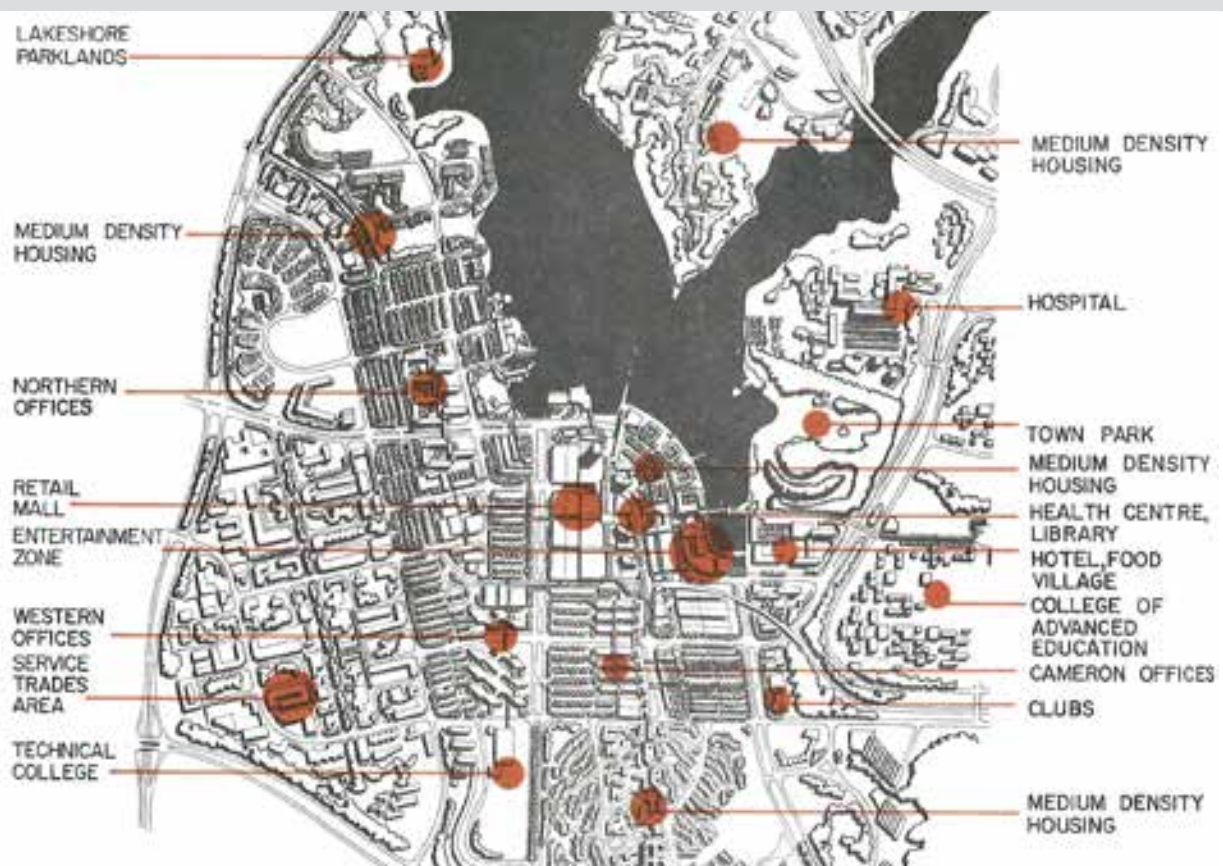
A key component of the 2001 master plan was the implementation schedule, which detailed the timing and funding mechanism for each initiative. Key intents of the master plan were adopted into the Territory Plan through the Town Centres Land Use Policies. This was converted into a rule and criteria format in 2008, before being converted into place specific precinct codes in 2012.

While the plan has been successful in achieving significant change within the centre, many of the detailed requirements were not translated into enforceable rules within the precinct code.

Fourteen years after the 2001 master plan was prepared, there are still a number of recommendations that are yet to be realised. However, given the extent of development that has occurred and the introduction of the ACT Planning Strategy, Transport for Canberra and AP2, it is appropriate to review the plan.

Planning controls in the Territory Plan are being evaluated as part of this master plan review, which may result in changes to the existing Belconnen Precinct Code and Map.

**Figure 8: 1968 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan**



# Belconnen Town Centre

## Draft Master Plan



the town centre?

pedestrian and cycling connections,

Micro-business friendly  
small tenancies  
cheap, short term

Separate bike & pedestrian paths

pram friendly  
bike friendly  
townhouses not high rise  
great streets to walk on & peruse





## 3. Background and analysis

### 3.1 Community engagement

Consultation for the Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan includes two main stages. Each stage informs the master plan as it evolves.

#### 3.1.1 Stage 1 – November 2014 to January 2015

The first stage of community engagement identified the key issues from the community and stakeholders to inform this draft master plan.

Postcards outlining the project were sent to Belconnen district residents and displays were held at Belconnen and Kippax libraries, the University of Canberra (UC), Westfield Belconnen and the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets. Meetings with key stakeholders, several ‘meet the planners’ sessions and a community design workshop were held. Approximately 640 people have participated in discussions or provided comments on the project.

Local community groups publicised the project widely. In particular, the Belconnen Community Council undertook a survey, public display and a joint event with the Belconnen Arts centre and Belconnen Community Service. Pedal Power also undertook a survey. Their efforts are appreciated and greatly assisted in ensuring the wider Belconnen community was able to contribute to this stage of the project.

The community provided 84 submissions and hundreds of individual comments, detailing a range of issues. The key messages included:

- The centre’s public domain and amenity requires improvement, particularly street trees, children’s play areas and remaining open space.
- People want to cycle into the centre, but the cycle paths are not continuous and lack legibility.
- Parking provision requires improvement, particularly for commuters.
- There is general support for increased residential development, with a need to clarify building heights and improve design quality.
- Destinations need to be enhanced, particularly at Emu Bank, to take better advantage of its location as a quality dining precinct.
- The usability of Margaret Timpson Park needs to improve.

Further information on feedback from the engagement can be found in the Stage 1 community engagement report available at: [www.act.gov.au/Belconnen](http://www.act.gov.au/Belconnen). Where appropriate, key messages and relevant background information has informed the development of this draft master plan.

#### 3.1.2 Stage 2 – Draft master plan

Stage 2 of community engagement is seeking community feedback on this draft master plan, which will be used to refine the master plan before it is presented to government for consideration.

Community engagement will also be undertaken on any subsequent changes to the Territory Plan through a separate consultation process.

### 3.2 Character and heritage

Following the adoption of the 1968 master plan, development began in 1970 with construction of the Cameron Offices. The NCDC’s original intentions for the site were five 15-storey buildings; however the architect, John Andrews, provided an alternative solution of nine 4-storey wings, which were more responsive to the site.

The Cameron Offices were innovative with column free floor space, floor to ceiling windows and a cooling system that used lake water. The system’s pump station remains on Emu Bank. Themed courtyards provided an attractive outlook in what was a bare town centre.

While compromised by the demolition of six wings in 2007, the Cameron Offices is one of only ten Australian buildings listed on the International Union of Architect’s register of significant 20th Century buildings. It is also listed on the Commonwealth Heritage list.

The use of off-form concrete in the Cameron Offices set a pattern for the use of the material in the town centre. Most major buildings constructed in the town centre during the following years utilised concrete, which provided a distinct, unifying character to the centre.

Concrete has been used in recent construction, such as the ‘Linq’ apartments and the Belconnen Community Health Centre, reflecting the architectural style and character of earlier buildings.



The centre's large area, typography, wide roads and planning, which segregated uses, has established areas of distinct character, including:

- the service trades area to the west of Lathlain Street
- the mid-rise retail and office core centred on Benjamin Way
- the 'civic' area of Margaret Timpson Park
- the medium density residential areas of Emu Ridge and Totterdell Streets.
- the lake and surrounds
- the lakeside strip along Emu Bank
- the emerging high density residential area of College and Chandler Streets.

The heritage significance of several sites within the centre was previously considered; however, John Knight Memorial Park is the only place listed in the suburb of Belconnen on the ACT Heritage Register.

### 3.2.1 Potential new heritage places or objects

A heritage assessment of buildings, places, objects and artwork was undertaken to assess the potential for additional items of heritage significance within the centre.

The Belconnen Town Centre Library and Tumbling Cubes at Margaret Timpson Park were considered to have sufficient qualities to meet the assessment requirements of the ACT Heritage Act. While the English Elm is a heritage item, being an individual tree it can only be listed on the ACT Tree Register.

These places and objects have not been nominated to the ACT Heritage Register and require further assessment to determine if they are of heritage value. It is recommended these items undergo further investigation for heritage significance and be nominated to the ACT heritage and tree registers.

### 3.2.2 Places of Aboriginal heritage significance

A preliminary Aboriginal heritage assessment was undertaken to identify locations in the centre that may be significant. While there are no recorded Aboriginal sites in the centre area, there are sites in the surrounding area including Bruce.

Three areas have been identified as being relatively undisturbed by construction activity and have moderate potential for archaeological deposits to occur. These areas are in public open space, close to the lake and are unlikely to be developed.

It is recommended that if any ground-breaking or development work is proposed for these areas, an archaeological survey and heritage assessment be undertaken, to identify the need for any further heritage investigation of these areas.

## 3.3 Demographics

### 3.3.1 Population

The 1968 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan indicates the district of Belconnen was planned to support a community of 120,000 people with 10,700 residents living in the town centre. In 2014 Belconnen's population was 96,980 with 6020 people living in the centre.

The centre was also intended to be an important employment hub for Canberra, supporting 20,000 employees. In 2014 an estimated 13,550 people worked in the centre.

As summarised on Figure 9, Canberra's population is projected to grow from 387,070 in 2014 to a projected population of 493,500 by 2031. The town centre is projected to grow to 8450 during the same period.<sup>3</sup> This growth will require additional retailing, housing and employment locations. The 2012 ACT Planning Strategy provides clear strategies to accommodate this growth, reduce urban sprawl and increase sustainability. A key outcome is to focus urban intensification in town centres.

The population of the Belconnen district is projected to grow to 102,200 by 2031<sup>4</sup>, not including the proposed West Belconnen development.

The centre's age profile is currently skewed towards 20–34 year olds, with 50% of the population within this age bracket compared to 25% for the rest of the ACT. However, Belconnen has a lower proportion of people under 20, with 14% of the population within this age group compared a Canberra average of 25%.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 9: Snapshot of Belconnen District and suburb

## POPULATION

Population in ACT	
2004	328,940
2014	387,070
2031	493,500

Population in Belconnen suburb	
2004	2,957
2014	5,774
2031	8,450

Population in Belconnen suburb is anticipated to grow **40% by 2031**

### Median age

- 29** for Belconnen (suburb)
- 34** for the Belconnen district
- 34** for the ACT

## DWELLINGS

36,928 dwellings in Belconnen District

**2,287**

Dwellings in Belconnen town centre (2011)

**72%** Dwellings are detached in the Belconnen district

Household types in Belconnen (suburb)

- 39%** Single persons
- 29%** Couples
- 19%** with children
- 12%** group

## EMPLOYMENT

**13,550**

Jobs in Belconnen Town Centre

**67%**

Of Belconnen town centre workers live in the Belconnen District

**30.5%** of jobs in the town centre are public administration

**10.1%** of jobs in the town centre are in retail

## TRANSPORT

Transport modes used by Belconnen district residents to get to work

- 70.8%** Car
- 6.3%** Bus
- 2.3%** Walk
- 1.8%** Cycle

Transport modes of workers to Belconnen town centre

- 80%** Car
- 10%** Bus
- 6%** Walk
- 2%** Cycle



The centre needs to be attractive and cater for all ages and abilities. It is estimated around 12% of apartments within the centre core house children<sup>3</sup>; however, neither the apartment complexes nor the centre core provide facilities specifically for this group. A large number of children visit the town centre when families go shopping or when visiting people who live there.

Around 11% of the population in both the Belconnen district and centre are aged over 65<sup>5</sup>, and this proportion is increasing. The centre should be easy to move around and feel safe for people of all ages.

Another group requiring consideration is young people. Young people need to have space that is safe and that meets their needs.

### 3.3.2 Residential development

With an estimated 6020 people living in the centre in 2014 and a projected population of 8450 in 2031, the centre will accommodate growth of around 2430 additional people by 2031. A high proportion of single and group households choose to live in the centre, which reflects its diverse housing options and proximity to employment and the University of Canberra.

The centre has sufficient capacity to house additional residents without the need to increase the development potential of the majority of the service trades area, the residential areas at Totterdell Street and Emu Ridge, or public open space near the lake.

Comments have been received indicating the need to provide more medium density housing rather than apartments in the centre. While there is demand for this housing type, it already forms 30% of the developed area of the centre.

Taller residential assist to reduce urban sprawl and being close to services, employment and public transport. The town centres and city centre are considered appropriate locations to provide the housing choice offered by taller buildings. These developments were initially thought to mainly attract investors and students, but are attracting a wide variety of people including those wanting to downsize but stay in the area. Discussions with residents indicate that strong communities are also forming within taller buildings.

### 3.3.3 Infrastructure

An infrastructure capacity study was undertaken to determine if the existing services were able to support the additional residential development proposed in the centre. Study outcomes indicate there are no immediate constraints to development, although future improvements are proposed to sewer, stormwater, electricity and gas in the town centre area.

### 3.3.4 Employment

An estimated 13,550 people<sup>3</sup> were employed in the Belconnen town centre in 2013, around 6.1% of the ACT's total workforce of 227,300. The main employers are retail and the Australian Government, particularly the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) (3600 employees), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (1468 employees).<sup>6</sup>

Providing employment within the town centres was a key feature of their creation. Employment helps support local businesses, reduces traffic congestion across Canberra and improves property values. A large number of people live in the Belconnen district because they work there.

Canberra has experienced an economic downturn with a high office vacancy rate, low retail growth, stagnating wages and weak construction activity. Canberra's unemployment rate is predicted to grow from 3.6% in 2014 to 6.7% in 2017. This downturn is attributed to uncertainty caused by proposed reductions in Australian Government employment.

DIBP are currently assessing location options and may decide to relocate out of the town centre. Employment by DIBP equates to almost 25% of jobs in the town centre and any movement of jobs away from the town centre will have a significant impact on the local economy.

This threat highlights the need for Belconnen to diversify its economy and reduce the reliance on the Australian Government to provide jobs.

Part of the opportunity for additional employment lies in strengthening Belconnen's existing advantages. The proximity of the centre to UC, Calvary Hospital and AIS, along with the proposed university hospital, provides Belconnen with strong potential for employment growth.



Rather than developing these facilities in isolation, they should be integrated, enabling relationships and new jobs to grow. Integration of planning for the centre with the university will ensure these benefits are realised; that services, transport and amenities are effectively provided; and the area becomes a competitive and attractive location for investment.

The economic and employment opportunities of this area have been recognised by the ACT Government's business development strategy, released in June 2015. This strategy promotes the development of a sports technology cluster, based on the AIS, Australian Sports Commission and the UC; as well as a health innovation cluster, recognising the relationship between the Health Faculty at UC, Calvary Hospital and the new UC hospital.

The success of the redevelopment of the Childers Street area has enabled the Australian National University (ANU) to successfully integrate with the city centre. The future integration of UC and the town centre will ensure Belconnen becomes a 'university town'.

There is some community concern that the sale of Territory-owned sites within the centre may compromise the ability to provide for future employment. The town centre area is considered to have sufficient capacity for additional employment purposes well into the future.

If the Australian Government relocate jobs out of Belconnen, there is likely to be pressure to enable the residential development of vacant office buildings. The retention of these sites for employment is fundamental to keeping the diversity of uses in the centre.

## 3.4 Land use

### 3.4.1 Land use zones

Belconnen was planned with separate land use areas, resulting in areas of distinct character. As indicated in Figure 7, allowable uses are determined by the Territory Plan's land use zones, which specify the type of development that can occur. While allowable uses are listed for each zone, these are often further limited by individual leases.

The Core Zone (CZ1) requires commercial uses that contribute to a diverse and active character. This area is largely taken up by Westfield Belconnen.

The Business Zone (CZ2) is mainly office areas, however this is expanding to include a mix of uses including clubs and high density residential. The Services Zone (CZ3) is generally west of Lathlain Street and is intended for lower rent commercial uses. Residential uses are allowable, despite possible conflict with other uses.

There are other zones supporting specific uses, including a Leisure and Accommodation Zone (CZ6) at Emu Bank, Community Facilities (CFZ) zoned areas to support uses such as schools and churches; and two CZ4 areas, intended for local shops.

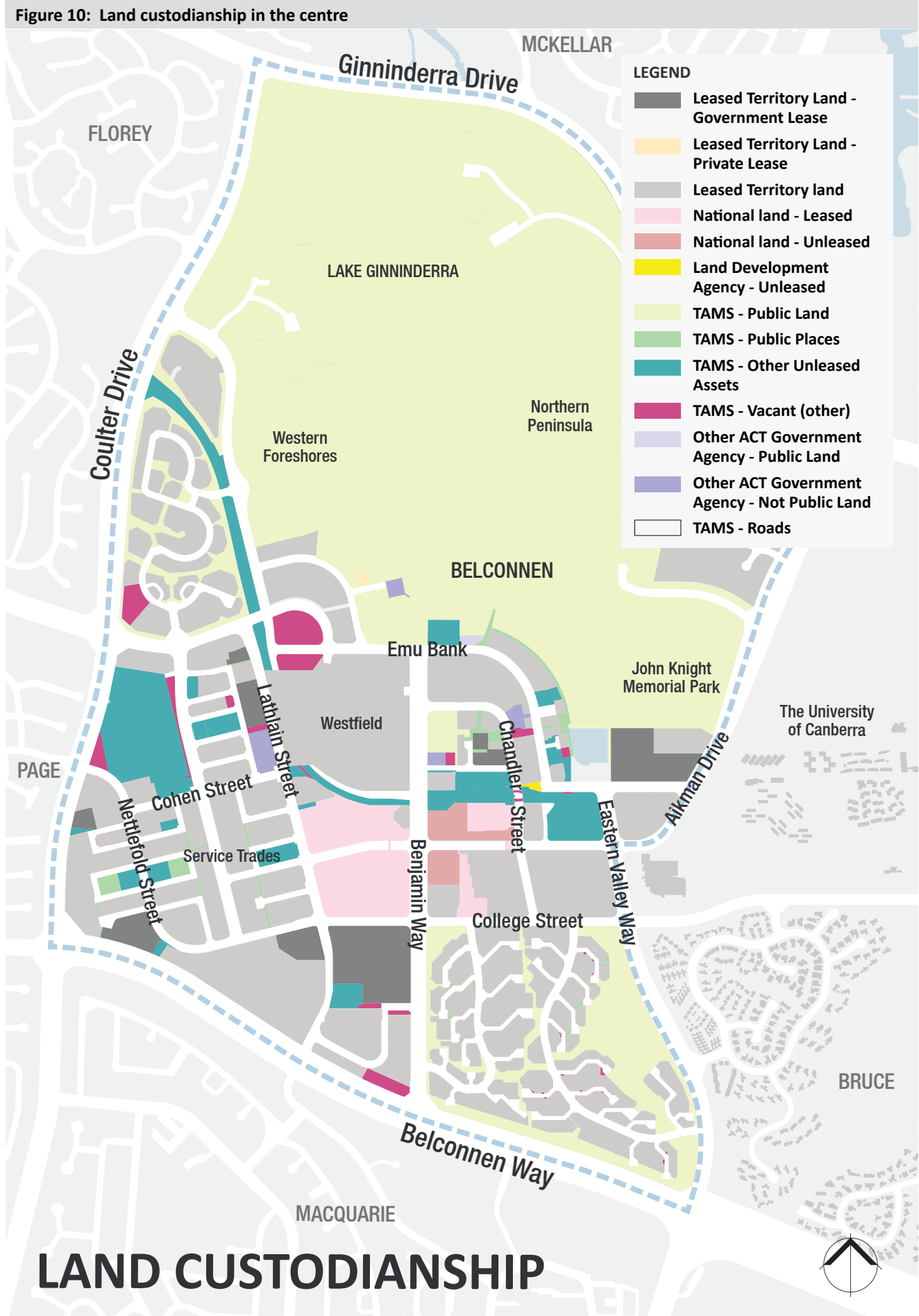
The centre has three large areas of medium density housing developed during the 1980s and 1990s, mainly zoned Suburban Core Zone (RZ2). The planning and density of these areas are now considered more appropriate to a suburban area than a town centre. Future redevelopment of these areas to a more appropriate density will be difficult due to restrictive block and road layouts and separate leases.

Residential use is permitted in all of the above commercial land use zones.

In the centre, most sites are now privately leased, as illustrated on Figure 10. While there are comparatively few vacant sites or carparks still owned by the ACT Government, there are several sites including the Belconnen Bus Depot and the Winchester Centre, which may be suitable for distant future redevelopment.



Figure 10: Land custodianship in the centre





### 3.4.2 Community facilities

The centre supports a range of community facilities for the wider district including:

- five churches
- five childcare centres
- the Belconnen Senior Citizens Club
- medical facilities, including the new Belconnen Community Health Centre
- Lake Ginninderra College
- Lake Ginninderra Sea Scouts
- emergency services including police, ambulance and fire
- Kangara Waters aged care facility and residences
- the Belconnen Arts Centre
- the Belconnen Library
- the Canberra International Sports and Aquatic Centre (CISAC).

The location of community facilities is indicated on Figure 11. While Belconnen has a broad range of community facilities there is a comparatively low amount of land zoned as Community Facilities Zone (CFZ). An increase in the residential population of the town centre may increase the usage; however, no additional facilities have been identified as being required.

#### Belconnen Community Service

Belconnen Community Service (BCS) provides a large number of services, including youth, disability, and children's support and recreation programs. BCS also operates the Belconnen Community Centre, providing space for theatre events, community classes and child care.

BCS has a limited budget and is seeking ways to reduce operating costs. This may involve relocation elsewhere within the centre.

#### Belconnen Arts Centre

The Belconnen Arts Centre opened in 2009 and has changed the character of Belconnen through an increased opportunity for access to art and cultural events. The centre offers a range of dance and art classes, art exhibitions and events. Its location on the lake edge at Emu Bank adds to the diversity of uses in this area.

The second stage of the centre has been designed to provide a theatre and dance studio, and will be a substantial addition to the centre and the cultural life of Belconnen.

#### Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)

Although outside of the core study area, the CIT Bruce campus is an important consideration of this draft master plan. The campus is relatively large and is located away from the rapid transport route. Changing student and teaching requirements, together with increasing operation and maintenance costs, may lead the ACT Government to consider more cost-effective alternatives to the current facility over time.

These alternatives may involve relocation to the town centre core in a smaller and more efficient building, or combining the campus with other similar community or education uses.

#### Emergency services

The emergency services group were some of the first buildings constructed in Belconnen. It comprises the former Belconnen Police Station, remand centre, the ambulance station and fire brigade. With the opening of the Alexander Maconochie Centre in 2009, the remand centre became redundant, as did the police station in 2012 when the new Belconnen police station was constructed. Construction of a new emergency services facility in Aranda to house ambulance and fire services is anticipated to be completed in 2016. The relocation of services out of Lathlain Street will enable this area to be redeveloped.

### 3.4.3 Sport and recreation facilities

The centre is fortunate to be close to a range of quality sporting and recreation facilities. Lake Ginninderra provides an attractive background to many of these including the shared pedestrian and cycle path, play areas, off-lead dog park, and swimming and sailing opportunities.

Other facilities such as CISAC, ten pin bowling, multi-use courts at the community centre and Lake Ginninderra College, cinemas, the Canberra City Gymnastics Club and the basketball centre have significantly improved the range of facilities in the centre. The skate park is rated by skating organisations as one of Australia's best.



Figure 11: Community, sport and recreation facilities







While not in the centre, the Jamison enclosed oval, tennis courts and Big Splash Water Park are all within walking distance, and some AIS and UC facilities are also available to the public.

Apart from the proposed expansion of the basketball centre, there are currently no plans for additional sports facilities in the centre.

### 3.4.4 University of Canberra (UC)

The UC opened as the Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAЕ) in 1970. In 2014 UC had 16,300 students, including 3800 international students, and provided accommodation for 2400 people.

The higher education and research sector, including the UC are significant contributors to the ACT's economy, adding \$2.75 billion each year and providing significant employment. International students are recognised as the ACT's biggest single export earner.

The ACT Government has recognised the significant opportunity for growth at the UC by amending the University of Canberra Act, to encourage further development of the campus and partnerships with private research based businesses. An improved relationship between the town centre and UC will provide new employment opportunities and a unified, efficient and cohesive urban environment.

The 2014 UC Urban Plan sets a clear path for future development of the campus. Future revisions of the Urban Plan, together with this draft master plan, provides the opportunity to focus on achieving greater integration of UC and the town centre. In particular, consideration should be given to the opportunities to locate more business and enterprise focused uses close to the town centre, as well as road connections and a formal entrance to the UC campus from the town centre.

Planning for the AIS, CIT and Calvary Hospital did not provide main frontages to Haydon Drive, and now require an additional local bus service instead of utilising the adjacent rapid service. Convenient access to rapid public transport services should be a key consideration of the new university hospital.

### 3.4.5 Commercial and retail

Belconnen has an estimated 221,000m<sup>2</sup> of retail and services floor area and an estimated 184,000m<sup>2</sup> of commercial office space. The biggest source of retail floor space is Westfield Belconnen with 290 retailers and 94,700 m<sup>2</sup> floor area.

This was Australia's biggest shopping centre when it opened as the Belconnen Mall in 1978. Westfield Belconnen underwent significant expansion in 2012, providing a bus waiting lounge and active frontage to Lathlain Street.

Canberra has experienced its highest ever office vacancy rate, calculated at 15.4% in January 2015.<sup>7</sup> The ACT's retail sector was also Australia's weakest performing in 2014, with turnover growth of 0.1% compared to NSW's growth of 6.7%.<sup>8</sup>

Many small businesses in the centre are finding the current conditions difficult. The potential relocation of DIBP out of the centre may further impact the viability of these businesses. Other concerns with commercial and retail activity in the centre includes parking capacity and the long-term development plans of UC. Recent changes will enable an extensive range of uses to be developed there, which may compete with existing town centre businesses.

However, the ABS indicate the ACT economy grew by 1.4% during the March 2015 quarter, which was the strongest in the country. This indicates the ACT economy has become more resilient and diversified. The centre is in a good position to become the preferred location for shopping and business in Canberra.

### 3.4.6 Service Trades area

Belconnen town centre supports a large number of small businesses, offering a diverse range of services, throughout the centre. These businesses are often locally owned and provide significant employment and activity to the centre.

Many of these businesses are located in the service trades area, an area intended for lower rent uses and those with noise and odour issues. The area supports a successful group of car dealers along Josephson Street, providing a competitive destination for car buyers.

Maintaining suitable and convenient areas for these kinds of businesses is important. Development controls currently allow residential uses and permit buildings over two storeys. If residential development occurs, it could conflict with surrounding uses.



The service trades area is divided by Cohen Street, with the southern areas of Oatley Court and Weedon Close having greater activity and identity than the area to the north. The area to the north is dominated by the bus depot and emergency services, and is less active due to limited access.

Comments from small business owners include a range of concerns that require consideration:

- A lack of suitable short-term parking adjacent to their business. Many of these spaces are utilised by office workers and car dealers or repairers.
- A lack of parking enforcement, with parking at the rear of businesses preventing deliveries.
- A lack of overall amenity. The area has around 180 businesses but lacks toilets, bike racks and street trees and has poor paving.
- There is a lack of identity or 'brand' association to the area.
- A lack of controls to prevent large franchised business moving in and forcing out long term, locally-owned business.
- There is concern about regulation and limits on aspects such as signage and outdoor furniture.

### 3.4.7 Emu Bank

The Emu Bank Precinct has a good mix of activities and uses including the Belconnen Arts Centre, retail and commercial uses, restaurants, the skate park, Lake Ginninderra College, a bowling centre, a church and residential areas. The mix of activities, together with the shared path linking John Knight Memorial Park and the UC attract a large range of people during the day and night.

As outlined, the area adjacent to the lake was always intended as an entertainment precinct, and is zoned Leisure and Accommodation (CZ6). The precinct code also has an allowable use of residential, an option not taken up until recently.

Community engagement revealed both a strong desire to encourage more uses that take advantage of the location, and dissatisfaction with building design and sites being dominated by parking.

The buildings are generally located close to the lake to maximise parking areas. This has resulted in limited opportunities for outdoor dining. The fast food drive throughs are considered unattractive and a poor use of the location. However the fast food outlets themselves are popular.

Given the location and mix of uses, this area has potential to be a key destination for Canberra. It should be more attractive and busy.

### Entertainment

Belconnen town centre has a range of bars, restaurants, cinemas, clubs and theatres. However, they are dispersed throughout the centre and lack a clear destination or 'brand'. Restaurants patrons often have little incentive to stay on in the centre after a meal, with no obvious activity or venues in many locations.

A large group of taverns and bars opened in Weedon Close during the 1980s. While lacking character, the grouping attracted people and the area became a popular destination. The last of these—The Pot Belly—remains a popular live music venue.

People from Belconnen go to places such as Manuka, Bunda Street, and Kingston because they offer choice and activity in one area. As a centre serving almost 97,000 people, Belconnen should be able to offer a destination that is competitive, busy and desirable.

## 3.5 Transport and movement

The centre's transport system has a sound structure, with perimeter arterial roads and a clear central public transport spine. It generally lacks the congestion or division by arterial roads that many urban centres experience.

As indicated in Figure 12, the reconfiguration of bus routes to service three main stops has enabled better access to public transport across the centre, and the future possibility of light rail to the town centre could further improve this.

The centre's transport system will need to support a number of large new developments in the near future.

The proposed university hospital near Aikman Drive and new apartment buildings near Eastern Valley Way may increase traffic as well as parking and public transport demand.



Figure 12: Rapid transport





### 3.5.1 Public transport

The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan recommended changes to the bus operations in the centre, including removing the existing bus interchange and relocating the buses to on-street bus stops. This proposal has been realised and enabled the re-development of the original interchange, as well as the creation of new stops on Lathlain Street and Cohen Street. These changes have led to improved pedestrian connections between bus stops, shopping areas and new mixed use developments. They have also improved street verges, making the centre a more attractive place for pedestrians.

Some bus stops in the centre may come under increasing demand in coming years, particularly the existing stops on Eastern Valley Way between Aikman Drive and Emu Bank, and the Westfield bus station which is almost at capacity.

### 3.5.2 Light rail master plan

The Light Rail Master Plan is currently investigating the potential for the expansion of a light rail network across Canberra. The outcomes of the plan will inform future decision making about extensions to Capital Metro Stage 1 (between the city centre and Gungahlin). The master plan builds on work already undertaken on light rail and integrated land use and transport planning, and delivers on ACT Government policies, including Transport for Canberra and the ACT Planning Strategy.

### 3.5.3 Active Travel

#### Walking

Active travel involves physical activity such as walking and cycling. With significant economic and health benefits, the ACT Government has a policy on active travel which aims to increase the number of people walking and cycling.

Nationally, Canberra has the third highest rate of people walking. The 2011 Census indicates 14.2% of people living in the town centre used walking as the only method to get to work, while only 1.8% of Weetangera residents and 3.1% of Page residents walked to work. What is preventing more people walking to the centre from surrounding suburbs?

Analysis and comments received during consultation revealed a number of factors which may influence people's choice to walk:

- Several footpaths are perceived as unsafe; for example, underpasses without lighting or areas which are secluded with no passive surveillance.
- Footpaths are often not legible and connections unclear, with the quickest routes not obvious.
- Footpaths are lacking in some places or the quality is poor, with changing materials, or are obstructed by signage or lighting.
- There is a lack of clear directional signage for pedestrians.
- Footpaths should be attractive and easy to use.

Figure 13 indicates the existing pedestrian network. Given one in five Australians has a disability, the centre should be accessible and usable by everyone.

#### Cycling

Canberra has the nation's highest cycle usage rate. However, the 2011 Census indicates only 1.8% of employed people living in the Belconnen district chose to ride to work, despite being close to employment.

Cycling infrastructure improvements attracted the highest number of consultation comments. This was reinforced by the survey of cycling issues in the town centre provided by Pedal Power, which revealed 73% of respondents considered cycling to the town centre was easy, but only 29% considered cycling within the town centre easy.

Analysis of the area's cycle infrastructure, as indicated on Figure 14, reveals some key issues:

- A lack of cycle infrastructure on Belconnen Way, west of Coulter Drive. Cyclists must use a busy car lane or the footpath and risk cars reversing out of driveways.
- On-road cycle lanes that terminate without an off-road alternative.
- A lack of suitable lanes on College Street, linking the centre to the UC, Calvary Hospital, CIT, the AIS and Radford College.
- A need for better links to the centre from the north-west, including Florey and Evatt.
- A lack of suitable cycle lanes on Lathlain Street that could link the Westfield Belconnen with the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets and Jamison.
- Consultation noted a possible shortage of secure bicycle parking at key destinations.

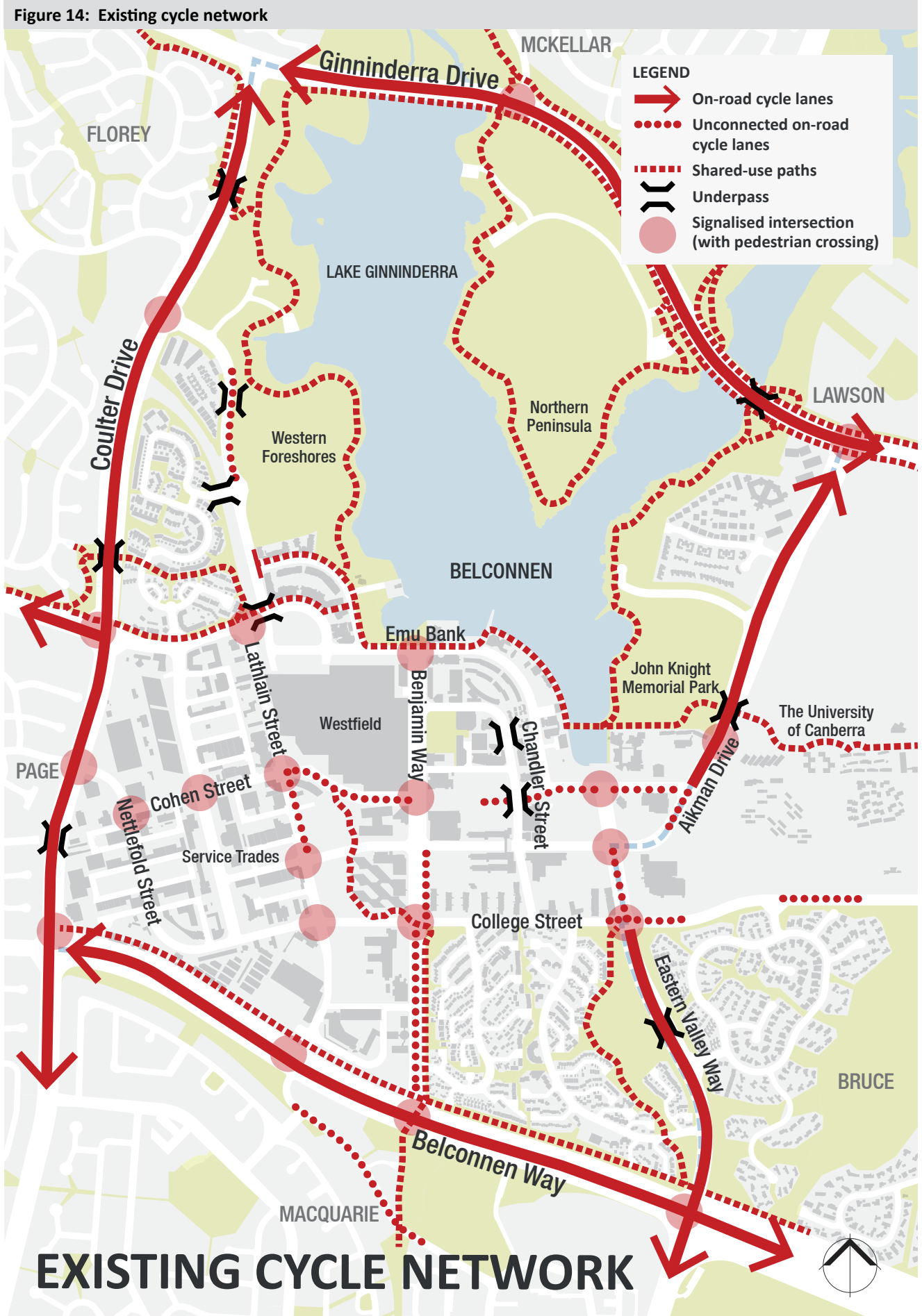


Figure 13: Existing Pedestrian Network





Figure 14: Existing cycle network





- Some shared paths are too narrow to accommodate the demand, such as the shared path on the Ginninderra Drive Bridge.
- A lack of cycle connections within the town centre. Cycle lanes and shared paths terminate at the edge of the centre, requiring cyclists to use footpaths or ride on the road.
- Paths within the centre are often narrow and obstructed with street lights, bollards or traffic signals, making it difficult for cyclists to travel on.

Safe, connected and legible cycle infrastructure that links to key destinations is important. The centre is ideally suited to cycling, with wide roads, dispersed destinations, good topography and a population who enjoy cycling.

Cycling has a range of benefits including improved health, reduced traffic congestion and reduced pollution. A study by the Heart Foundation has highlighted the economic benefits of cycling, with each car parking space generating \$6 per hour for local businesses, compared to \$31 per hour for bicycle parking.<sup>9</sup>

The centre has tremendous potential to improve the rate of cycling, increasing health and economic benefits and improving sustainability and social equity.

### 3.5.4 Road network and traffic

Traffic movement into and around the centre has been aided by the extension of a number of roads identified in the 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan. However, cars searching for spaces to park still create congestion on several streets. For example, Lathlain Street suffers parking-related congestion at peak times.

The growth of the centre has created additional strain on many of its entry roads. Aikman Drive suffers from southbound congestion in the morning peak and northbound congestion in the afternoon. Additional traffic will be generated along Aikman Drive with the completion of the new suburb of Lawson and the construction of the university hospital. Luxton Street suffers peak hour congestion between Josephson Street and Coulter Drive, as does Joynton Smith Drive between Morrell Close and Beissel Street.

Some arterial roads around the edge of the centre are also congested in peak periods. This includes stretches of Ginninderra Drive and Belconnen Way between Coulter Drive and Lathlain Street. This slows traffic entering the town centre and traffic to other destinations.

Figure 15 indicates the existing traffic volumes on the centre road network during the morning peak hour.

Although measures have been taken to reduce traffic on Emu Bank, the area still presents some safety concerns.

The width of Emu Bank together with numerous driveways off its eastern side, make navigation difficult for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians. The large amount of parking space also detracts from the visual appeal of the area, which could be one of Canberra's most attractive entertainment areas.

### 3.5.5 Parking

Background analysis and community engagement on parking in the centre found that:

- Small businesses in the service trades area are reliant on short-stay spaces near their shops for customer parking. These are often used for all day parking by commuters or by other businesses including car dealers and repairers.
- There is a perception there is insufficient parking provided to meet peak demands.
- Developments approved without providing on-site parking are now reliant on adjacent carparks for their long-term needs.

The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan considered parking was adequate, with supply considered to exceed 10,000 spaces and peak demand at 6000 spaces. The location of current carparks is indicated on Figure 16.



A survey and analysis of parking was undertaken throughout the day and evening on the peak days of Thursday and Saturday, as outlined on Table 1.

Key findings include:

- Parking at Westfield Belconnen is often nearing capacity (98%) at peak times on Saturdays.
- The undersupply of all day car spaces for offices in the central area is encouraging commuters to use short-stay spaces in the service trades area or park in other areas.

A 90% utilisation rate is considered to be the capacity of a carpark. Although the total peak demand of the centre is 86%, there are several large public carparks where the demand for spaces is at 95% or greater.

The Parking and Vehicular Access General Code includes two key provisions for the Belconnen town centre which require review:

- Office developments in the CZ2 zone in the city centre are required to provide two spaces per 100m<sup>2</sup> GFA, whereas Belconnen is only required to provide one space per 100m<sup>2</sup> GFA.
- There is no requirement to provide parking for residential uses in the town centres or the city centre.

Other aspects which require consideration when determining parking requirements include:

- Transport for Canberra aims to increase people walking, cycling or using buses to get to work from 15.4% in 2006 to 30% in 2026.
- The ACT Government's Parking Action Plan (2015) which provides a policy for the provision of parking to ensure it is more effectively and fairly provided.
- The ACT Government is proposing to undertake a trial of 'smart parking', which monitors car spaces and provides information about vacant carparks through road signs and to phone apps.
- Apartment buildings provide carparks for each dwelling, however not every dwelling requires the car space. Currently the public are unable to use these vacant spaces.
- The possible relocation or expansion of Australian Government Departments will have a significant impact on parking. An expansion will require additional parking to meet the demands of 1500 additional employees.

**Table 1: Current parking demand in the town centre**

Parking restriction and capacity	Peak weekday demand *	Peak Saturday demand *
<b>Service trades area</b>		
Less than 1 hour: 126	75%: 95	70%: 89
1–2 hours : 1243	91%: 1126	84%: 1041
3–6 hours: 94	89%: 84	86%: 81
6–9 hours: 394	94%: 372	79%: 313
Unrestricted: 144	85%: 123	78%: 113
Park & Ride: 27	96%: 26	89%: 24
Private / permit: 21741	71%: 1545	67%: 1456
Disability parking: 24	62%: 15	75%: 18
<b>TOTAL: 4226</b>	<b>80%: 3386</b>	<b>74%: 3135</b>
<b>Emu Bank area</b>		
Less than 1 hour: 64	51%: 33	50%: 32
1–2 hours : 426	82%: 349	85%: 363
3–6 hours: 65	85%: 55	90%: 59
6–9 hours: 596	83%: 496	88%: 524
Unrestricted: 266	64%: 171	26%: 70
Private / permit: 4641	72%: 334	22%: 102
Disability parking: 31	61%: 19	75%: 17
<b>TOTAL: 1912</b>	<b>76%: 1457</b>	<b>61%: 1166</b>
<b>Central area</b>		
Less than 1 hour: 22	100%: 22	25%: 4
6–9 hours: 1281	100%: 1281	32%: 418
Unrestricted: 55	80%: 44	98%: 54
Private / permit: 11691	95%: 1113	15%: 175
Disability parking: 6	100%: 6	16%: 1
Westfield: 2785	85%: 2367	98%: 2730
<b>TOTAL: 5318</b>	<b>91%: 4833</b>	<b>63%: 3382</b>
<b>CISAC</b>		
Paved spaces: 486	41%: 200	90%: 404
Gravel overflow: 120	0%: 0	22%: 27
<b>TOTAL: 606</b>	<b>33%: 200</b>	<b>71%: 431</b>
<b>Parking in suburban streets</b>		
Assumed to be going to central area	500	
<b>TOTAL: 12062</b>	<b>86%: 10376</b>	<b>69%: 8322</b>





Figure 15: Existing peak traffic volume during morning peak hour

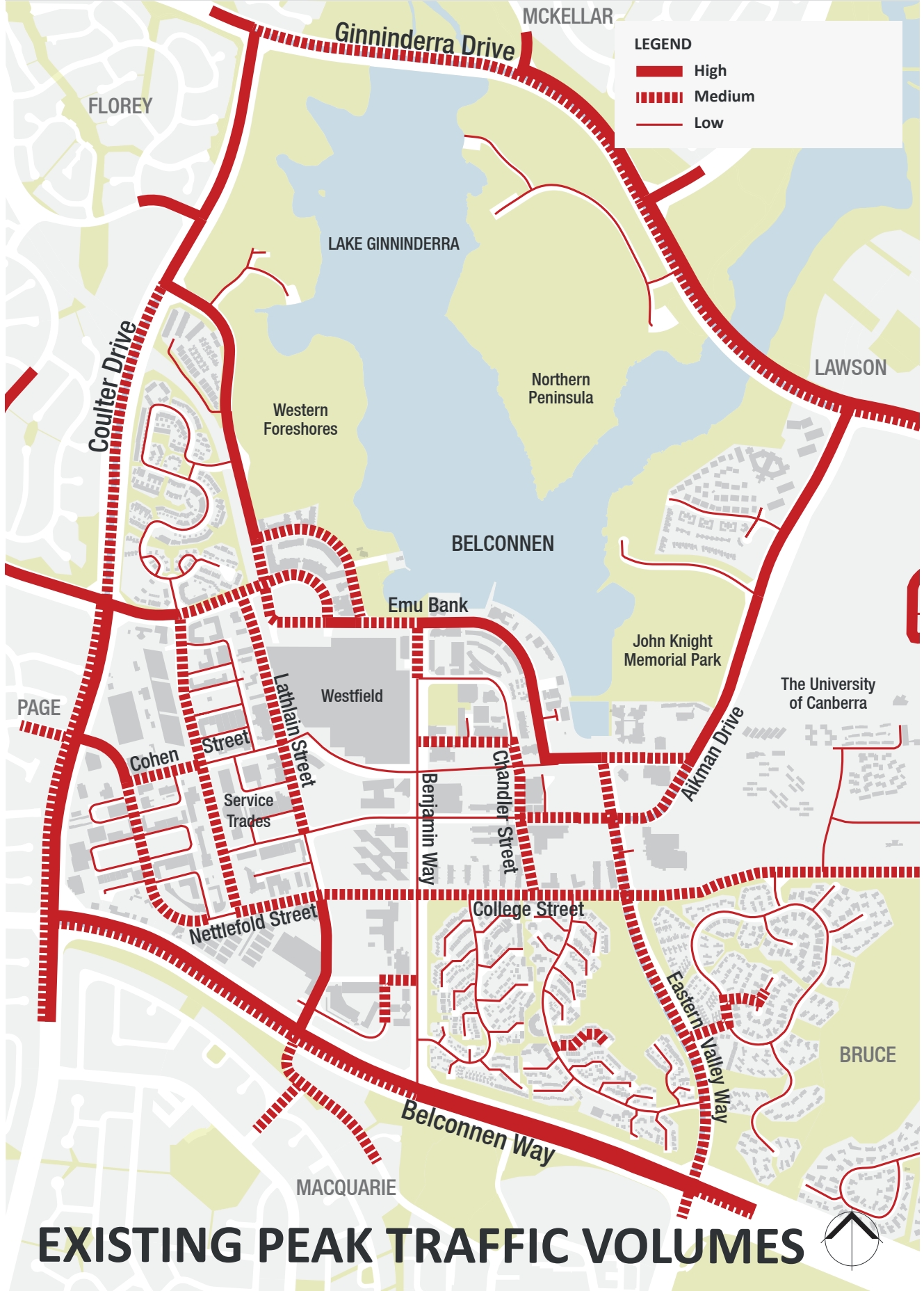
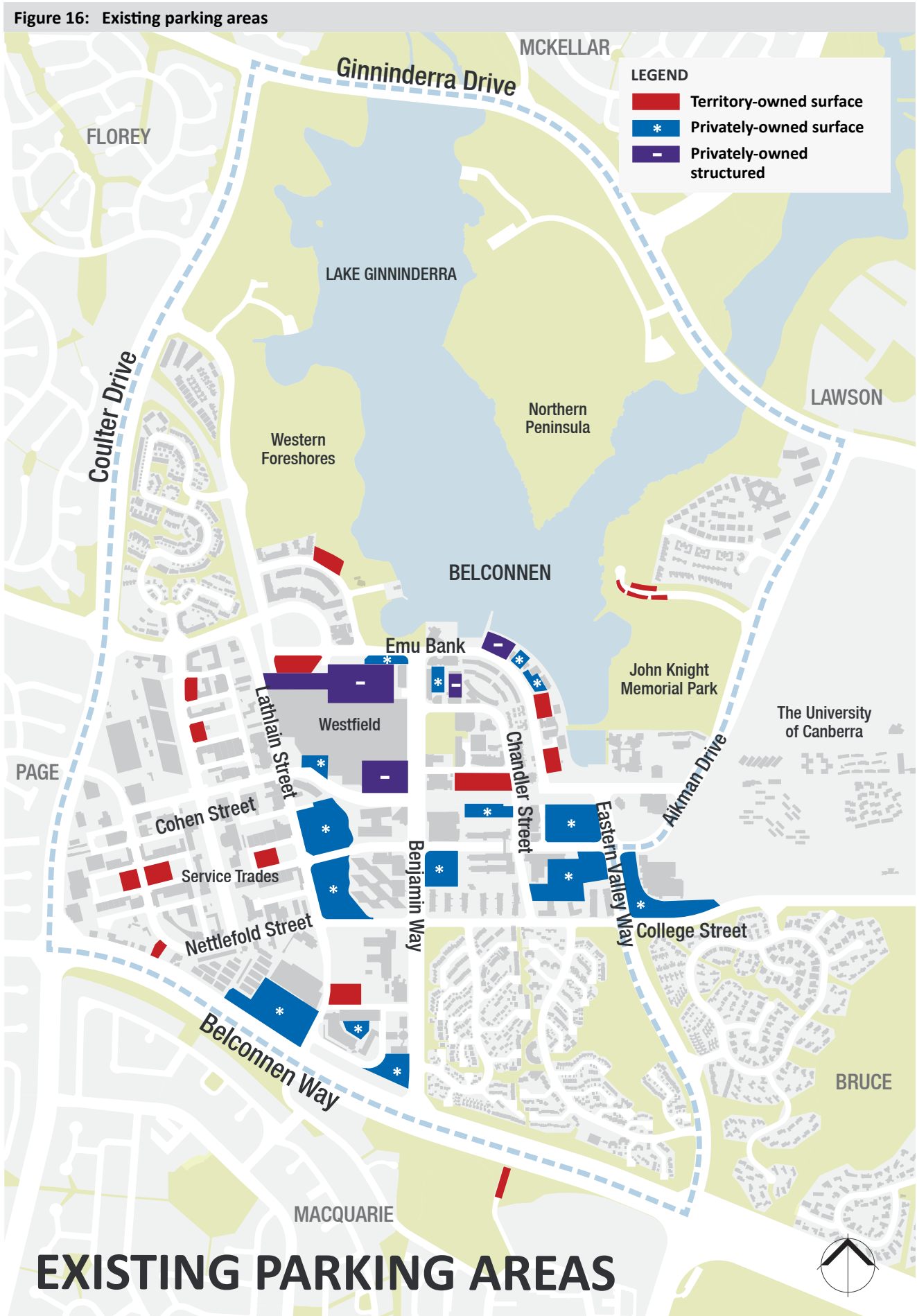




Figure 16: Existing parking areas



### 3.6 Public domain

As the district’s principal community and commercial area, the centre’s key public spaces, including streets and parks, should be of a high quality and reflect Belconnen’s character.

During consultation, the community said the improvement of the public domain was a significant issue. Retaining existing open spaces, improving maintenance and establishing of a community garden, were some areas requiring consideration.

#### 3.6.1 Key areas of activity

Belconnen’s early planning resulted in buildings having little relationship to surrounding streets. Main destinations such as the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets, the library, Westfield Belconnen and UC were widely spaced, had narrow connecting footpaths and no activity along the way, resulting in people driving to these destinations.

The quality and amenity of the public domain should reflect its level of use, providing a signal to users that they are in a main area and allowing better allocation of resources.

The current precinct code identifies an extensive ‘main pedestrian area’ and limits the uses and buildings types that can front onto these spaces. Given the limited capacity for additional retail, and desire to create active destination areas, this requirement is leading to vacant commercial space and dispersed uses.

A better outcome could be to restrict these requirements to key areas and increase flexibility for alternative outcomes, depending on market demands. For example the ground floor units of ‘Altitude’ are largely commercially adaptable, enabling both residential and future commercial uses.

#### 3.6.2 Street trees

The centre was intended to have a ‘distinctively Australian landscape character’.<sup>10</sup> Mass plantings of eucalypts were provided to the perimeter of the centre and native trees used as street trees throughout. While some have been successful, including the casuarinas on Josephson Street, many failed and were not replaced.

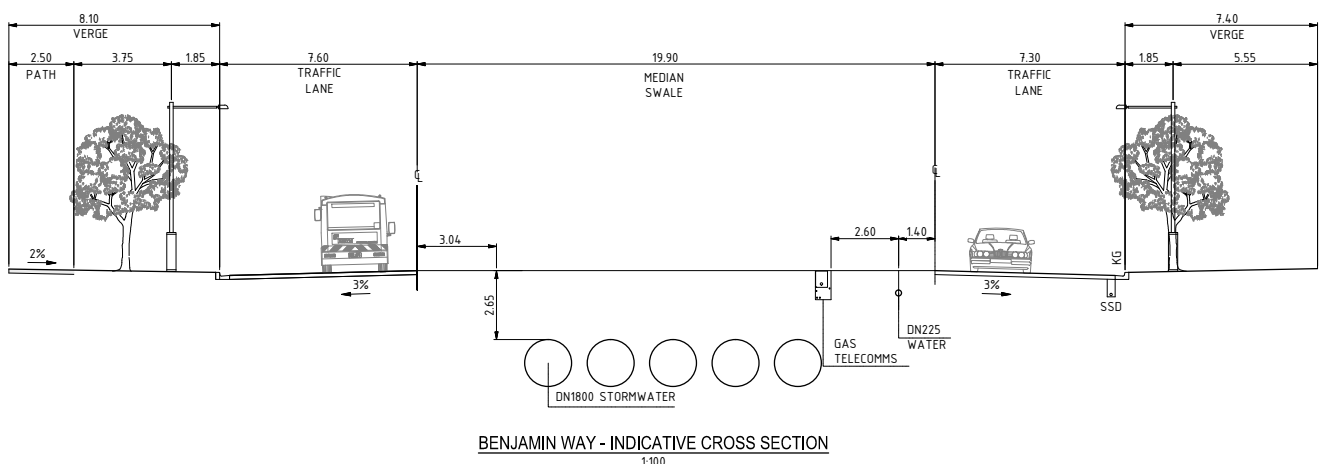
The intended character was also diluted by plantings of elms and plane trees.

As indicated in Figure 18, many streets now do not have trees or they are on privately leased blocks, and could be removed.

Analysis of the area’s street trees was provided in a 2008 report which listed all tree species and provided recommendations on replacements. Many of the recorded tree species were found to be in poor health, stunted and provided limited canopy cover.<sup>11</sup>

The elms planted along Benjamin Way have provided an attractive formal entry to the centre. Ideally these plantings would have continued to Emu Bank; however, this has been prevented by five 1.8 metre diameter stormwater pipes in the median. Figure 17 indicates this constraint.

**Figure 17: Benjamin way cross section showing stormwater infrastructure at southern end**





A key focus of future public domain improvements should be the provision of large canopied street trees. These provide character, improve amenity for pedestrians and cyclists and value of areas and can significantly reduce the impact of heat on urban areas.

### 3.6.3 National Capital Authority controlled land

There is a concern that some redevelopment on NCA-controlled land has not produced the public domain outcomes expected in the centre. Footpaths have not been provided in some areas and requirements for building frontage to key streets have not been enforced. This has resulted in dirt tracks and areas that are unused.

### 3.6.4 Parks and open space

The centre has a high proportion of open space, mostly located around Lake Ginninderra. As indicated on Figure 18, the open space in the core area is limited to Margaret Timpson Park.

The 'court' areas at Oatley Court, Weedon Close and Purdue Street were intended as open space, but have now been largely replaced by carparks. The remaining open space areas offer little amenity and these blocks are zoned as Services Zone, which enables them to be sold in the future.

#### Margaret Timpson Park

Margaret Timpson Park provides the civic core area of the centre, emphasised by its formal, symmetrical set out, distinctive landscaping and surrounding uses. It provides Belconnen with a formal space for important or district focused events.

Providing more activity in the park was an issue in the 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan, which suggested new cafes and a new road to the east as a solution. Many people still consider the park to be underused and lacking facilities.

#### Lake Ginninderra

Since its establishment in 1974, Lake Ginninderra has become intrinsic to Belconnen's character. It is highly valued by the community, providing space for recreation and contemplation.

Many consider it more attractive and with better water quality than Lake Burley Griffin. The variety of spaces and landscapes, combined with high quality recreation areas, is partly what makes the lake special. These are also important in providing an outlook from the centre.

From its initial planning, the lake was always intended to have an urban edge to the centre. This edge needs to provide a high level of quality and variety; however, the contrast between the landscape and built form of the centre should be maintained and strengthened by retaining land at the north and west of the lake as open space.

The recreation areas at John Knight Memorial Park, Diddams Close and Macdermott Place are high quality and well maintained. While demand for these areas is often high, additional maintained areas are not currently required. A key issue is the need for additional parking at John Knight Memorial Park, which has no capacity for overflow parking.

The use of the lake for fishing, swimming and sailing has dropped off compared to the 1980s; however, there is growing demand for access to the lake from groups including the sea scouts and girl guides. Consideration is required of how these groups can be accommodated.

The northern peninsula provides a valuable landscape outlook from the centre and has ecological and possibly archaeological value. It also has potential for vegetation restoration and improved canopy connections (Figure 19).

The northern peninsula is zoned Urban Open Space (PRZ1). The central area is identified as 'not public land' in the precinct code, reflecting the grazing which is undertaken, partly to maintain it.

The western side of the lake also has landscape, ecological and possibly archaeological value. This area was intended for development, however it was decided it should remain as open space and planned roads were degazetted. This area is close to developed areas and offers potential for other uses including community gardens and vegetation restoration.

The lake is formed by damming the Ginninderra Creek, which flows from Gungahlin and connects with the Murrumbidgee River. Two minor creek lines feed into the lake from the south along with storm water from several surrounding suburbs.

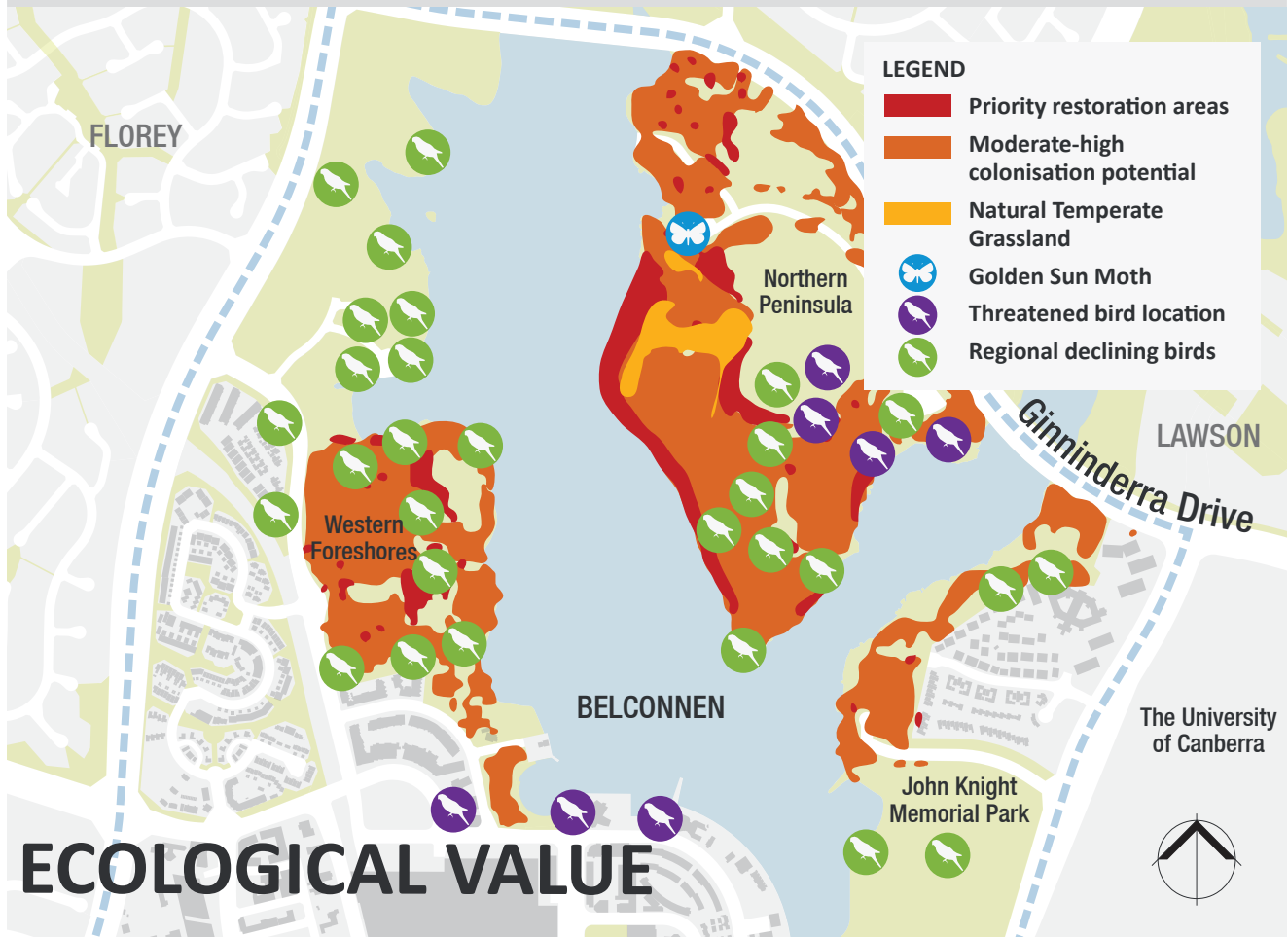


Figure 18: Open space network





Figure 19: Ecological



Recent work at the Emu Inlet and Eastern Valley Way Inlet has improved the quality of water flowing into the lake. Further work could be considered, including improving the run-off from the service trades area to the lake.

The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan recommended a water quality control pond and a new gross pollutant trap be constructed on the disused Eastern Valley Way oval, however this has not been constructed. Depending on the success of the new wetland area adjacent to the skate park, the Eastern Valley Way water quality control pond and new gross pollutant trap could be given further consideration. The current gross pollutant trap on Eastern Valley way is difficult and expensive to clean, with a new facility further upstream potentially providing significant savings.

### Community Gardens

Community gardens provide a range of benefits; they encourage more food to be grown locally and provide an opportunity for communities to form. They are valuable for people without garden space, such as those living in apartments. The closest community gardens to the centre are currently at Charnwood and behind Cook.

Establishing a community garden within the centre will increase the liveability and sense of community of the centre. While suggestions have been made for locating a community garden at Margaret Timpson Park, there are possibly better locations such as the western side of the lake.



### 3.6.5 Paving, lighting and street furniture

The paving and street furniture of the centre is largely uncoordinated, having been provided over an extended period of time.

Paving in particular is varied with combinations of asphalt, stencilled concrete, various paver types and concrete. Segmented pavers have generally proved unsuccessful as they are lifted by tree roots and cracked by vehicles.

Currently, off-site works associated with residential developments generally follow the requirements of the Canberra Central Design Manual. This was developed for use in the city centre, and has proved very successful. A key issue is if this manual should be adopted for general use in the Belconnen town centre or if a new one should be developed.

### 3.6.6 Public art

Public art lifts an area beyond the basic requirements. It allows the community to reflect its character and artists to respond to a location. While at times controversial, art works can become a loved and intrinsic part of an area. For many years the public art in Belconnen town centre was limited to two sculptures:

- *Tumbling Cubes* by Bert Flugelman (1979)
- *Optical Galaxy* by Gerald Gladstone

As the centre developed, additional public art has been installed, including:

- *About face by Wellspring* (2001)
- *Running Lights* by Thylacine Art Projects (2006)
- *Ark in the Ark and Beyond* by Wataru Hamasaka (2009)
- *Dancers on a Lakefront* by Konstantin Dimopoulos (2010)
- *The Ability to Imagine* by Peter Tilley (2010)
- *Winds of Light* by Peter Blizzard (2011)
- *Owl* by Bruce Armstrong (2011)

The Belconnen Arts Centre provides an important opportunity for a wide range of art, including dance, to be available and promoted to the wider Belconnen community. It is also helping to ensure that art becomes perceived as an integral part of the centre.

The provision of new street furniture, including seating, provides an opportunity for incorporation of public art. Consideration could also be given to the locating a legal graffiti wall within the town centre core area. This will allow local street artists to contribute to the emerging character of Belconnen.

## 3.7 Building design and height

### 3.7.1 History

The initial development of Cameron Offices, Benjamin Offices and Westfield Belconnen provided the centre with a low scale, dispersed character. This was at odds with the original intention of a dense, active core area.

Construction of the service trades area began in 1974. Development within this area was tightly regulated with a consistency to building design and materials. This provided unity but limited variety and features such as effective awnings.

The residential areas of Emu Ridge and Totterdell Street were developed during the late 1980s and generally limited to two storeys. The Emu Ridge townhouses were notable as an interpretation of historic Sydney terraces; however, the area's layout has resulted in a poor streetscape.

### 3.7.2 Taller buildings

The centre was always intended to have a variety of building heights and forms. The core area and taller buildings were intended to be located along the central ridge, adjacent to Chandler Street, with large floor area offices and carparks in the valleys. This emphasised the area's typography and gave prominence to the central core.

Modelling of the centre undertaken in 1974 indicated four towers ranging in height from 13 to 20 storeys (Figure 20).

Ensuring the landscape remained the dominant visual factor was a key consideration of the NCDC. The 1964 book 'The Future Canberra' states 'The districts would be built in adjoining valleys and the intervening hilltops and ridges would be preserved in their natural state. This would give every resident of Canberra a view of tree-clad hills'.



The 1975 Policy document, A land Use Plan for the ACT, identified the landscape qualities of Canberra and included the statement ‘the strongest impression of Canberra is that of a set of buildings rising from the trees and silhouetted against the distant range’.

Submissions on the 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Draft Master Plan recommended towers should be constructed to mark the centre and make it ‘feel’ like a town centre. The 2001 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan also suggested several locations where ‘higher development is encouraged’ but remained silent on maximum heights beyond development being ‘to desired future character’ and limiting overshadowing impacts.

The first taller residential building, Altitude, was completed in 2013. At 18 storeys, and in the area originally intended for taller buildings, it is considered a good example of higher density residential development. It provides a high quality verge and street trees, increased surveillance of the skate park and Chandler Street and included an upgrade to the adjacent public open space.

Existing building heights are shown in Figure 21 and includes Altitude (18 storeys) and the Sentinel Apartments (20 storeys). Recently approved development include the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets (up to 16 storeys), Westfield Belconnen (up to 24 storeys), and the Wayfarer (27 storeys). These developments are dispersed and several are in positions which are considered ‘marker’ buildings.

The first stage of community consultation on this draft master plan resulted in a variety of opinion on building heights, however there was general acceptance of the height of buildings already constructed.

Taller residential buildings are a substantial investment and indicate confidence in the future of the centre. They have increased the number of residents in the centre and improved the public domain and perception of safety within the centre. They provide employment during construction and ongoing benefits to local businesses. While these buildings have resulted in some overshadowing, it is considered to have limited impact.

A range of factors needs consideration when determining heights, including previous policy, sites suitable for additional taller development (indicated in Figure 25), the long-term demand for additional residential development, overshadowing impacts and the retention of views. The key consideration is how taller buildings in the town centre relate to the surrounding landscape and typography.

**Figure 20: 1974 Model indicating towers in the core area**







Figure 21: Existing building heights

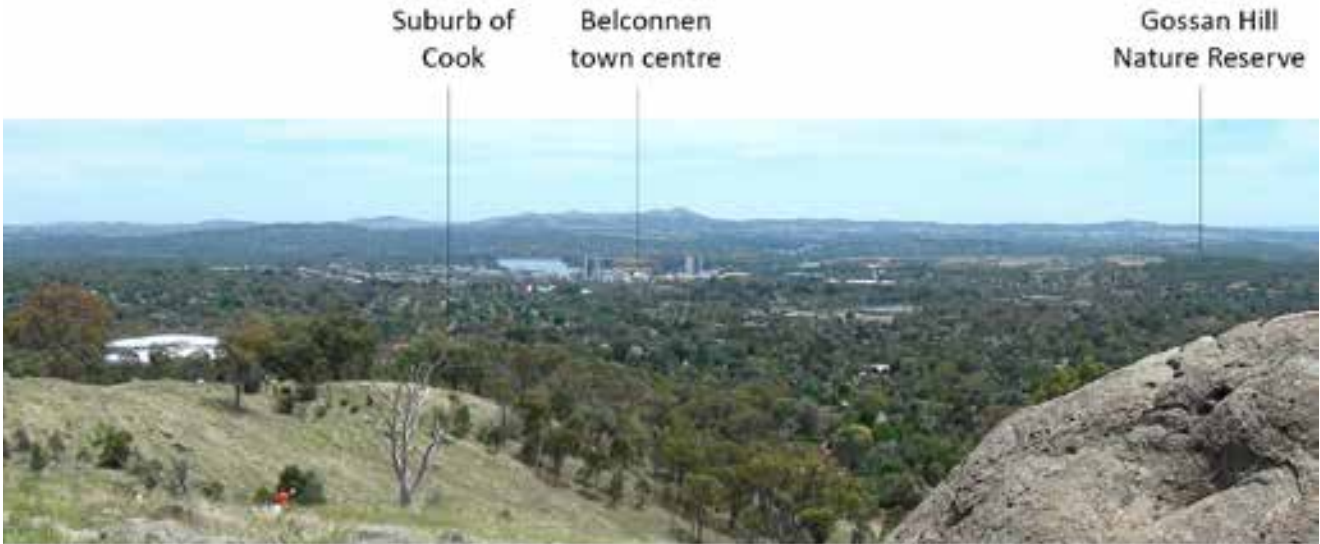




## Visual impact of existing taller buildings

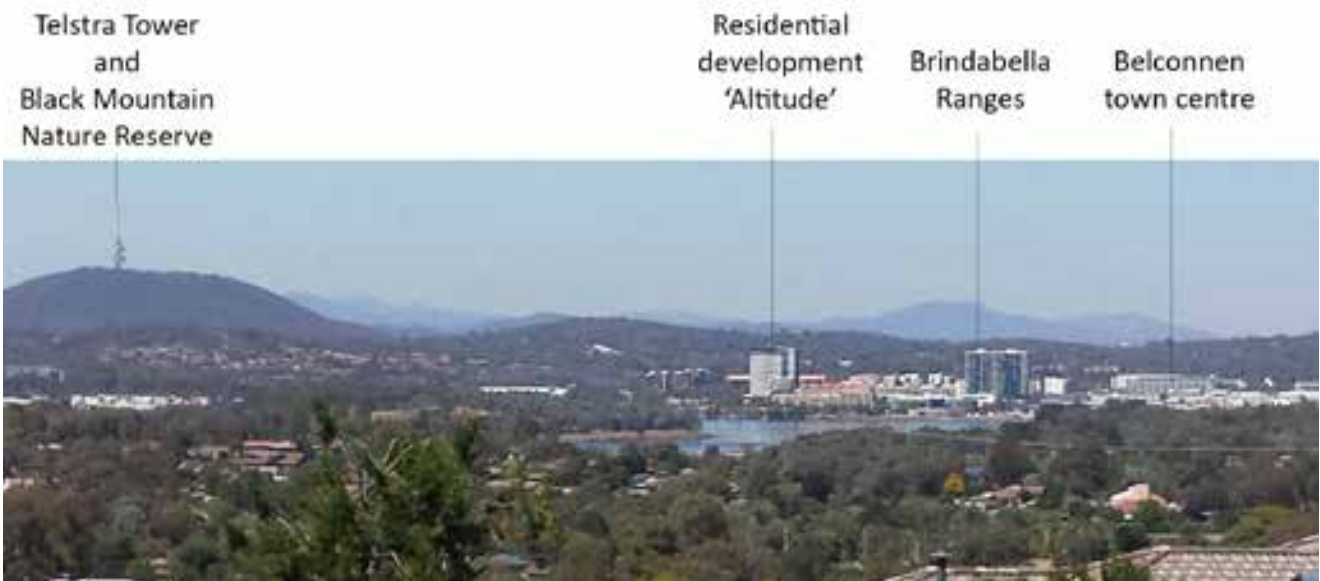
### Mt Painter looking north

The centre core sits in a slight valley, with higher land to the east, south and west. While the taller buildings are visible from the south and west, they sit within the wider landscape and are not prominent.



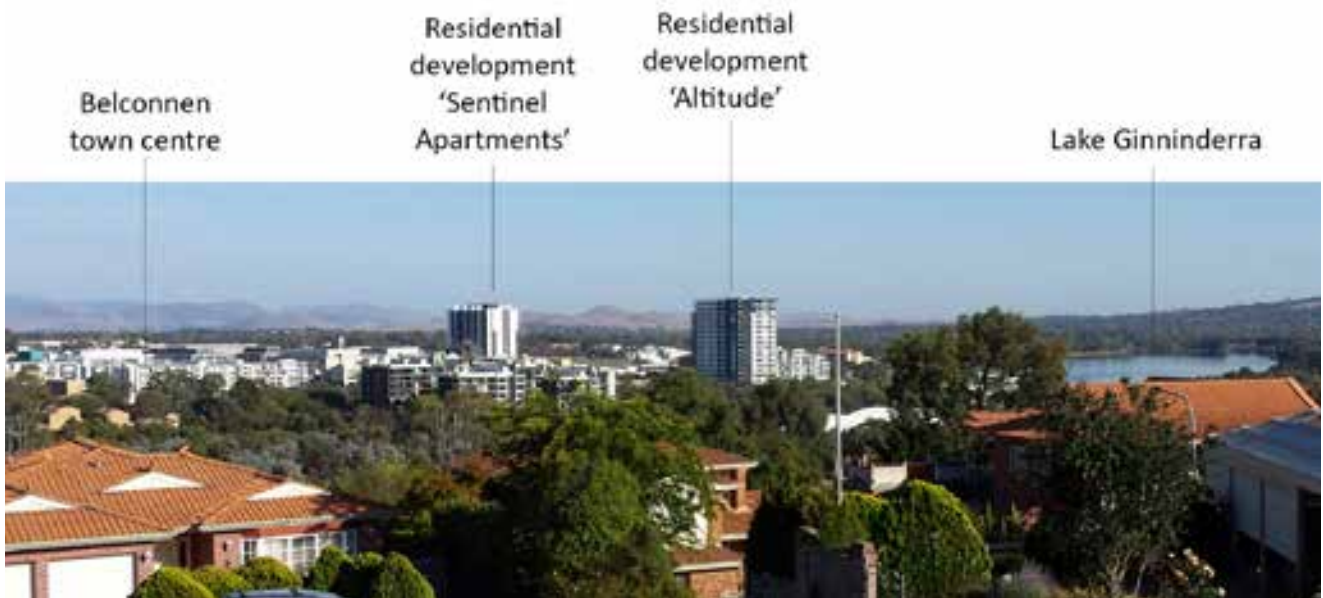
### Bainton Place, Melba, looking south

Views of the centre from the north and east are generally only available from higher areas or open space. The view from the side of Mt Rogers at Melba indicates current heights sit below the Aranda / Cook ridgeline and are dominated by adjacent hills and Brindabellas beyond.



**Crisp circuit, Bruce, looking west**

Where taller buildings are visible from the east, such as the side of Gossan Hill, they are more prominent. However current heights are at about the same level as Mt Rogers and the Brindabellas.



**Ginninderra Drive, looking south**

Views of the centre are most prominent at Ginninderra Drive Bridge. Although Mt Painter provides a prominent backdrop, taller buildings tend to dominate this view.

These images demonstrate the current heights are generally contained by the surrounding landscape. If heights were doubled, for example, buildings would break through the landscape horizon and dominate views.





Key heights in the centre are:

- the Altitude Apartments—18 storeys, RL 648.5 metres
- the Sentinel Apartments—20 storeys, RL 642.6 metres
- the Wayfarer Apartments—27 storeys, RL 664.35 metres
- Mount Painter is at RL 741m and Mount Rogers is at RL 704 metres
- The prescribed airspace for Canberra Airport above the centre is at 720 metres.

The location of suitable sites for new higher level development is constrained when the issues of existing development, NCA requirements and minimising the impact on views and overshadowing is taken into account.

Apart from the sites where higher level development has already been approved, future higher level development within the town centre is generally limited to:

- Block 17, Section 152, which is currently on the 2018–19 land release program.
- Block 1, Section 200, which was recently sold for the construction of up to 745 units.
- Block 15, Section 45, possibly the second stage of the Linq apartments.
- Block 16, Section 45.

Other sites where redevelopment may occur but height is considered constrained by the relationship to surrounding buildings include:

- Block 1, Section 151
- Section 23, fronting onto Lathlain Street
- Blocks 43 – 49, Section 55.

### 3.7.3 Building design

The centre contains few examples of exceptional or innovative architecture although it has a good representation of architectural styles of the past 40 years. Retaining these layers of history adds character and will be important as the centre grows. Recent buildings such as the ‘Linq’ apartments and ABS House have a considered design and material choice, adding character and high quality design outcomes to the centre.

This master plan seeks to address some key issues in terms of building height and design:

- The Territory Plan provides for minimum acceptable outcomes, rather than encouraging best practice design. Consideration should be given to more explicit controls and providing incentives to encourage design quality.
- The ‘Altitude’ apartments provide a high quality streetscape to Chandler Street and ‘library walk’, between Chandler Street and Emu Bank. These improve the appearance and value of the development, benefiting the whole community. Future developments should be encouraged to provide similar public space improvements.
- Podiums are now the preferred method of providing carparks. We need to ensure podiums are well designed and provide surveillance to main pedestrian routes.
- Other aspects requiring clarity through the precinct code include pedestrian shelter, active frontages, and the relationship with surrounding buildings.

## 3.8 Public safety

ACT Police figures show a low level of incidents reported within the centre, but they consider the perception of public safety could be improved.

The closure of the Belconnen bus interchange in 2009 is considered to have significantly reduced the number of crime-related incidents in the centre. Most incidents are now considered by the ACT Police to be between people who know each other.

A perception that a place is unsafe leads to areas becoming inactive and can encourage people to drive rather than walk or cycle.

The adoption of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles when designing areas can greatly improve the perception of safety.

For example, Belconnen Skate Park combines a good facility and lighting, adjacent active uses and passive surveillance from nearby apartments and traffic. This has resulted in an area that young people feel safe using until well after dark.

During consultation on issues to inform the draft master plan, the community raised concerns about the safety at night of several specific areas in the centre. Many of these are also related to improving the walkability of the town centre:

- People felt unsafe when crossing from the lake pedestrian bridge to the library, and when walking along the lake at Emu Bank and John Knight Memorial Park.
- The lack of lighting to underpasses, such as under Coulter Drive to Page, deters people from using them.
- A lack of activity and passive surveillance to key areas, such as the lake side of Emu Bank and Margaret Timpson Park, also deters use of these areas.

Table 2 compares crime statistics between the city centre and Belconnen town centre.

**Table 2: Crime statistics**

Incident	Belconnen Jan - March		City Jan - Mar
	2010	2015	2015
Homicide	0	0	0
Sexual assault	0	3	8
Burglary	26	23	10
Theft	180	171	128
Property damage	74	74	31
Assault	40	27	77
Offence against a person	1	2	3
Robbery	4	2	5
Motor vehicle theft	16	17	6
Other	157	140	246
Traffic infringement	173	98	94

## 3.9 Environment and ecology

### 3.9.1 Areas of ecological significance

While there are no major biodiversity constraints within the area, there are remnant patches of endangered Box-Gum Woodland (listed as critically endangered nationally) and endangered Natural Temperate Grassland. These areas are potential habitat of three threatened animal species, the Perunga Grasshopper, Golden Sun Moth and Striped Legless Lizard. Figure 19 indicates where these species have been recorded, along with threatened plant and bird locations.

The shrubs and trees around Lake Ginninderra are utilised by the Crested Shrike-tit and White Winged Triller, while Iron-bark plantings at Weedon Close and at the AIS provide a food resource to the nationally threatened Superb Parrot and Regent Honeyeater. Superb Parrots have also been sighted in trees along Benjamin Way and Belconnen Way.

### 3.9.2 Habitat connectivity

The ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2013–23 aims to enhance the resilience of natural areas at a wide scale. This strategy proposes a range of measures to enhance habitat connectivity and ecosystem function and the biodiversity value of urban areas.

Figure 19 illustrates the priority restoration areas and areas of ecological value close to Lake Ginninderra.

## 3.10 Environmental sustainability

Sustainability is critical to the landscaped and built environment. ACT Government policies and strategies provide guidance for integrating sustainability measures into our urban environment.

The following are key environmental sustainability principles to be considered in the Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan and its implementation.

### Climate change

Responding to climate change takes two forms:

- Mitigation—reduce greenhouse gas emissions by minimising use of fossil fuels for heating, cooling and transport, and increase the efficiency of energy use.
- Adaptation—adapt our urban environments to be resilient to the risk of a changing climate.



### Resources consumption

- Reduce the amount of land used for the growing city with urban renewal and intensification.
- Reduce the amount of energy and potable water used for non drinking water purposes in our urban environments and invest in living (green) infrastructure..
- Respect and conserve natural and cultural heritage.
- Respect and conserve the significant landscapes and its features.
- Enhance biodiversity with habitat connectivity.

### Buildings

- Improve the design and construction of buildings.
- Increase choice in housing to meet diverse needs.

### Urban planning and design

- Reduce reliance on private vehicles.
- Create opportunities for social interactions.
- Integrate passive solar design principles into building and site design.
- Reduce the heat island effect in urban areas and improve microclimate through landscape design.

Master plans provide opportunities to address climate change adaptation at a place-specific scale. The projections for the ACT and region are for an increasingly hotter and drier climate with more extreme weather events. The place-based risks to people and assets from a hotter and drier climate are heat, severe storms (flash flooding) and bushfire.

To address these risks, the interventions may include:

#### 1. Reduce city heat and increase amenity in outdoor spaces for healthy living

- Increase shade trees to roadways and carparks.
- Use light coloured pavements.
- Increase shade to pathways and parklands for human comfort and wellbeing.
- Include seats and drinking fountains with water bottle recharge taps.
- Increase use of vegetation.

#### 2. Reduce city heat and achieve cooler buildings

- Design buildings, streets and parks to be ‘climate wise’. This means improving the design and choice of materials for the built environment to lessen the effects of climate change.
- Use solar passive design.
- Use light coloured materials.
- Introduce green infrastructure such as green roofs and walls.

#### 3. Intense rain events

- Reduce runoff from impermeable surfaces within the sub-catchment.
- Capture and use rainwater/stormwater in redevelopment projects.
- Retrofit roadside kerb and gutter systems using water sensitive urban design.

#### 4. Reduce the risk of bushfire in urban areas

- Initiate an asset protection zone.
- Ensure no continuity of fuel from the ground to the crown of the tree.
- Plan for emergency service access.

The following opportunities were identified to incorporate environmental sustainability measures in the master plan.

### 3.10.1 Energy

The ACT Sustainable Energy Policy 2011–2020 stated objectives are to achieve: reliable and affordable energy; smarter use of energy; cleaner energy; and growth in the clean economy.

A district energy system could contribute to achieving these objectives and be commercially viable with a commercial/residential development or expansion. District energy systems produce electrical energy locally and use ‘waste heat’ from electricity generation to heat and cool buildings.

Electricity and/or thermal energy is generated close to where it is used. Energy systems such as co-generation (electricity and heat) or tri-generation (electricity, heat and cooling) need the combination of commercial and residential uses to be efficient, as the peak load for commercial is during the day and the peak load for residential is generally out of hours. The use of such energy systems can achieve social, economic and environmental benefits.

A district energy system in the Belconnen town centre could provide an alternative cleaner energy for the centre and contribute to a sustainable future. Further investigations would be required to determine if a district energy system would be viable, how it could be delivered and in context of future budgets.

### 3.10.2 Water

Water is an important natural resource that is under significant pressure from population growth and climatic conditions. There is also a need to reduce broader social, economic and environmental costs associated with potable water distribution.

The irrigation for a number of playing fields in the ACT has been switched off due to water restrictions for potable water. The potable water consumption for domestic or commercial use could be minimised if other solutions were investigated, such as the re-use of stormwater and rainwater.

### 3.10.3 Heat island effect

An urban heat island is a metropolitan area which is significantly warmer than its surrounding areas. The main cause of the heat island effect is from the use of materials—such as concrete and bitumen—which store and radiate heat to surrounding areas.

Thermal comfort can significantly change the way we use outdoor areas in the public domain. Urban environments, such as the Belconnen town centre, contain significant areas of concrete and asphalt in the roads and footpaths. Higher temperatures may be acceptable in the cooler months, but some urban environments can become uncomfortable in summer.

The built environment can be designed to reduce the urban heat island effect with the use of lighter building materials, shade structures and permeable surfaces. Large canopy trees can provide shade in the warmer months and cooling through transpiration.



*Eastern Valley Way inlet and Lake Ginninderra College*







## 4. Challenges and opportunities

The main challenges and opportunities identified for the Belconnen town centre are outlined below and indicated in Figure 22. This list has been informed by issues raised during community consultation. While not exhaustive, it offers a basis for developing the draft master plan and resultant revision to the precinct code.

### 4.1 Challenges

#### 4.1.1 Town centre employment

The potential relocation of DIBP out of the centre could have a critical impact on businesses in the town centre. A reduced employment base is a challenge faced by other town centres in Canberra and highlights the need to diversify employment opportunities. Belconnen is in a good position to meet this challenge with significant adjacent institutions, an attractive outlook and space for additional development.

#### 4.1.2 Poor connections with the University of Canberra

Despite being within walking distance, the centre and UC are connected by only two formal footpaths. To effectively achieve the economic and employment potential offered by this relationship, the town centre and UC need to be better integrated. Recent legislative changes will enable the UC to develop a wide range of uses, including commercial and residential uses. It is important to ensure these uses are planned to integrate with the centre.

#### 4.1.3 Parking nearing capacity

Parking issues were raised by the community during consultation and through the Belconnen Community Council's survey. While it is important to ensure sufficient parking for people who need it, a more balanced approach is required to the provision of parking.

The centre is maturing, and the ability to provide large amounts of low-cost parking is reducing. Providing parking is a significant cost for developers and property purchasers, and influences the viability of development proposals.

There are currently three main parking issues in the Belconnen town centre: the provision of long-stay spaces for offices; ensuring sufficient spaces for the Emu Bank precinct; and managing peak demands at

Westfield Belconnen.

The demand for long-stay carparks currently exceeds the available capacity, resulting in commuters using short-stay service trades spaces and residential streets. This reduces the parking available for local businesses. Suitable sites for structured long-stay carparks need to be identified.

While the Emu Bank precinct has sufficient parking it dominates the area and current parking requirements restrict possible redevelopment. Relocating parking to an off-site structure is one option to enable redevelopment, however there is a lack of suitable ACT Government owned sites where this could be the required use. Sufficient parking choices must be provided to ensure the on-going viability of the area.

Westfield Belconnen's peak demand can reach 98% of capacity. However, large carparks nearby are at only 21% of capacity at this time. Better knowledge of these would be assisted by a 'smart parking' initiative.

#### 4.1.4 Limited public open space in the core area

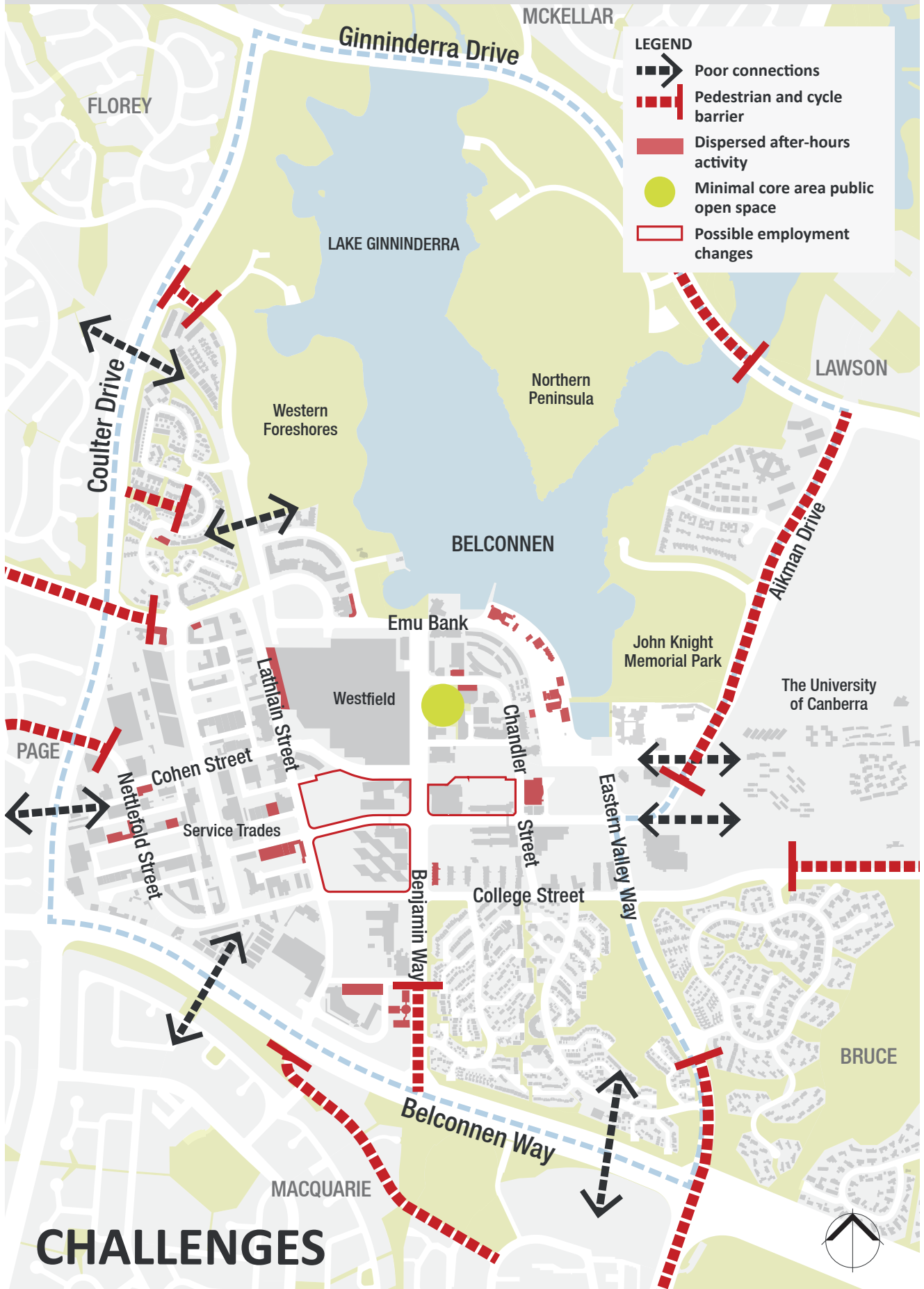
The centre has a large amount of open space around the lake and through Emu Ridge, which provides a valuable resource for the community. However, open space within the core area is limited to Margaret Timpson Park.

Areas of open space in Oatley Court and Purdue Street are on blocks which may be sold for development. Similarly, open space on the Belconnen Way and Coulter Drive perimeter is zoned for transport use and may be required for additional roadworks. Ensuring remaining opportunities for open space are retained will become increasingly important as the centre continues to grow.

Margaret Timpson Park is Belconnen's 'civic' space, but suffers from a lack of use. The park will become increasingly important as more people live in the town centre, including children. The central town centre area currently provides no children's play areas or equipment. Margaret Timpson Park is an ideal place to provide children's play areas, possibly incorporating water play, which would also attract users from outside the area.



Figure 22: Challenges





#### 4.1.5 A poor perception of Belconnen as a destination

Belconnen town centre has good restaurants, bars and locations, yet lacks a clear destination and an inviting urban quality. The centre requires the ‘brand recognition’ that other places have—such as New Acton or Braddon—if it is to compete with these locations.

#### 4.1.6 A lack of features to reduce climate change impacts

Canberra’s climate is predicted to become warmer and drier into the future, with less frequent but more severe rainfall events. The centre must have the resilience to respond to the impact of these conditions. Ensuring the centre is cool and attractive during hot periods will reduce possible health problems and increase the centre’s appeal.

#### 4.1.7 Traffic congestion

The centre’s entry and exit points become congested during the morning and afternoon peak periods, particularly along Ginninderra Drive and Aikman Drive, as well as Luxton Street and Joynton Smith Drive. A number of intersections within a relatively short distance are beginning to create traffic issues for cars and buses on Nettlefold Street between Coulter Drive and Cohen Street.

## 4.2 Opportunities

#### 4.2.1 Attract more people to live in the town centre

The residential population of the centre is predicted to grow from 6020 in 2014 to 8450 by 2031<sup>12</sup>. Targeting growth within town centres reduces redevelopment demands within the suburbs, prevents further urban sprawl and allows people easy access to employment, transport and other services. The ACT Planning Strategy recognises these advantages and includes the policy for 50% of new housing to be delivered through urban intensification. Growth within the centre provides greater housing choice and additional services, which benefits the greater Belconnen district.

#### 4.2.2 Improve cycling and pedestrian links into the town centre

Constructing clear and safe cycle and pedestrian links across the centre and cycle facilities will encourage more people to walk or cycle to the centre, meeting healthy living and sustainable development policy goals of the ACT Government. Better connections received significant support during consultation, as did utilising the former Joynton Smith bus way as a cycle path.

As indicated in Figure 25, with improvements on Lathlain Street, this could provide a clear cycle path linking the Florey Shops to Westfield Belconnen, the bus station, the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets and Jamison.

The median strip of Benjamin Way is an opportunity for a two-way cycle path along its full length, replacing narrow footpaths and conflict with pedestrians. This would enable a clear path between the existing avenue of trees that links Macquarie to the lake.

Improved cycling access along College Street would provide a safe east–west connection through the town centre from UC, Radford College, Fern Hill and the AIS. Cycle paths exist along some sections of College Street but end abruptly, creating unsafe conditions for cyclists when navigating vehicular traffic.

Improving pedestrian connections into the centre could include lighting underpasses, removing earth mounds, and ensuring legible, wide footpaths.

#### 4.2.3 Expand the public transport network

The growth of the centre will provide opportunities to expand the local public transport network. This includes the possible connection of light rail from the city centre to Belconnen and Kippax. Feasibility and alignment studies will inform how and where light rail will travel through the centre if it is deemed feasible.

Improved bus facilities are also likely to be required on the eastern side of the centre to cater to the increasing numbers of residents.



#### 4.2.4 Encourage well designed buildings and public domain

Well-designed buildings and public domain will attract more people and further investment in the centre, as well as providing lasting benefits to the wider community.

##### **Buildings**

While taller buildings are generally accepted by the community in the centre, this is qualified by a need to ensure good design quality. Recent buildings generally achieve a high design quality; however, the Territory Plan currently provides for the minimum acceptable outcome and has few incentives which encourage or reward better-quality design.

It is preferable to limit the amount of prescriptive controls to ensure innovation is achieved, although clarifying expected outcomes for new buildings can help achieve a better result.

Aspects which require consideration include:

- the appearance of taller buildings and how they relate to the street level
- encouraging a range of apartment buildings and dwelling types to encourage a broader range of households and incomes
- consideration of the design of balconies, podiums and communal open space
- clarifying height and setback controls, and assessing potential overshadowing impacts
- consideration of active frontage requirements and the design of ground floor apartments
- encouraging sustainability features beyond standard requirements, such as on-site power generation, green walls, communal car schemes and reduced water use.

##### **Public domain**

A clear hierarchy of public domain areas is required to ensure public domain improvements can be prioritised. Upgraded areas of open space should be coordinated with the main pedestrian routes and new developments into the future.

Places that people enjoy visiting often have similar key characteristics. These should be incorporated into the town centre to ensure its public domain becomes a place people where people want to be. Some of these characteristics include:

- Places should be memorable, not just functional. Strengthen the area’s existing character and provide opportunities for surprise and delight.
- Streets are enclosed with buildings and trees at a scale which feels comfortable.
- Places are provided for people to gather and socialise.
- Active shopfronts are more closely spaced in locations that are busy and attractive to customers.
- Awnings or colonnades that are consistent and connected are provided in main pedestrian areas.
- Key areas and streets have wider footpaths.
- Spaces feel safe with good lighting, surveillance and no entrapment spaces.
- Areas are legible—views are reinforced and way-finding features are provided, including signage or public art.
- Lighting is interesting, incorporating up-lighting into trees or lighting to artwork.
- Podium carparks are wrapped with offices or residential dwellings where they front onto key public spaces. Main footpaths and open space are overlooked by building users.
- Successful places are capable of holding events. The public domain should be able to have concerts, markets and community barbecues.
- There are no unused or left over areas.

#### 4.2.5 Develop solutions for parking

The possible trial and introduction of ‘smart parking’ measures will allow more efficient use of existing parking spaces. Real-time signage detailing the number of parking spaces available could help reduce congestion within carparks and on surrounding roads.

There are other opportunities to make better use of under-utilised parking spaces, such as those to the rear of CISAC. The future provision of parking in the centre will largely be through the development of structured carparks run as viable commercial operations utilising the proposed ‘smart parking’ initiative.

The centre still has some opportunities to locate viable structured carparks, as identified on Figure 34. It is important that the use of these sites for public carparks, combined with other uses, is given serious consideration.

#### 4.2.6 Preserve the quality of Lake Ginninderra

Lake Ginninderra and its surrounds are highly valued by the community and provide an attractive point of difference over other urban areas. The qualities and diversity of areas around the lake need to be preserved and strengthened to maintain the lake's attractiveness, recreation facilities, habitat potential and business viability. Providing better pedestrian and cycle connections to the lake will enable better utilisation of the lake's features.

#### 4.2.7 Wide streets

Streets in the centre are wide, often with median strips. This provides a great opportunity for separated cycle lanes, on-road parking and attractive landscaping within the street. This reduces the need to impact on narrow verges, which may also require the relocation of services.

Wide streets are also better able to accommodate taller buildings while still feeling comfortable.

Figure 23, indicates how Lathlain Street is able to accommodate possible improvements.

#### 4.2.8 Confidence is encouraging investment

The level of investment in the centre by both government and private developers indicates a clear confidence in the future of the town centre. People are choosing to live in the town centre over competing locations because of the attractive outlook and amenities provided within Belconnen. This is also reflected in the feedback provided by the community, with a number of respondents commenting that they are pleased with how the town centre is developing.

This places the centre in a good position to attract further investment.

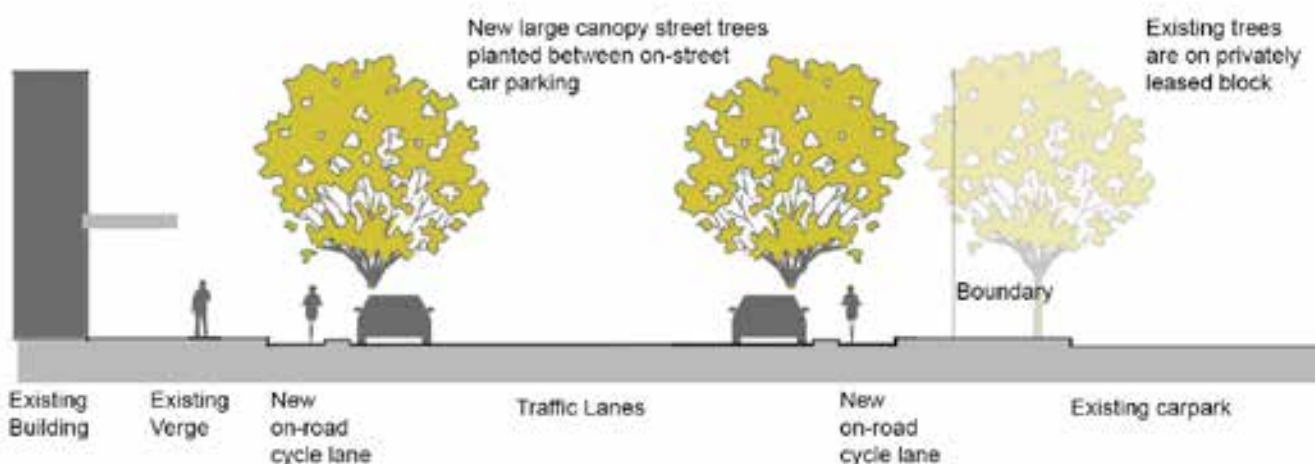
#### 4.2.9 Enabling attractive destinations

To meet the challenge of a lack of clear 'brand' or destination, opportunities presented by existing locations in Belconnen should be strengthened and utilised more effectively. There are two areas indicated in Figure 25 that have significant potential to become better destinations:

##### Emu Bank

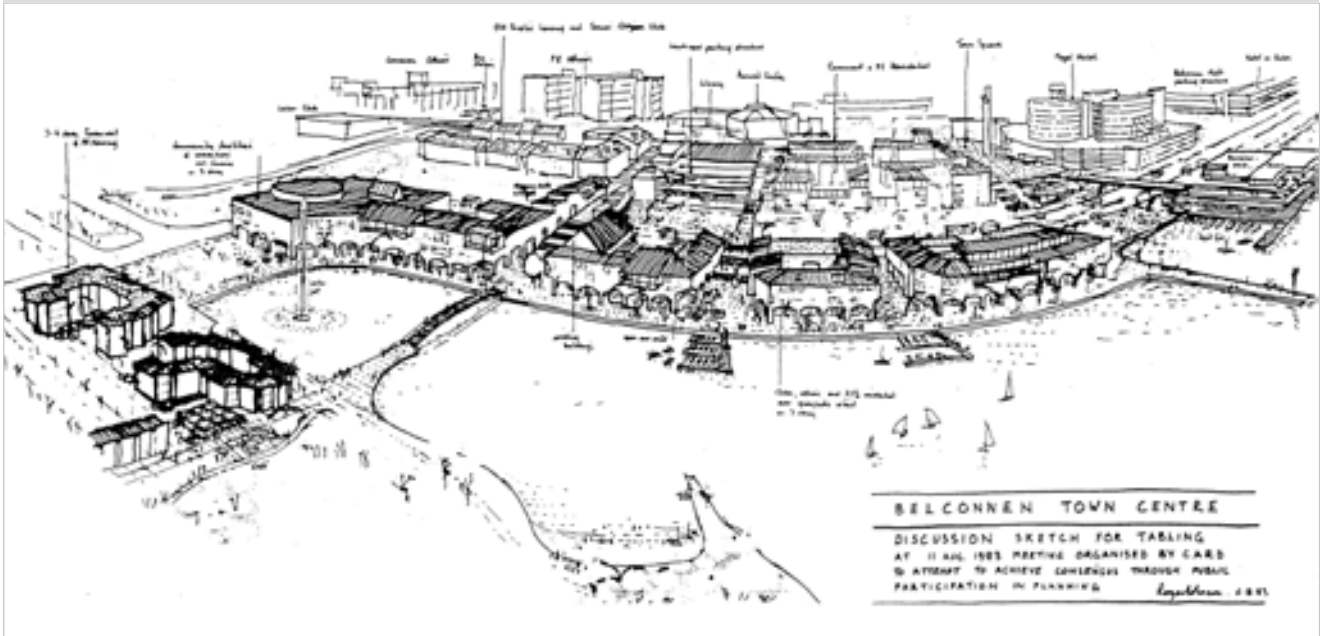
The Emu Bank precinct presents a clear opportunity to add to the existing venues and utilise the attractive outlook to provide a quality outdoor dining precinct that could attract patrons from across Canberra.

Figure 23: Possible future Lathlain Street





**Figure 24: Emu Bank, 1983 Roger Johnson sketch courtesy of Neil Renfree**



Emu Bank was always intended as a busy entertainment area. Sketches prepared in 1983 by Roger Johnson were used to show how the area should develop (Figure 24). These indicate three storey buildings containing clubs, offices and residential, as well as a parking structure.

The Land Development Agency (LDA) is exploring the development potential of the former water police site on Block 1 Section 149 to create a mixed-use precinct linking the lake foreshore with nearby open space, the Belconnen Arts Centre and Emu Bank commercial area.

Suggestions to further improve the Emu Inlet area included constructing a pontoon stage and providing seating to form an amphitheatre. This could be utilised by the adjacent Belconnen Arts Centre and as a focus for district events. Running the shared path on the lakeside of the arts centre, which may require filling in a small section of the lake, was another suggested improvement.

Issues with the design of the Emu Bank commercial precinct are covered at section 3.4.7. These require close consideration to ensure any changes result in an attractive and viable destination.

### **Lathlain Street**

The development of the bus station and more active frontages at Westfield Belconnen, along with the new community health centre, has shifted the core area of activity in the centre from Benjamin Way to Lathlain Street.

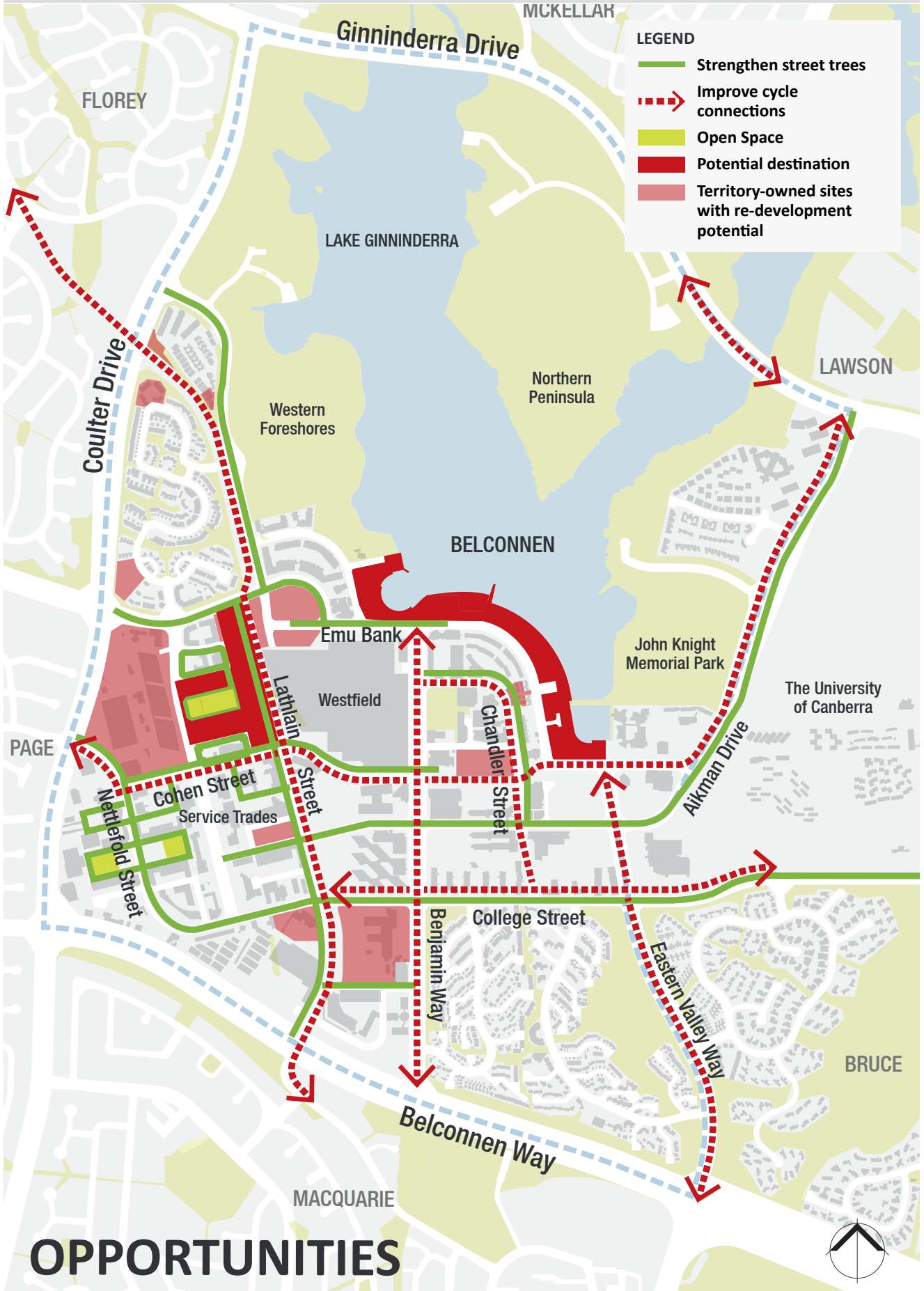
The future redevelopment of the former Belconnen Police Station and Remand Centre and the proposed relocation and redevelopment of the ambulance and fire brigade sites present a great opportunity to develop Lathlain Street as a 'Main Street' for Belconnen, providing benefits for the wider area.

Redevelopment could facilitate the relocation of the Belconnen Library and Belconnen Community Service from their current premises to a new site along Lathlain Street, bringing community services closer to the main shopping area, public transport and parking. This area may also be suitable for a future relocation of the CIT from its Bruce campus.

Together with the long-term reconfiguration or redevelopment of the bus depot, the area's proximity to public transport, retail and services will enable it to support a much broader range of uses and buildings than currently provided.



Figure 25: Opportunities



*Belconnen Community Health Centre*





## 5. The master plan

### 5.1 Master plan structure

The master plan structure indicates how the planning strategies and policies support achievement of the vision and principles (Figure 26). Figure 27 indicates some of the key master plan assumptions that were used to develop the principles and planning strategies.

### 5.2 Vision

The vision for the Belconnen town centre has been developed with feedback from the community. It captures what is valued about the centre and sets out what the centre could be in the future.

*Belconnen town centre's features and potential set it apart from other places. The lake, open spaces, layout and nearby institutions provide unique economic and environmental advantages. These will be improved and strengthened to ensure the town centre is an attractive, accessible and desirable place for people to live and enjoy.*

Figure 26: Master plan structure

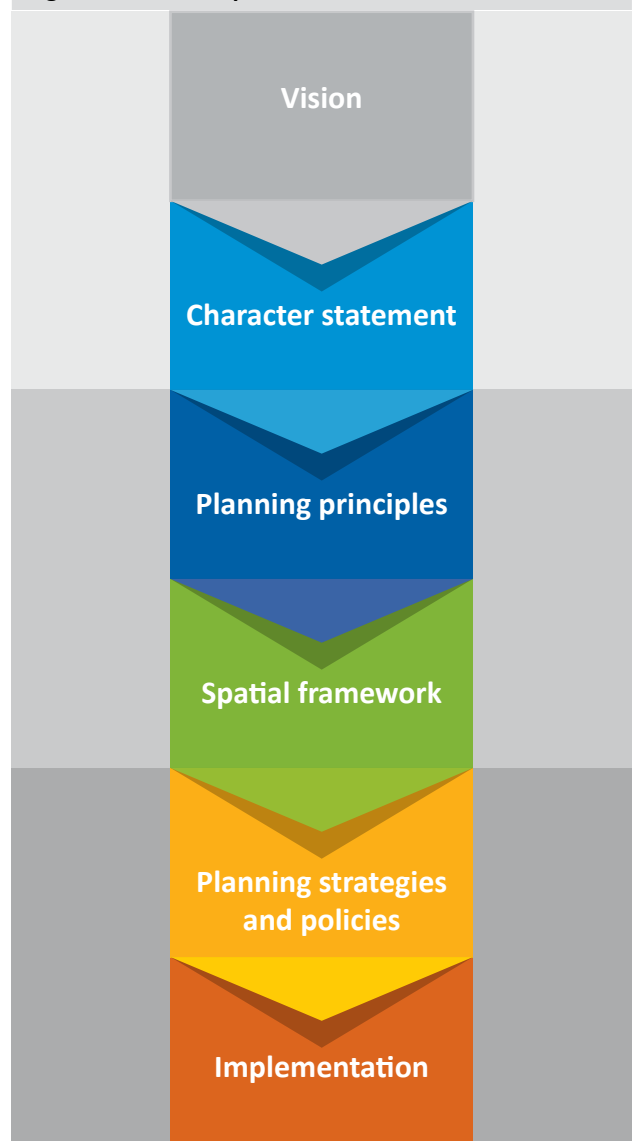




Figure 27: Table of assumptions

## POPULATION

### Population in Belconnen town centre

2021	<b>7,000</b>
2031	<b>8,450</b>

### Population in Belconnen district

2021	100,410
2031	102,180

### Population in ACT

2021	<b>430,400</b>
2031	<b>493,500</b>

## DWELLINGS

ACT average **3,000 dwellings** per year between **2011** and **2031**

**City and town centres** could attract **20–25%** of Canberras housing demand

Approximately **100 - 150** dwellings per year for **Belconnen town centre** to **2031**

## EMPLOYMENT

### Employment in the ACT/Queanbeyan

232,400	2011
260,000	2021
280,000	2031

### Operational office floor space

152,000m <sup>2</sup>	2015
161,000m <sup>2</sup>	2021
185,000m <sup>2</sup>	2031

### Retail floor space (GFA) at Belconnen town centre

221,000m <sup>2</sup>	2015
283,000m <sup>2</sup>	2031

## ENVIRONMENT

**0.7% increase** in **temperature** in the near future (**2020–2039**)

ACT Climate Change Snapshot (2014)

**Reduce** greenhouse gas emissions **40%** from 1990 levels, **by 2020**

AP2 (2012)



### 5.3 Character statement

Belconnen town centre's character has grown strongly and resiliently over the years, much like its asphalt-paved footpaths, rust-stained concrete and carpark-surrounded eucalypts. The centre has evolved into a place of choice, culture and variety. The arts centre, library, gymnasiums, ten pin bowling alleys, skaters, restaurants, meetings, parks, cinemas, shops, clubs, dog walkers and artwork are helping make the centre a place people now want to live in, as well as work or visit.

Belconnen town centre's evolving character is partly due to more diverse uses developing in areas that were previously only carparks or offices. Several clear precincts are emerging, as shown in Figure 28, based on the established land use zones. These are described below.

- **Service trades area**—provides a range of important services that should be retained and promoted. Residential development in most of the area may conflict with established uses and should be avoided for the time being.
- **Medium-density residential areas**—are well established and have provided an alternative and popular housing choice for the surrounding suburbs. There is little opportunity or need for substantial changes to these areas.
- **Retail/office area**—extends from Westfield Belconnen to the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets in the south and includes the new police station, Benjamin Offices and the redevelopment area along Lathlain Street. This area may undergo expansion if additional office space is required.
- **Mixed use/entertainment area**—has potential to develop into a key destination for Canberra. Its planning controls require careful consideration.
- **High density residential/office area**—located between Chandler Street and Eastern Valley Way. This area has undergone significant change from largely surface carparks to an area dominated by taller residential development and offers an opportunity to provide better integration with UC.
- **Municipal centre**—is centred on the Margaret Timpson Park area and considered the formal core area of the centre, with the library, Community Centre, Revival Centre and commercial buildings.

### 5.4 Planning principles

The following planning principles are applied to guide the implementation of this draft master plan, its vision and strategies. The principles reflect the future desired outcomes for the centre. Table 3 shows how the planning principles are supported by the planning strategies.

#### 5.4.1 Encourage a built form that contributes positively to the town centre.

The relationship of buildings to streets and open space is important to consider in the development of interesting and safe streetscapes. Buildings define urban spaces and can provide character, amenity and activity. Many recent buildings have successfully added to the centre; however, there should be better guidance to ensure better quality design outcomes.

Consideration of issues such as building heights, form, scale, setbacks, existence of awnings or colonnades, innovative building design and defining where active frontages are required would help ensure better quality built form and public spaces. Other important considerations are the impact that taller buildings may have on views, wind tunnelling, overshadowing effects and their relationship with the surrounding landscape.

#### 5.4.2 Enable an environmentally responsible and resilient town centre

Belconnen town centre provides an opportunity to help reduce Canberra's large ecological footprint and achieve a better environment.

The quality of storm water flowing to the lake can be improved and areas around the lake improved for wildlife habitat and connectivity. The use of open space for activities, including community gardens, will be considered, along with encouraging the community to take ownership of rehabilitation maintenance and revegetation projects.

The construction of more energy-efficient buildings will be encouraged and planting of street trees will ensure the streets will be pleasant places on warmer days. Better infrastructure encourages more people to walk or cycle to work, and enables more efficient water use.



Figure 28: Character Precincts





### 5.4.3 Encourage a liveable town centre that attracts a diverse community during both day and night

The most successful places are those which are attractive, accessible and safe, and which offer a large range of activities and choice. People want to visit or live in such places. More people living in the centre make places more active and safer, and will further improve Belconnen's character.

Belconnen town centre's advantages of location, amenities and a large surrounding population should be utilised to provide active destinations, particularly at Emu Bank. These will be supported by an improved public domain through features such as street furniture, paving, lighting and street trees.

Supporting a strong local community is a key factor in ensuring the 'liveability' of the centre. Taller residential developments are often criticised for a lack of 'community'; however, factors such as community facilities, gardens and community run events can strengthen a community and help integrate new and existing residents.

### 5.4.4 Capitalise on employment opportunities

The possibility of the Belconnen town centre losing a substantial part of its employment base highlights the need to reinforce and diversify employment opportunities. Its relationship with UC and other institutions provides significant economic advantages that have not been fully realised. Integrating the university with the centre will create opportunities for new employment and should be a priority.

The centre contains a large number of businesses outside of Westfield Belconnen, which provides substantial employment. However, these businesses lack a unified identity and marketing focus that could promote the area and allow it to compete more effectively. Other initiatives, such as establishing low-rent office space for business start-ups that are connected to high speed broadband, will be considered.

Consideration of how and when development occurs on remaining vacant sites is important to ensure active destinations and enhance economic returns. This extends to considering the future of current office employment sites if Australian Government departments decide to relocate.

### 5.4.5 Provide a well-connected centre with easy and safe transport and movement

The centre generally lacks the congestion or separation by arterial roads that burden many urban centres, although there are several improvements required to transport and movement. There is a significant need for legible and safe connections for pedestrians and cyclists into and across the centre. Safe routes to the centre along College Street and Belconnen Way, as well as the conversion of the former bus way near Joynton Smith Drive into a cycle path, have the potential to encourage many more cyclists into the centre.

There is also a need to provide safer roads, improve the operation of some intersections and refine the public transport system to accommodate increased demand and the future possible provision of light rail. More efficient provision and usage of parking supply through measures such as smart parking can help create a safer and easier-to-navigate centre.



*Ginninderra Drive shared path, indicating obstructions*



## 5.5 Spatial framework

The spatial framework (Figure 29) sets out how the broad structure of the centre could be arranged in the long term. The spatial framework shows how land use, public domain and connections could be arranged and delivered.

The spatial framework recognises the challenges in the centre and brings together the opportunities, vision and planning principles to illustrate how the Belconnen town centre could change over the lifetime of this master plan.

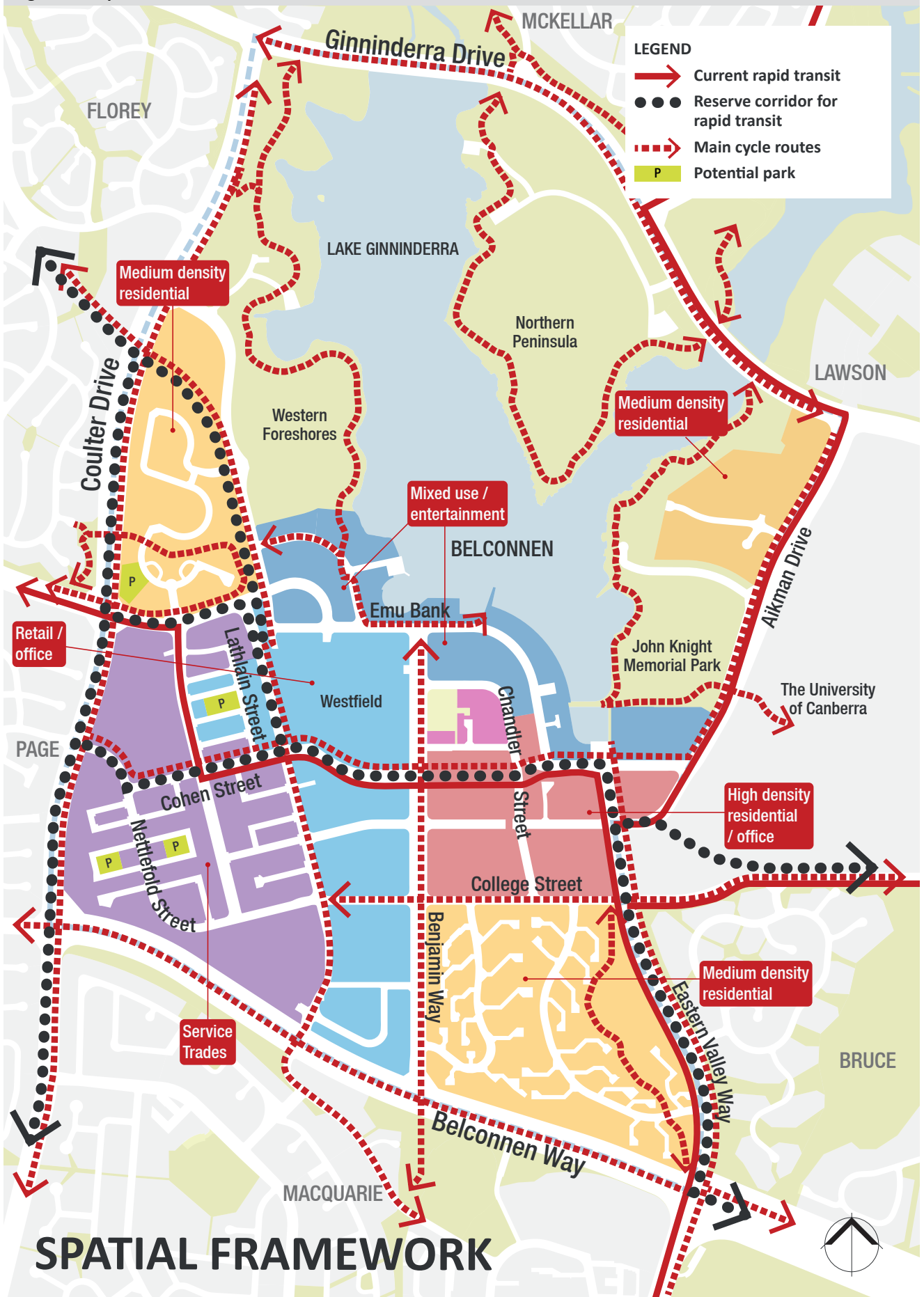
**Table 3: Summary of Principles and Strategies**

Principle	Strategy
Encourage a built form that contributes positively to the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage town centre living</li> </ul>
Enable an environmentally responsible and resilient town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the quality and use of open space areas</li> <li>• Improve the centre’s sustainability through the design of buildings and the public domain</li> </ul>
Encourage a liveable town centre that attracts a diverse community during both day and night	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage active destinations to grow</li> <li>• Improve the public domain</li> </ul>
Capitalise on employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the relationship with the university and other institutions</li> <li>• Encourage a more prosperous service trades area</li> <li>• Retain sites for employment</li> </ul>
Provide a well-connected centre with easy and safe transport and movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a well-connected centre that is easy and safe to get to and move around.</li> <li>• Encourage greater use of public transport</li> <li>• Manage parking to ensure the centre is accessible</li> <li>• Encourage safer roads</li> </ul>





Figure 29: Spatial framework





## 5.6 Planning strategies

These planning strategies are informed by the vision and planning principles in the previous section. They provide direction and guidance for the future development of the centre over the long term, considering the broad range of issues identified in the background and analysis.

The planning strategies identify opportunities for private sector investment within the centre. Where capital investments are identified, they will be subject to consideration by the ACT Government through future budget processes.

### 5.6.1 Encourage town centre living

Living in the centre has a range of benefits, including being close to employment, public transport, retail, entertainment and recreation facilities. The centre supports large areas of medium density development and recent apartment construction has broadened the choice of dwelling types. These are proving to be attractive for young professionals, students and people wanting to downsize while remaining close to their local community.

Comments received during consultation indicate that the community supports a greater residential population in the town centre. However, the community also indicated a desire for improved building design.

#### Recommended planning policies

- Retain the current Territory Plan rule that apartment developments in the centre are not required to provide parking for residents. Although this has not been taken up to date, it may encourage the construction of parking stations where residents lease carparks. This would reduce the cost of apartments and free-up unused residential spaces for public use.
- Encourage a range of apartment building types within the town centre. Alternatives such as two storey live/work units or shop-top housing should be provided. This could be facilitated by redevelopment in certain areas.
- Ensure the development of new apartment buildings preserves the views from existing apartments as far as possible, while maximising their own potential views.
- Establish development controls that provide incentives to reward good development outcomes

where the maximum allowed height is 12 storeys or higher. For example, increased height allowances could be developed where buildings can:

- » demonstrate a high level of environmental sustainability
- » contribute to the public domain, such as providing street trees, public facilities or more effective 'place-making'
- » demonstrate high quality building design that is innovative, attractive and considered. This includes aspects such as materials and consideration of surrounding uses
- » include a broader variety of apartment types, such as three bedroom, dual key, double height or dual aspect apartments, that cater for a wide range of household types and incomes.
- The proposed maximum heights for sites, if the proposed public realm, high quality design and sustainability outcomes are provided, are indicated on Figure 30.
- The proposed setback controls are provided on Table 4.
- Following consideration of the relationship of taller buildings with the surrounding landscape and a range of other factors, it is considered the maximum height for higher level development should be set to 27 storeys. This will enable the surrounding ridge lines to generally remain dominant while ensuring the development requirements of the town centre can be met.
- Incorporate a clear base, middle and top for taller buildings (12 storeys or above) unless demonstrating exceptional design quality. Buildings must provide a strong relationship with the public domain and avoid towers that continue to the ground.
  - » Building bases or podiums will define entrances and provide attractive and active frontages to main pedestrian areas.
  - » The middle of taller buildings will be set back in accordance with Table 4.
  - » The top of taller buildings will provide an appropriate finish to the building form and be designed to integrate or conceal plant rooms.





**Table 4: Building setback**

Height	Setback
Podium up to 6 storeys	0m
Towers from 7 up to 12 storeys	3m
Tower from 12 storeys and above	6m

- Provide innovation in building design. For example, the use of winter garden balconies provides more usable space for Canberra's climate and can help reduce noise. Similarly, dual aspect gallery apartments can increase natural ventilation and reduce corridor space.
- Limit carpark podiums to six storeys and wrap them with residential or commercial uses where fronting onto the main pedestrian areas indicated in Figure 35. Locate car and service entrances on secondary streets.
- Provide external communal areas for apartment developments on roof and podium spaces. Provide facilities provided for a range of ages. Where deep root planting is not possible, provide it in public space elsewhere in the centre.
- Ensure ground floor apartments are adaptable for commercial uses where fronting main pedestrian areas, as shown in Figure 35, with higher ceiling levels and separation from public space through either courtyards or a maximum 1 metre height difference.
- Ensure ground floor apartments and commercial tenancies have individual entries from public space and prohibit retail arcades which require dual frontage tenancies.
- Make communal entrances, lobby and lift areas visible from external public spaces.

#### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Continue with the improvements to public areas and amenities in Belconnen town centre to ensure it remains an attractive and desirable place to live. Simple improvements such as trolley collection bays in the higher density housing area could encourage people to walk rather than drive to supermarkets.
- Establish strong communities to further enhance the centre as a desirable place to live. Community groups can take a lead in organising events and rehabilitation initiatives and maintenance projects that promote ownership and pride in the area.

## **5.6.2 Improve the quality and use of open space areas**

### **Lake Ginninderra**

Urban open space around Lake Ginninderra provides an important recreational resource, holds ecological and possibly archaeological value, and has potential for vegetative restoration. Because the developed area of the centre has capacity to accommodate projected residential growth, there is currently no requirement to rezone open space adjacent to the lake to enable additional development. This will also help retain and emphasise the contrast between the lake's open space and the centre's built form.

There is currently no requirement for additional recreational areas around the lake; however, there is scope to improve parking, areas of the shared path and vegetation.

The open space of the northern peninsula currently has limited ecological or recreation value. This area has potential for a range of uses, including parkland, bush regeneration or rezoning to allow development. There is currently no strong demand for alternative use of this land, so retaining the current open space provisions will provide flexibility for the future.

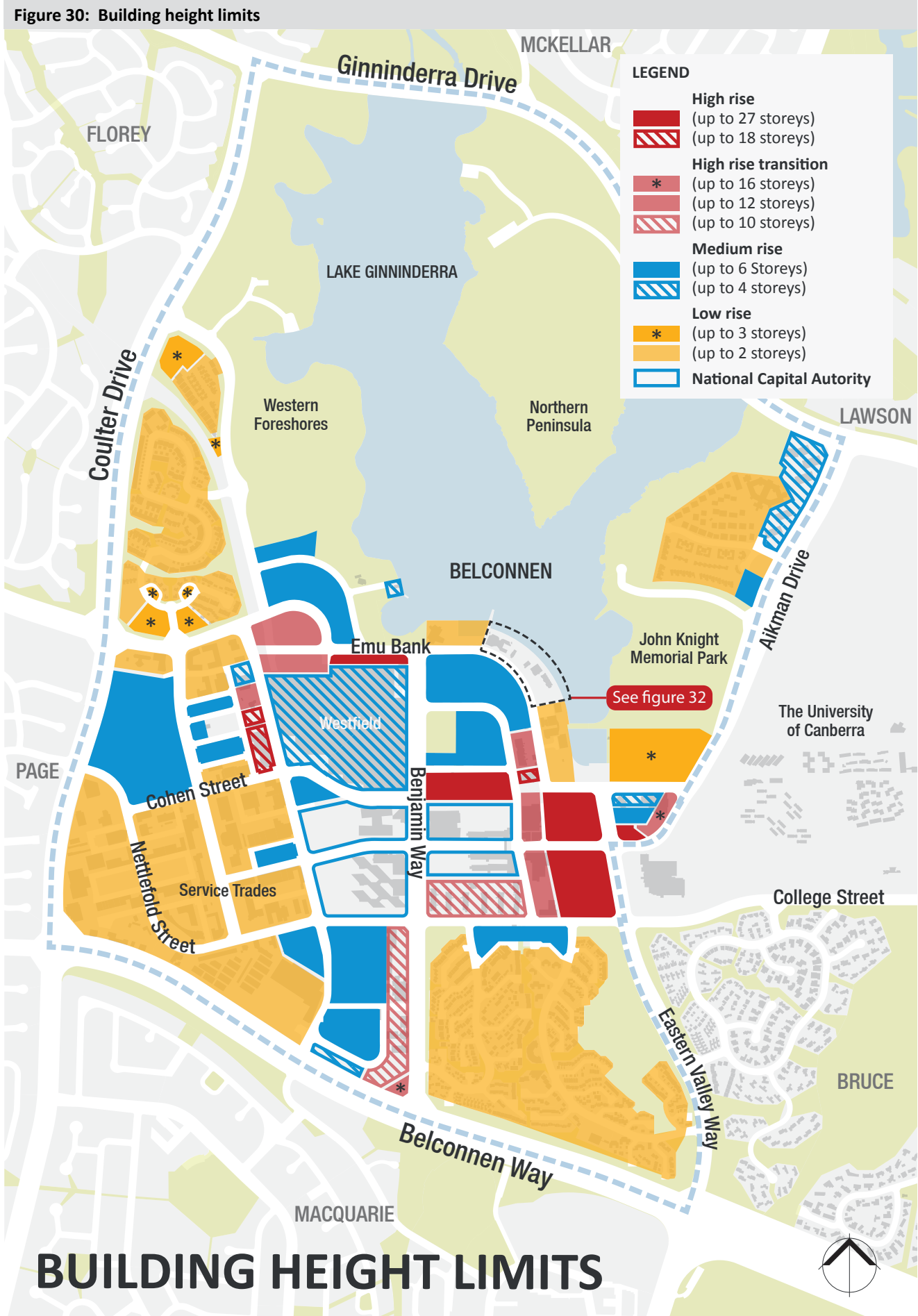
Suitable space to meet the long term requirements of groups that want to use the lake, such as the Lake Ginninderra Sea Scouts, as well as future possible users needs to be identified. The western side of the lake has potential for a range of uses, including community gardens. There is scope to continue improving the water quality of stormwater entering the lake, particularly runoff from the service trades area and possibly from the Cook / Aranda area.

#### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Establish a budget bid to design and construct additional parking spaces at John Knight Memorial Park. There is potential for additional perpendicular parking spaces on the north side of Townsend Place.
- Develop a program of habitat rehabilitation for the northern and western areas of the lake. This work could be undertaken by local community groups, possibly through Australian Government funding.
- Investigate the development of a community garden on the western side of the lake, including assessing the level of community interest, the land required, access and management of the facility.



Figure 30: Building height limits





- Investigate further public domain improvements at Emu inlet, including the provision of a pontoon stage to enable community performances and events.

### Recommended further studies

- Investigate measures to further improve stormwater quality, including the need for replacement of the Eastern Valley Way gross pollutant trap and construction of a new water quality control pond, and introduce measures such as rain gardens and ponds.
- Stormwater from the service trades area currently flows directly into the lake. Construction of a small water quality control pond would improve the quality of water, as well as provide a facility to contain spills from the service trade area.
- Determine the demand from community groups, such as Rowing ACT and the Lake Ginninderra Sea Scouts, for space adjacent to the lake and how this space could most effectively be used. It is suggested areas adjacent to the former water police station jetty would be most suitable for these uses.

### Margaret Timpson Park

Margaret Timpson Park is Belconnen's key 'civic' space and currently the only park area within the town centre core. While increased use of the park would be desirable, the focus of activity has moved to Lathlain Street. Rather than trying to attract activity through additional commercial uses, the focus should be on its function as a formal space and as a park for the surrounding residents.

Providing a children's play space, possibly incorporating water play, would be a key improvement. Any changes will need to retain the existing palm trees and formal layout of the park, which help emphasise the park's civic role.

It has been suggested to demolish the former community health building and expand Margaret Timpson Park; however the ACT Health Directorate still requires this building. Given future uses of the site and the adjacent vacant block are unknown, it is recommended to retain the current community facilities zoning (CFZ). However, establishing development controls including maximum heights for both these blocks will provide certainty of future built form if redevelopment does occur.

**Figure 31: Possible future buildings fronting onto Margaret Timpson Park**





### Recommended planning policies

- Increase maximum building heights for blocks 40 and 41 of Section 54 up to the podium level of the adjacent Sentinel apartments on Block 1, Section 199, (RL 595m) to ensure a viable redevelopment, better surveillance opportunities of the park and maintain existing views from adjacent apartments.
- Increase the allowable building heights of blocks 37 and 39 of Section 54 to six storeys to enable upper-level residential development and surveillance of the park, as indicated in Figure 31.
- Establish planning controls for the blocks fronting Margaret Timpson Park that encourage high quality buildings and enable contribution to the upgrade of the park.

### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Establish a budget bid for the design and construction of a children's play area at Margaret Timpson Park, in conjunction with Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) Directorate. This could incorporate water play areas, barbecue facilities, public toilets and a legal graffiti wall.

### Other areas of open space

The car parks and open space areas at Oatley Court and Purdue Street are currently zoned Service Zone (CZ3).

Rezoning the areas of open space to urban open space (PRZ1) will provide valuable areas for both current users and the possible long-term redevelopment of the service trades area.

Open space is well provided in the Emu Ridge and Totterdell Street areas; however, the safety of some areas could be improved.





Block 2, Section 184 fronts onto Totterdell Street and contains a large number of trees, providing visual amenity to the intersection of Southern Cross Drive and Coulter Drive. This block is zoned RZ2, which is considered low density for a town centre location. While the block could be sold, development may be constrained by possible requirements to retain larger trees. It would be preferable to retain this block as open space and further strengthen the tree planting to provide a landscaped entrance to the centre.

Block 16, Section 14 fronts onto Coulter Drive and Nettlefold Street. The site is zoned CZ3 and has high visibility however vehicular access is very difficult.

A better outcome may be to delay development of this block until it can be integrated with any future redevelopment of the bus depot site.

Although vegetated areas beside Belconnen Way have some visual and ecological value, the current Transport Zone (TSZ1) zoning provides flexibility for road widening, while restricting other development. It is recommended the current zoning of this area be retained.

#### **Recommended planning policies**

- Subdivide and rezone part sections 5 and 11 at Oatley Court from Services Zone (CZ3) to Urban Open Space (PRZ1) to ensure open space and parking spaces are retained.
- Rezone Block 3, Section 22 at Purdue Street from Services Zone (CZ3) to Urban Open Space (PRZ1).
- Rezone Block 2 Section 184 from Suburban Core (RZ2) to Urban open space (PRZ1).

#### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Investigate methods of rectifying the entrapment hazard in the open space on Section 184, behind Totterdell Street.
- Establish a budget bid in conjunction with TAMS for the design and construction of improved open space areas at Oatley Court, if the rezoning proposal for these areas is successful. This could include a footpath from the carpark to basketball centre, additional lighting, seating and vandal proof basketball hoops. Improvements to the southern area could include a barbecue and public seating.

### **5.6.3 Improve the centre's sustainability through the design of buildings and the public domain.**

In 2010, Canberra's per capita greenhouse gas emissions were 18% above the national average while water usage was 17% above the national average.<sup>13</sup> This contributed to an ecological footprint of 9.2 hectares per person compared to the Australian average of 6.4 hectares, the fourth highest in the world. Combined with the predicted effects of climate change, where Canberra will become hotter and drier, our buildings and public spaces must become more efficient and responsive to the changing environment.

#### **Recommended planning policies**

- Establish development controls that provide incentives to increase environmentally sustainable building outcomes. These should encourage best practice rather than a minimum acceptable result.
- The Elm tree outside the Belconnen Library has heritage value as the remaining link to the original Emu Bank homestead. Consideration should be given for the inclusion on the ACT Tree Register.

#### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

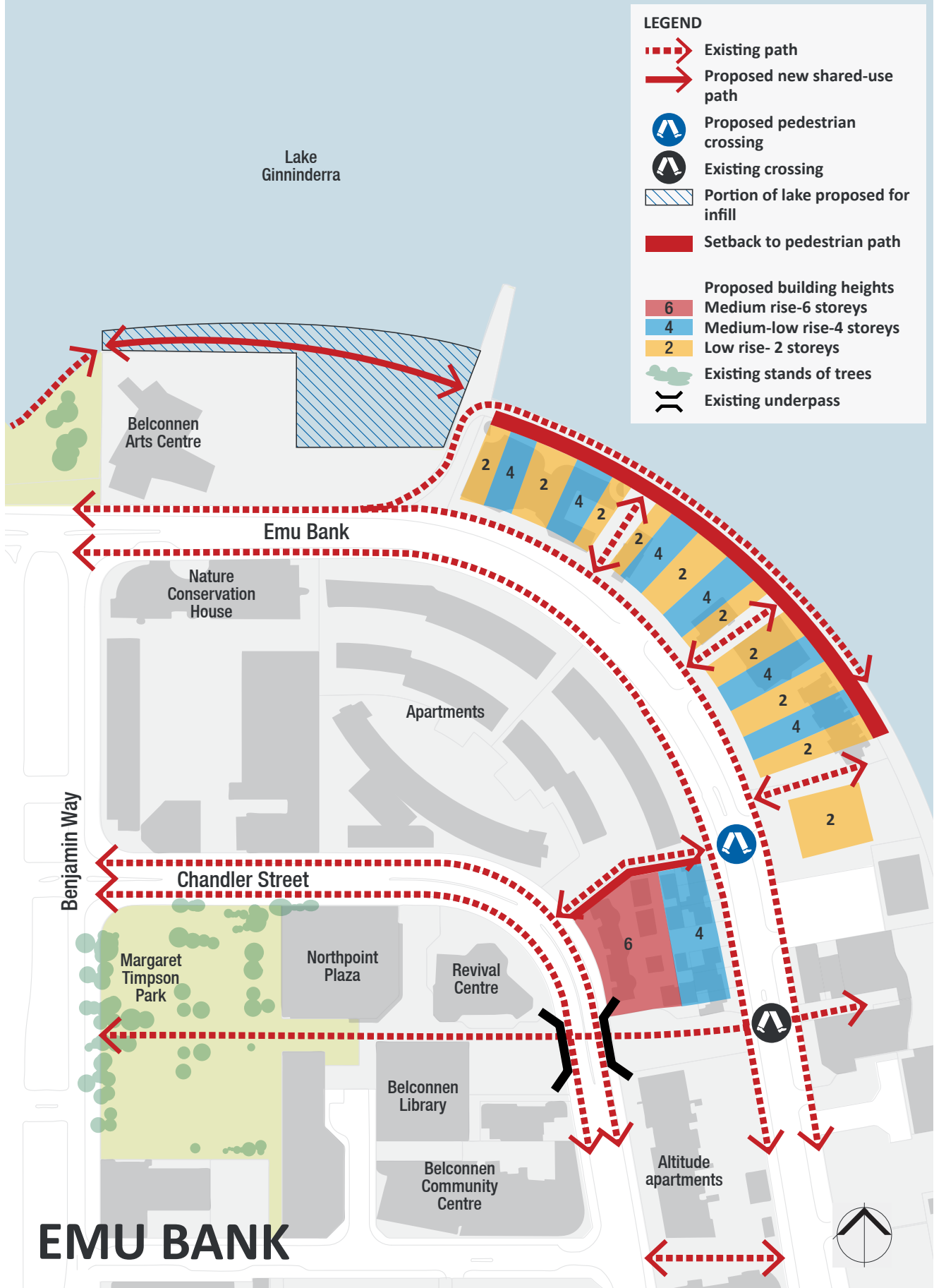
- Develop a street tree planting plan for the town centre core that keeps existing eucalypts where possible and ensures new large-canopied street trees are provided throughout the centre to achieve a minimum 50% shade coverage of the streets. Plant new street trees within tree pits or rain gardens, possibly located on the street. Irrigate trees with stormwater runoff, which ensures the trees have a water source and helps reduce stormwater volume.
- New trees should be species that are tolerant of urban spaces and are drought and disease resistant. This would require TAMS approval, but could include species such as the Oriental Plane (*Platanus orientalis*).

#### **Recommended further studies**

- Undertake further heritage assessments of the Belconnen Library and 'Tumbling Cubes' sculpture to determine their heritage value and potential nomination for inclusion on the ACT Heritage Register.



Figure 32: Detail of Emu Bank





#### 5.6.4 Encourage active destinations to grow

There is a desire from the community to establish attractive and active locations within the centre, particularly for night time use. Emu Bank and Lathlain Street are two locations where more active destinations are most viable.

##### Emu Bank

As detailed under 4.2 Opportunities, this precinct has strong potential to become a more attractive destination. Desirable outcomes will be larger, better quality outdoor dining areas facing the lake, a greater choice of venues and a more attractive presentation to both the lake and the street.

The visual dominance of surface car parking should be reduced. A future possible view of Emu Bank is provided in Figure 36.

Section 65 has a two storey height limit, with residential uses permitted at the second floor. To encourage better outcomes, incentives are required to enable lessees to redevelop their sites, for example adjusting parking requirements and enabling greater building heights.

The only site considered suitable for a car parking structure close to the Emu Bank area is the Padthaway Gardens housing complex. In the longer term, this site could be redeveloped to provide a higher density of residential development and publically available parking for the whole precinct.

##### Recommended planning policies

On blocks 76, 79 and 80 of Section 65:

- Consider parking requirements in this area prior to any parking policy changes. Removing current on-block parking requirements may encourage redevelopment but, without alternative parking available, the area may become unattractive for customers.
- Provide a minimum 10 metre setback from the building line of redevelopment to the lakeside boundary to encourage landscaped outdoor eating areas at the same level as the shared path.
- Require a minimum 3 metre wide pedestrian easement on each side boundary, apart from the north-west boundary of Block 80, Section 65 to maintain pedestrian connections from Emu Bank to the lake.

- Allow buildings up to four storeys high, provided they are in accordance with the setbacks indicated in Figure 32, to enable some views from the buildings opposite to be retained.

##### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Investigate the possibility of a shared path behind the arts centre. This may require infilling part of the lake or providing a bridge, but would ensure the area is more accessible and usable.
- Improve the visibility and use of the path connecting Chandler Street to Lathlain Street, on the north side of Padthaway Gardens.

##### Opportunities for land release

- Investigate the potential for redevelopment of Padthaway Gardens as a combined car park and residential development. If this is agreed, it may enable better development outcomes on Section 65, Emu Bank.
- Determine the use of the new area of land created if shared path behind the Arts Centre is agreed to. For example, it may be better suited to community use or open space, but its sale for residential use may help fund stage two of the arts centre.

##### Lathlain Street

The redevelopment of sites at the north end of Lathlain Street present an opportunity for it to become the 'main street' of the centre, as indicated in Figure 33. This area has considerable potential to support taller buildings and an increased range of uses, including residential, retail and community uses.

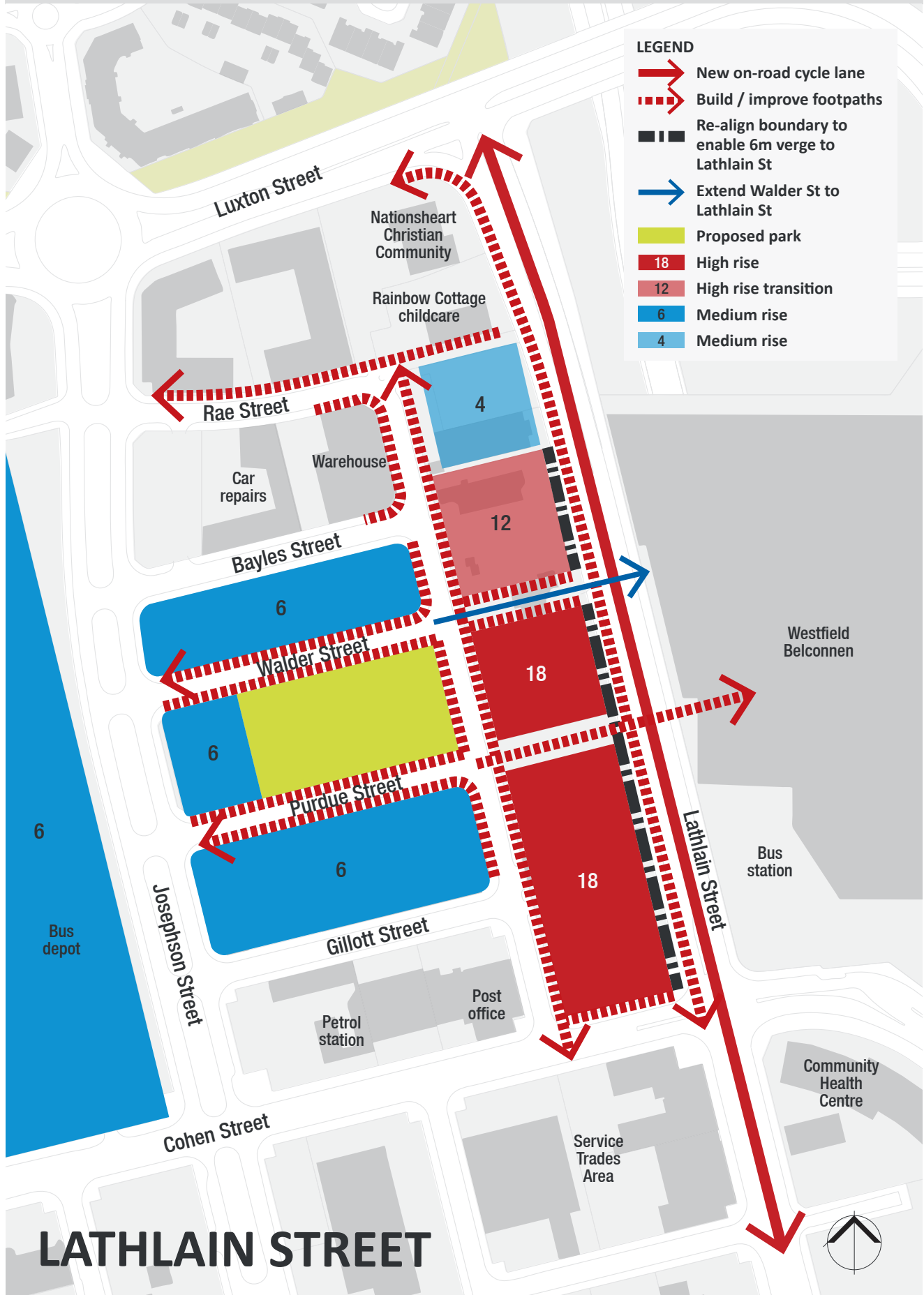
Ensuring clear connections between Josephson Street and Lathlain Street will be important for any future redevelopment of the bus depot.

Redevelopment of sites fronting onto Walder Street and Purdue Street for upper level residential development will take advantage of increased activity and close proximity to the bus station. To enable a viable redevelopment of this area, it is recommended the zoning of these areas be changed to 'Business Zone' (CZ2).

Given the lack of any urban open space in the area, together with the significant development potential available, it is recommended that Block 3, Section 22 is rezoned as open space to provide a park for the community.



Figure 33: Detail of proposed planning controls for the Lathlain Street area







Blocks 22 and 23, Section 21 front onto Lathlain Street and contain a car wash and motor vehicle repairer. These businesses are successful; however the uses and current building heights may not be compatible with the future adjacent redevelopment. Consideration could be given to increasing the allowable building height of these blocks.

Block 30, Section 52 fronts onto Lathlain Street and, at the lower level, Joynton Smith Drive. This block is narrow and difficult to develop, with the lower level backing onto a retaining wall. A better outcome may be to connect this block with Block 1, Section 151 at an upper level, as indicated in Figure 34. This would enable buildings to front onto Lathlain Street, the former busway to be preserved as a potential cycle way and Joynton Smith Drive to remain. Utilising currently wasted space will enable Block 1, Section 151 to be 30% larger.

Similarly, extending Block 26, Section 52 across Joynton Smith Drive to Block 30, Section 52 would also provide a frontage to Lathlain Street, while enabling Block 26 to be about 36% larger.

#### Recommended planning policies

- Establish controls to limit building heights to six storeys on sections 185 and 186.
- Rezone parts of sections 21, 23, 185 and 186 to Business Zone (CZ2) from Service Trades (CZ3) to minimise potential conflict between land uses.
- Establish controls to encourage the consolidation of blocks on sections 185 and 186 to ensure viable redevelopment outcomes.
- Establish controls to allow building heights up to 12 and 18 storeys on parts of Blocks 1 and 24, Section 21 and Block 2, Section 23.
- Establish controls to allow building heights to six storeys on blocks 22 and 23, Section 21. Given the unusual block configuration, it is preferable that these blocks are consolidated prior to any redevelopment above the existing height controls.
- If air rights can be established for Block 1, Section 151, and Block 26, Section 52, development is to be limited to a height of 12 storeys, to enable views over the 'Waterside' apartments and to retain views from future development on the former police station site. Retain existing land use zone

- Establish clear controls to encourage better urban design and built form outcomes with redevelopment in this location.

#### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Determine the feasibility of extending Walder Street to Lathlain Street to enable better access into this area, including consideration of the reduced development area on Section 21.

#### Recommended future studies

- Determine the probability of the library, community centre and/or CIT relocating to this area. These uses will require a Community Facility zoning over a suitable area of the site.
- Determine the feasibility of enabling air rights to Block 1, Section 151 to extend over Joynton Smith Drive and Block 30, Section 52.
- Determine the feasibility of enabling air rights to Block 26, Section 52 to extend over Joynton Smith Drive.

#### 5.6.5 Improve the public domain

Clear requirements for improvements to the public domain will enhance each precinct's character and ensure improvements are provided effectively.

There is currently little direction to ensure consistent paving and street furniture. The Canberra Central Design Manual was developed following extensive work and agency agreement, and provides a consistent suite of materials. This manual details how public domain improvements should currently be undertaken in the city centre. While there could be some adjustments, it is recommended this should form the basis for future works in the Belconnen town centre. It will be important to focus on 'place making' to ensure areas within the town centre are active and attractive.

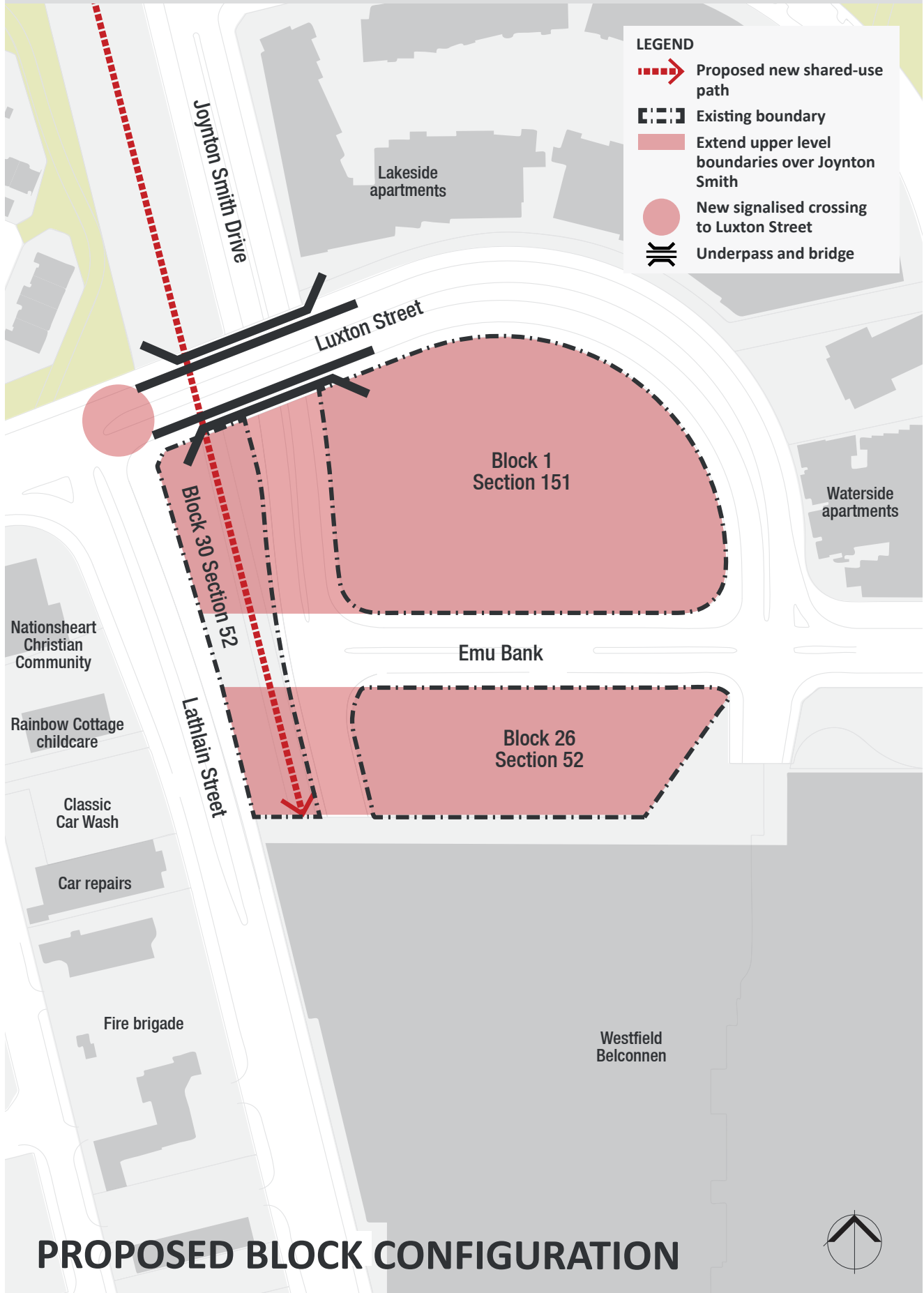
#### Retail/office precinct

This precinct extends from the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets to Westfield Belconnen. Frontages to Lathlain Street and Benjamin Way have value as pedestrian connections, but suffer from narrow footpaths and a lack of weather protection.

The Belconnen Fresh Food Markets has approved plans for additional development. When constructed, the area will have a high standard of environmental sustainability and a diverse range of uses.



Figure 34: Proposed block configuration





The verges in this precinct are narrow, particularly along Lathlain Street, where they are less than 2 metres in places. The verge to the emergency services group at Lathlain Street is approximately 4.5 metres, which is considered too narrow for a potentially busy area.

### **Recommended planning policies**

- Increase the verge width of the Lathlain Street frontages of the former Belconnen Police Station, the remand centre, the ambulance station and fire station to 6 metres to ensure these areas provide suitable public space.
- Establish clear planning controls to ensure parking podiums fronting Lathlain Street and Cohen Street are wrapped with residential or office uses.
- Rezone Block 3, Section 22 from Services Zone (CZ3) to Urban Open Space (PRZ1) and refurbish it as a public park.
- Limit requirements for additional active frontages to the areas identified in Figure 35 to ensure areas of activity are concentrated and identifiable.

### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Use the Canberra Central Design Manual to form the basis of future public domain improvements. The document should be reviewed to determine if Belconnen-specific changes should be incorporated.
- Pave Walder Street and Purdue Street frontages of Sections 185 and 186 in concrete to match the new verge design on Lathlain Street.
- Block 3, Section 23 provides an overland flow path. Investigate how this can be retained while providing a substantial pedestrian link between Rae Street and Lathlain Street. The redundant underpass should be closed off.
- Investigate extending Walder Street through Block 24 Section 21 to Lathlain Street. This should continue with footpaths and street tree planting to provide a clear link between Rae Street and Lathlain Street as indicated in Figure 33.

### **Emu Ridge area**

The requirement for a water quality control pond and gross pollutant trap on the former Eastern Valley Way oval is dependent on the success of the new wetlands adjacent to the skate park; however, a new pond could provide a significant public domain improvement for this area. The establishment of ponds in Canberra's inner north has provided a strong basis for community involvement, attractive public space and increased wildlife habitat.

### **Further studies**

- Prepare a feasibility study to determine the technical requirements for a water quality control pond and gross pollutant trap on the former Eastern Valley Way oval.

### **High density residential/office precinct**

This precinct contains most of the existing taller residential buildings, sites where taller buildings have been approved for construction but have not yet been built, and a mix of other uses including the Labor Club and commercial offices.

As this area undergoes significant change, the public domain must be of a high standard. The Chandler Street verge of the Altitude apartments provides a good example of urban design outcomes that should be provided in conjunction with future developments.

### **Recommended planning policies**

- Limit the required areas of active frontage to the key areas indicated in Figure 35. Ground floor uses should be flexible and include commercially adaptable residential to reduce empty and dispersed shopfronts. This will also help ensure existing commercial areas are busy.
- Establish development controls that provide incentives to contribute to the improvement of the town centre's public domain.

### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Ensure public domain improvements in this area are co-ordinated to enable the area to become a recognisable precinct. Redevelopment provides a good opportunity to improve the public domain.



Figure 35: Proposed pedestrian routes and structured parking



### Emu Bank precinct

This precinct has potential to become a key destination for entertainment and dining. The quality of the public domain will be central to the success of the area. A high quality public domain should also reflect the character of the location. There are opportunities to improve the area's paving, lighting and landscaping as part of future redevelopment of sites.

Integrating landscaping and outdoor dining areas will provide a 'point of difference' for the area, making it attractive and successful.

#### Recommended Planning policies

- Provide additional pedestrian easements between Emu Bank and the lake, as detailed in section 5.6.3. This will provide clear connections and encourage more viable lakefront businesses.

#### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Improve the lakeside shared path beside Section 65. This paving has become unstable and requires replacement or repair.
- Enhance the lighting of main pedestrian areas, particularly along the shared lakeside path, from the Arts Centre to John Knight Park to provide a greater level of safety and amenity to these areas.

- Determine alternative methods of providing parking in the area, including opportunities for basement parking and structured carparking.

### 5.6.6 Improve the relationship with the University of Canberra and other institutions

The centre has a unique advantage given its proximity to important health, educational and sport facilities. This relationship offers significant future employment and lifestyle opportunities and should be utilised to increase the diversity and resilience of Belconnen's employment base.

The centre and UC will be closely integrated, with the UC Campus Master Plan revised to ensure development opportunities on the west side of the campus are realised. Improving road and pedestrian connections, together with establishing a formal entry point with signage will assist this.

Recent changes will enable UC to develop a wider range of uses, including private residential dwellings and larger areas of retail and commercial office space. It is important to ensure these uses complement rather than compete with the centre. The benefits offered by close proximity need to be maximised and inefficient duplication of uses in the town centre and UC avoided.

Figure 36: Future possible redevelopment along Emu Bank





### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Improve pedestrian and cycle connections, particularly on College Street to ensure they are legible and safe.
- Determine the feasibility of increased road connections between the centre and UC. For example, extending Emu Bank to Telita Street and Cameron Avenue through to Bimbimbie Street may enable better access to development sites and access between the centre and UC. This provides an opportunity for a formal entry point to UC with signage to be established.'

### Recommended further studies

- Ensure future revisions of the UC Campus Master Plan encourage integration with the centre. For example the 'business and enterprise' precinct of UC could be better located on the west side of the campus where it may have a stronger relationship with uses in the centre.

#### 5.6.7 Encourage a more prosperous service trades area

The service trades area supports a large number and range of small businesses. It is a valuable and accessible place for uses that may be unsuitable in other locations. The CZ3 Services zone currently permits residential use, which may provide after-hours activity and surveillance but could also force the closure of noisy businesses.

The current height control of two storeys reduces incentive for redevelopment, enabling the cheaper rents of the area to be maintained. Despite supporting a comparatively large number of businesses, the area lacks suitable amenity. Improving the amenity will ensure the area is competitive and attractive to customers.

### Recommended planning policies

- Remove the current provision allowing residential uses, thus minimising potential future conflicts between land uses and ensuring service trades uses are protected and retained.
- Provide awnings to all redevelopment in the area where it fronts a public footpath. Awnings are to be a minimum 3 metres wide and 3–4 metres high. The area has a high level of pedestrian activity but lacks pedestrian protection in places.

### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Undertake detailed design and planning investigations to improve the amenity of the area. Determine the preferred location for items including public toilets, signage, bike racks, additional seating and drinking water outlets.
- Continue the use of asphalt paving to the service trades area and replace all damaged areas. Asphalt provides a cost effective and distinctive character to the service trades area.
- Develop a street tree planting plan for the area, as detailed at point 5.6.2, retaining existing eucalypts where possible and ensuring new large-canopied street trees are provided to achieve at least a 50% shade coverage of the street.
- Encourage local business to establish a united approach to promoting the area and ensure it becomes a recognisable destination.
- Encourage new uses that are potentially noisy, such as live music venues, to locate in the service trades area to avoid conflict with residential uses.

#### 5.6.8 Retain sites for employment

Providing a substantial base of employment was a key driver for establishing the town centre. Decentralised employment has provided significant benefits such as reduced road congestion, improved property values and reduced commuting time. If DIBP relocate, it may be difficult to attract other large employers into existing office buildings.

The lessees of these sites may seek to provide residential uses to retain profitability. Although these sites are under control of the National Capital Authority, it is vital that an area is reserved to provide substantial employment for the future.

### Recommended planning policies

- The use of land currently considered 'National Land' on sections 43, 44, 49 and 50 is the responsibility of the NCA. However, any consideration of permitting residential uses on these sites as an alternative use to 'employment' should not be supported.



### 5.6.9 Provide a well-connected centre that is easy and safe to get to and move around.

Providing improved cycle and pedestrian connections from surrounding suburbs and across the centre is a clear desire of the community. Legible, connected cycle lanes that children can confidently use will increase rates of cycling and provide added health and economic benefits.

While cycle connections to the centre are relatively good, connections across the centre are poor. However, there are many opportunities to improve these connections, as indicated in Figure 37. For example, a cycle way along the median of Benjamin Way could provide a direct cycle connection from Belconnen Way to the lake shared path while creating an experience of cycling between the trees.

The use of the former Joynton Smith busway as a shared path was strongly supported during consultation. This area has also been considered for additional residential development; however, this option faces several constraints, particularly the limited vehicle access, the narrow site width and height restrictions to respect adjacent development. While the busway culvert could be utilised for basement parking, it is considered most of the area would not currently be economically viable to develop.

The use of the busway as a cycleway will require additional infrastructure, including pedestrian signals on Coulter Drive and a cycle connection to the Florey Shops. The cost of this work could be offset by the development of more viable parts of the site, such as land adjacent to Coulter Drive and Morrell Street. Development of these sites will also provide increased surveillance of the future cycle way.

The Canberra Centenary Trail provides a significant recreational resource for the community, with 145 kilometres of walking and cycling paths around the ACT. Part of the trail goes through the town centre, providing an easy connection to it. Providing additional information about the trail through signage at the centre may encourage greater awareness and use of the trail.

#### Recommended planning policies

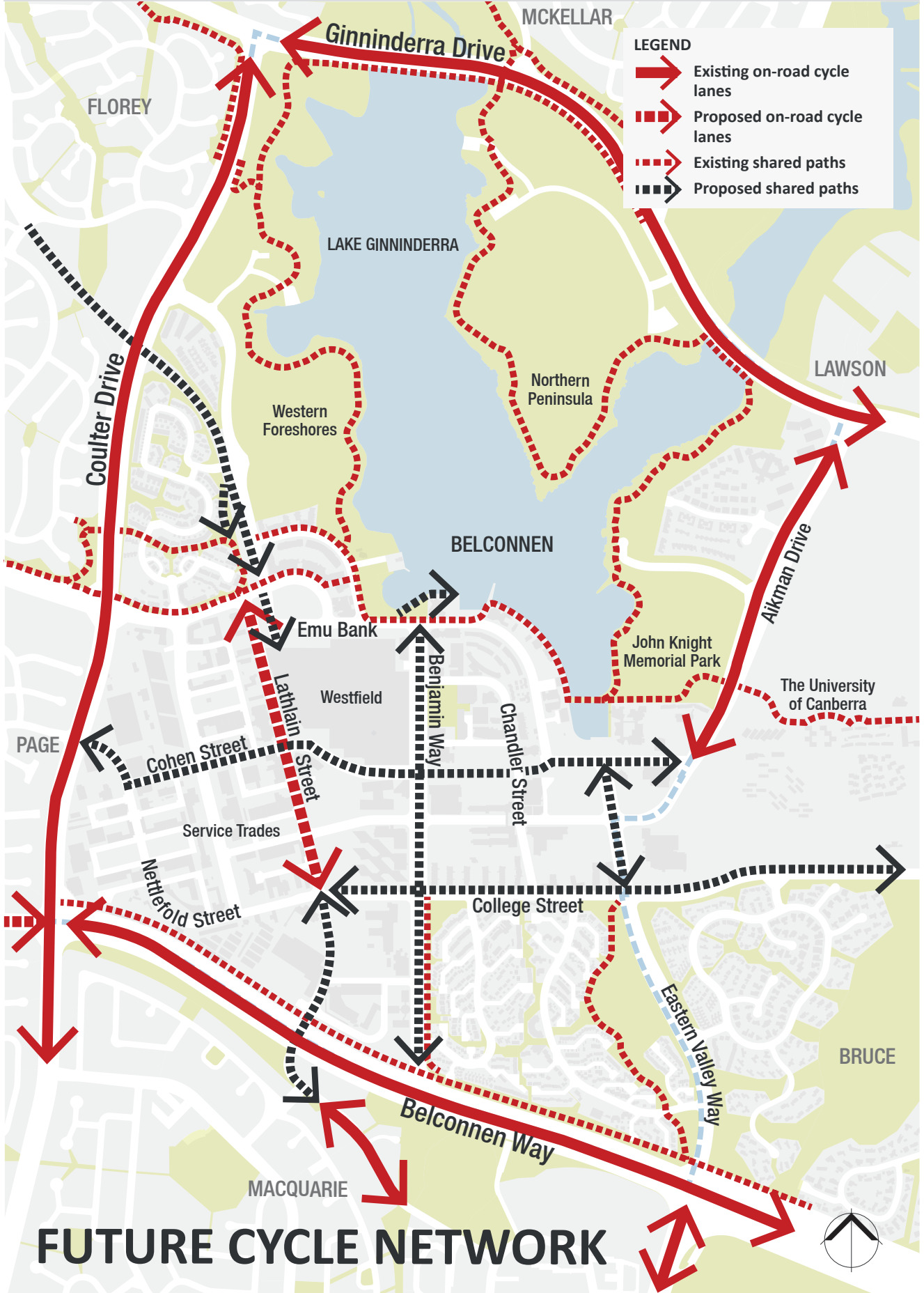
- Investigate the reconfiguration and rezoning of blocks fronting the former Joynton Smith busway to enable residential development. In particular, blocks 25 and 26, Section 157 have potential to support viable residential development.

#### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Work closely with TAMS to establish a program of cycle infrastructure improvements to establish a clear and safe network across the centre, as indicated in Figure 37. In particular:
  - » progress a clear north–south trunk route based on the former Joynton Smith busway and Lathlain Street. This will provide a direct link between Florey Shops, Westfield Belconnen, Lathlain Street bus station, the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets and the Jamison Centre.
  - » provide separated cycle lanes along Belconnen Way, extending from Kingsford Smith Drive to Coulter Drive
  - » improve the lake shared path, particularly the shared path on Ginninderra Drive Bridge. The location of street lights obstructs pedestrians, with people often using the road to avoid on-coming cyclists. Consideration could be given to utilising the existing on-road cycle lane to overcome this issue.
  - » widen the lake shared path in places where there is clear conflict between users or dirt tracks have developed.
  - » provide additional north–south connections linking existing cycle lanes with the lake along Eastern Valley Way and Benjamin Way. Consider making the median of Benjamin Way an alternative location of a two-way cycle path
  - » investigate the provision of a lake-side shared path around the arts centre. This may involve infill of part of the lake.
  - » consider the location of additional bike storage.
- Provide shared paths to both sides of College Street, linking Haydon Drive to Lathlain Street. This will provide a clear link from the AIS, CIT, Calvary Hospital and UC to the town centre. This will provide paths where they are missing, such as beside the ‘Oracle’.



Figure 37: Future cycle connections







- Provide clear pedestrian and cycle connections along Emu Bank and College Street, linking the UC and Lake Ginniderra College to the bike storage at the Community Bus Station, Westfield Belconnen and Page.
- Undertake an accessibility study to determine where improvements are required to existing pedestrian paths including checking to ensure compliance with current codes. This should include investigation for a 'cycle hub', including storage and change facilities.
- Investigate the provision of signage to inform people about the Canberra Centenary Trail, which runs beside the lake.
- Work closely with TAMS to establish a program of pedestrian infrastructure improvements, including:
  - » Ensure footpaths are provided to areas of the town centre where they are missing and where dirt tracks have formed, in particular beside Coulter Drive.
  - » Provide lighting improvements to areas perceived as having safety issues.
  - » Improve the legibility of key routes. For example, the underpass connecting Keene Place in Page to Egan Court is not obvious.

### 5.6.10 Encourage greater use of public transport

The reconfiguration of bus routes and demolition of the former Belconnen Bus Interchange has improved access to and the perception of safety of buses. The rapid route between the Belconnen town centre and the city centre provides links to UC, Radford College and Calvary Hospital. This is a convenient and cost-effective way of getting to the city, and is well used. The future possible provision of a light rail link between the City, Belconnen and Kippax offers further opportunity to encourage the use of public transport.

The Westfield Belconnen bus station is nearing capacity and may require additional platforms to accommodate future growth.

#### Recommended planning policies

- Review the requirement for the 'Intertown Public Transport' route, which is indicated on the Territory Plan map. This route requires confirmation and possible revision. For example, the Florey reservation and Joynton Smith Busway are still indicated despite now not being required.

#### Recommended public domain upgrades

- Undertake a study of future public transport requirements in the centre, including the requirement and possible location of future additional bus platforms at the Westfield bus station.
- The preferred route of a future light rail system is to be determined. Reconfiguration of streets to accommodate on-road cycle lanes and street trees will need to take a future possible light rail route into account.
- Promote the use of the bike cage at the community bus station as part of an alternative transport solution for both people travelling to the Belconnen town centre and the city centre. This bike cage is currently underutilised and may encourage more people to cycle if promoted.

### 5.6.11 Manage parking to ensure the centre is accessible

Many people consider parking to be a significant issue in the centre. Meeting future parking requirements will most effectively be addressed by commercially operated structured carparks. This will ensure a competitive, cost-effective and fair way of meeting parking needs. It may also enable commercial and residential buildings to be constructed without the added cost of providing parking spaces. The potential for such structured carparks is addressed in the ACT Parking Plan (2015).

Suitable locations for additional structured carparks need to be identified and reserved. These sites should be convenient to areas of demand and large enough to be commercially viable. Other uses, such as residential, could be incorporated into the buildings.

#### Recommended planning policies

- Review the parking rate requirements specified in the Parking and Vehicular access code, to align with recommendations of the ACT Parking Action Plan.
- Investigate the feasibility of sites identified as suitable for structured carparks, indicated in Figure 35. While several of these could be developed for parking in the short term, others will require relocation of existing uses, or may prove unsuitable.



Figure 38: Proposed 40KM/H zones





- Ensure structured carparks fronting main pedestrian routes have active uses or commercially adaptable residential dwellings fronting the street at ground level. These structures should also have office or residential at upper levels where overlooking main pedestrian routes.

#### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Encourage a higher participation of active travel to help reduce parking demand and provide health and economic benefits.
- If the proposed trial is successful, implement the smart parking system to enable more efficient use of parking in the centre.
- To ensure the viability of parking structures, apply and enforce parking restrictions in the centre and surrounding suburbs.
- Encourage opportunities to establish commercially operated car sharing facilities or car hire in the town centre. This may include identifying dedicated parking spaces close to apartment developments.

#### **Recommended further studies**

- Undertake a carpark usage and access study to assess parking areas that could be better utilised or designed, including the entrances to the Bunnings carpark and the Westfield carpark off Lathlain Street.

#### **5.6.12 Encourage safer roads**

The adoption of a 40 km/h speed limit in the central area of the centre has been generally accepted as a positive outcome. The provision of traffic calming devices, particularly the speed humps have not been popular and are resulting in cars swerving to avoid them; however, they send a clear signal that speeds need to be reduced.

The reduced speed limit enables pedestrian crossings and on-street parking to operate safely and provides a less car-focused character to the central area. With the possible introduction of additional on-road cycle lanes, it is important that roads and parking areas are safe for cyclists.

Increasing road safety in the town centre, particularly along Emu Bank, and providing more integrated traffic calming devices needs to be considered.

#### **Recommended public domain upgrades**

- Investigate the expansion of the 40 km/h zone to cover a wider area, as indicated in Figure 38. This includes Lathlain Street between College Street and Luxton Street, Chandler Street, Cameron Avenue and Emu Bank.
- Consider providing measures such as build-outs and raised pedestrian crossings to mark where the 40 km/h limit zones start, rather than the current plastic speed humps.
- Consider the provision of an additional raised pedestrian crossing on Emu Bank to align with the pedestrian path on Block 42, Section 55. This path links Chandler Street with Emu Bank, however is largely unknown and unused. This link could be valuable to connect with additional car parking areas.

Aerial view of the Belconnen town centre, [www.geoffcomfort.com](http://www.geoffcomfort.com)





## 6. Recommendations for implementation

### 6.1 The process of change

This draft master plan is being released for public comment. Following community engagement and feedback, a final master plan will be produced for consideration by the ACT Government.

Implementation will be through:

- a Territory Plan variation, including a revised Belconnen Precinct Code
- capital works to be considered in context of future budgets
- uptake of opportunities by private developers and the community.

Implementation of development set out in the master plan will be progressive over the longer term as it is dependent on capital works funding from the ACT Government, investment decisions by private business and land availability.

### 6.2 Territory Plan variation

A variation to the Territory Plan to revise the existing Belconnen Precinct Code will realise some of the planning policy recommendations. The precinct code will provide the opportunity for the building heights, setbacks and land uses outlined in the master plan to be implemented as development and redevelopment occurs.

There will be opportunity for the community to provide feedback on the precinct code through a separate community engagement process.

### 6.3 Public domain upgrades

Infrastructure and public space improvements are required to realise the vision and some of the strategies of this master plan. This will involve further investigations by various government agencies and funding consideration through future government budget bids.

### 6.4 Commercial opportunities

Business, commercial developers and the wider community are responsible for taking advantage of opportunities identified within the master plan. A number of changes indicated in the master plan are on existing developed sites or require substantial investment. Therefore, implementation of the master plan will be progressive over time.

### 6.5 Further studies

Potential further studies could include:

#### 6.5.1 Belconnen town centre design manual

Public domain improvements in the city centre are guided by the 'Canberra Central Design Manual', which provides a consistent approach to elements such as paving, seating and lighting. The development of a similar manual for Belconnen requires consideration; however, it may be more cost effective to adopt the Canberra Central manual.

#### 6.5.2 A road traffic study

A traffic study is required to determine the future requirements of road corridors. It would potentially include Aikman Drive between Ginninderra Drive and Emu Bank; Ginninderra Drive between William Slim and Aikman Drives; Lathlain Street between Belconnen Way and College Street; Luxton Street between Coulter Drive and Josephson / Totterdell St; and Nettlefold Street between Coulter Drive and Egan Court.

#### 6.5.3 A public transport study

A study of future public transport requirements in the town centre is required, including consideration of the need or suitability of the Cohen Street bus station and how to accommodate additional platforms, if required, at the Westfield bus station.

#### 6.5.4 A carpark usage study

A carpark usage and access study would assess parking areas that could be better utilised or designed. Potential study sites include the entrances to the Bunnings carpark and the upper-level Westfield carpark off Lathlain Street, both of which experience occasional queues back onto Lathlain St, and the upper level of the CISAC carpark (which is currently underutilised).

#### 6.5.5 An accessibility study

An accessibility study of the core area of the town centre is required to ensure key pedestrian routes are compliant with disability codes.



## 7. Endnotes

- 1 'Belconnen's Aboriginal Past', Peter Kabaila, 1997
- 2 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan Report, NCDC 1968
- 3 Environment and Planning Directorate estimates, derived from ABS 2011 census data
- 4 Australia Bureau of Statistics 2011 census data
- 5 Australia Bureau of Statistics 2011 census data
- 6 Environment and Planning Directorate estimates, derived from ABS 2011 census data.
- 7 APS Statistical Bulletin 2013-14
- 8 Property Council of Australia, February 2015
- 9 Colliers International retail research and forecast report first half 2014
- 10 Heart Foundation 'good for business' 2011
- 11 Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan NCDC 1968
- 12 Belconnen Town Centre Public Transport Improvements and Transport Orientated Development. ACTPLA 2008
- 13 Environment and Planning Directorate 2014, derived from ABS data.
- 14 Australian Conservation foundation consumption Atlas