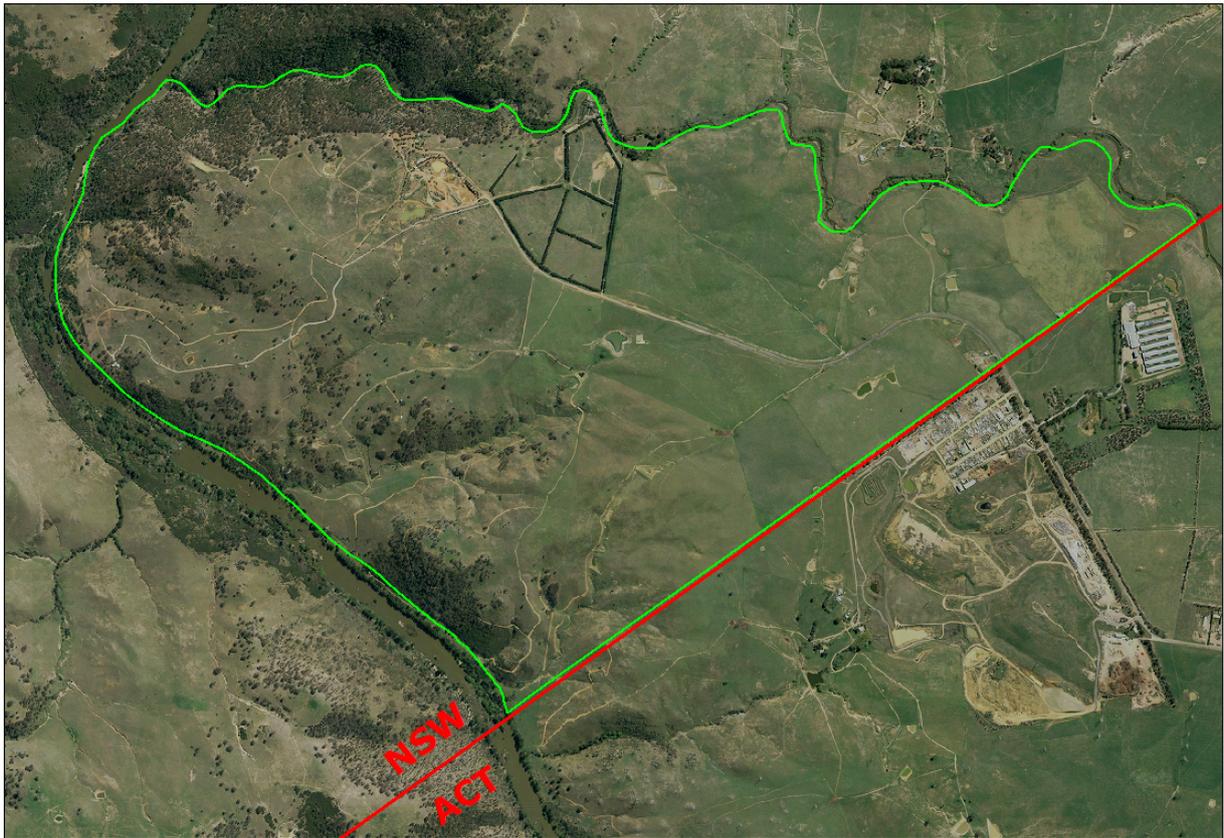




West Belconnen Agricultural Lands Review



June 2014

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Prepared for The Riverview Group
by



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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The Riverview Group are currently preparing a rezoning of land in West Belconnen which is in both the ACT and NSW. This report focuses on the land in NSW. The land is owned by Reid and Stevens and 4 other landholders. Reid and Stevens has the largest holding and currently farms it in conjunction with land in the ACT.

Edge Land Planning has been engaged to prepare an Agricultural Suitability Study of the NSW part of the site to progress the rezoning.

The study will specifically address the Local Planning Directions 1.2 and 1.5 dealing with rural lands.

This study has been prepared to accompany a planning proposal to be submitted to Yass Valley Council and the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure to enable it to be rezoned for urban purposes.

1.2. Study Area

The study area is shown on Map 1.1 and is in the Yass Valley Local Government Area adjoining the ACT on the western side of the Canberra urban area with the suburbs of Holt and Macgregor to the west. The Murrumbidgee River forms the western boundary of the site and Ginninderra Creek forms the northern boundary and the NSW ACT border is the southern boundary. To the west is the Canberra suburb of West Macgregor.

It can be seen that it has no physical public road access from NSW and the access to the NSW land is via Parkwood Road, which is in the ACT.

The lots and their area are described in table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Real Property Description and Area

Real Property Description	Area (ha)
Lot 1 DP 771051	91.8
Lot 2 DP 771051	80.0
Lot 3 DP 771051	80.0
Lot 4 DP 771051	80.0
Lot 5 DP 771051	80.0
Lot 61 DP 801234	83.0
Lot 62 DP 801234	25.0
Lot 7 DP 771051	80.0
Total	599.8

The land is held in 4 ownerships as follows:

- Lots 1, 2, 3 and 7 with an area of 332ha. Used for grazing of cattle.

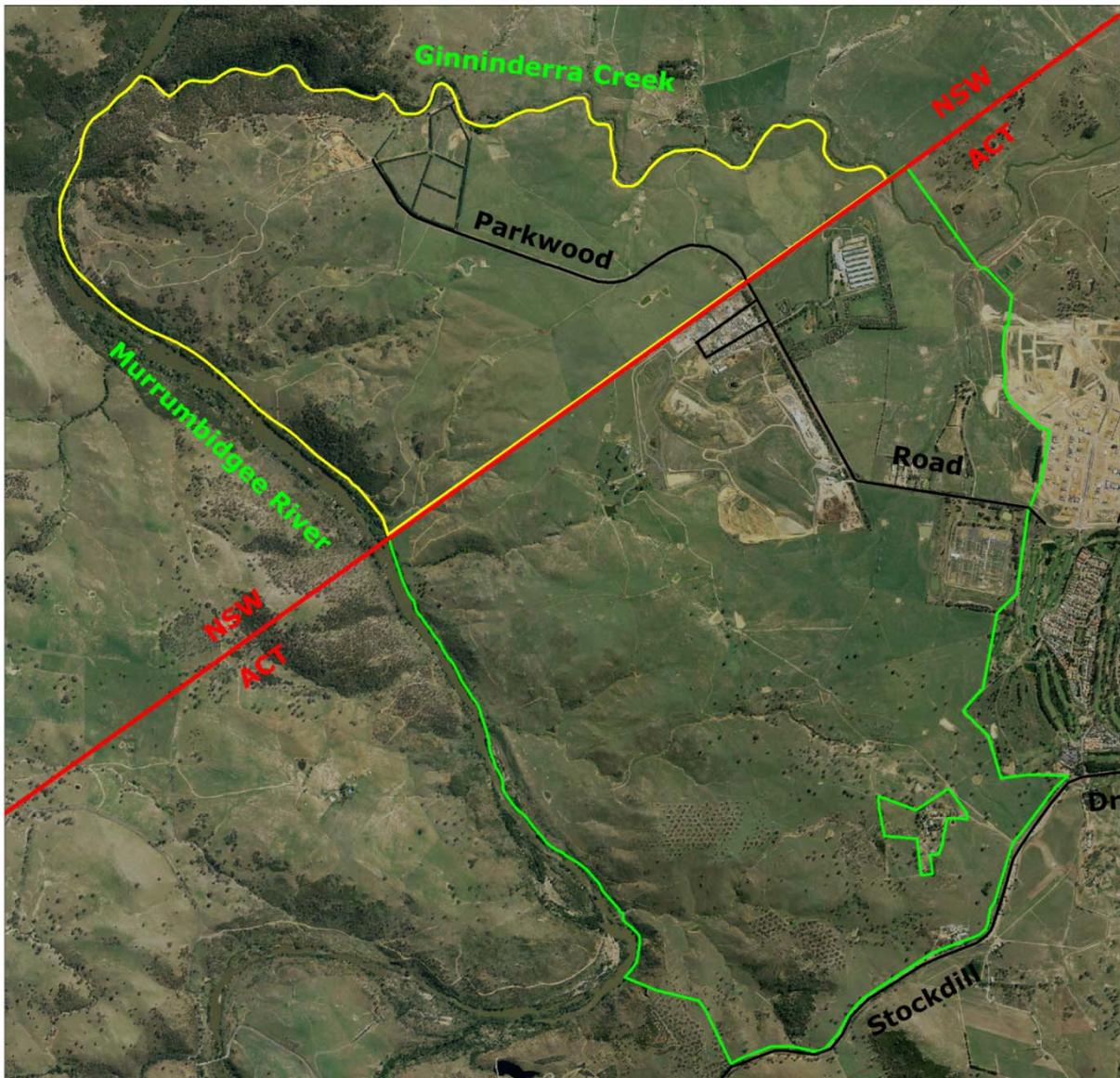
- Lots 61 with an area of 83ha. Used as a quarry.
- Lot 4 with an area of 80 ha. Used as a rural residential use.
- Lot 5 with an area of 80 ha. Used as a rural use.
- Lot 62 with an area of 25 ha. Used as a rural residential and conference use.

The study area is physically separated from the other land in NSW by the Ginninderra Creek, which is a permanent watercourse, as can be seen from photo 1.1.



Photo 1.1: Ginninderra Creek

Date of Photo: October 2013



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Legend

-  ACT Land
-  NSW Land
-  NSW - ACT Border
-  Key Roads



Map 1.1: Study Area

Chapter 2: Site Description

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the site and focuses on the slope, vegetation and soils.

2.2. Slope

The site is flat to undulating in the north and western parts and has some steep land in the eastern and northern parts where it adjoins the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra Creek. Map 2.1 shows the slope in broad terms and Photo 2.1 shows the steep land along the Murrumbidgee River and photo 2.2 shows the flat to undulating land to the west of the site.

2.3. Drainage

There are some drainage lines throughout the site which are more pronounced on the eastern portion. In this area the drainage lines form steep sided gullies.

2.4. Vegetation

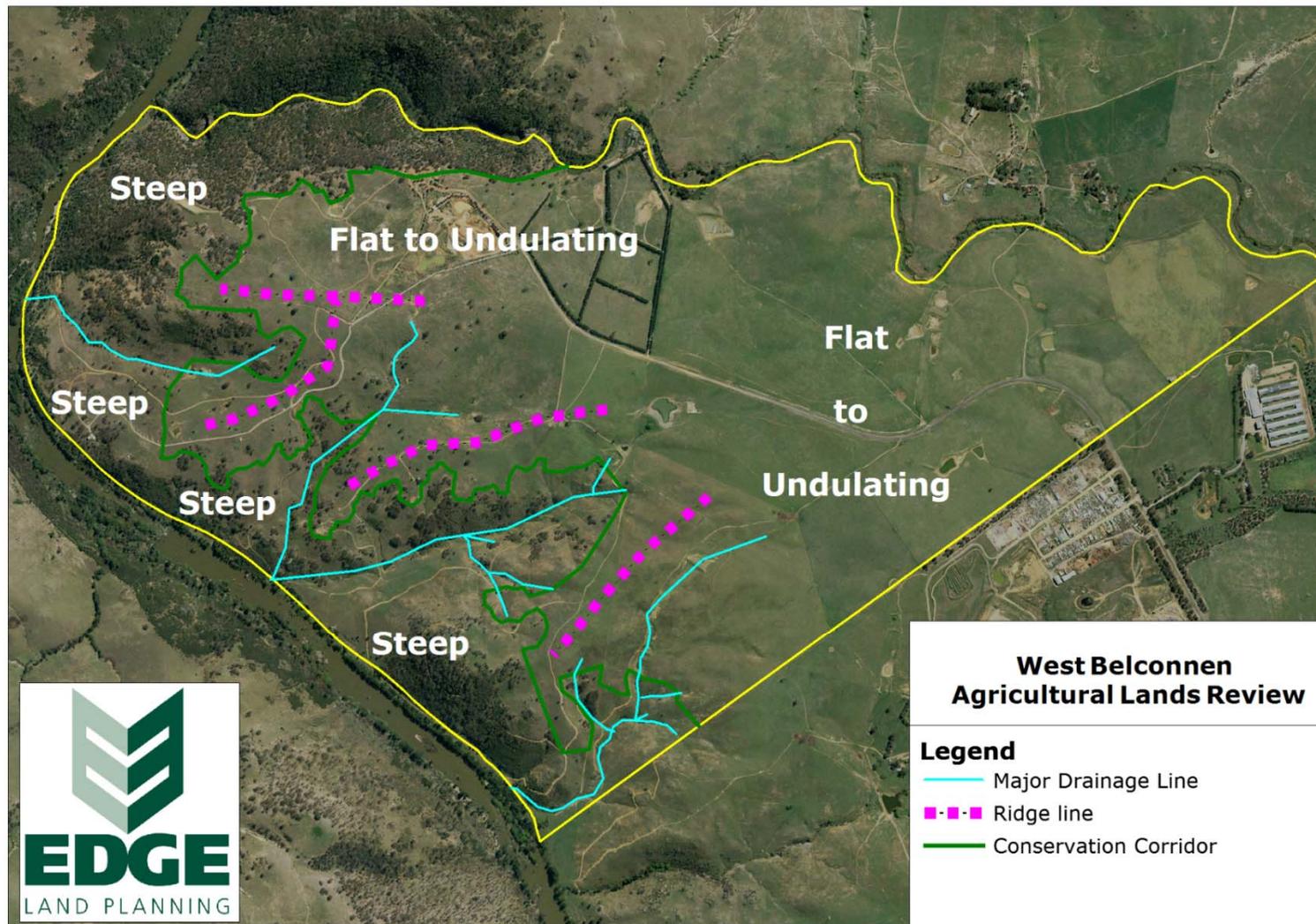
The land is mostly cleared and sown to pasture for grazing. However there are areas of vegetation along the eastern and northern parts in association with the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra Creek. This area has been comprehensively surveyed and a conservation corridor has been identified and this is shown on map 2.1.

2.5. Soils

The soils within the ACT are generally regarded as being of poor quality and low nutrient value.

The subject land shows similar soil types to the majority of the ACT and is not high quality. The land is mostly sown to pasture and is used for grazing of Angus cattle. An exception to this is a portion in the north western corner of the site which is slightly higher quality soil and is sown to dryland Lucerne.

The sloping land is covered by rocks which are interspersed with the soil. This means that it is not able to be cropped. Only the flat to undulating land in the western part of the site is able to be cropped.



Map 2.1: Constraints for Agriculture



Photo 2.1: Land to the East of the Site

Date of Photo: October 2013



Photo 2.2: Land to the West of the Site

Date of Photo: October 2013

Chapter 3: Agricultural Suitability

3.1. Introduction

The information contained in this section has been sourced from a number of sources including the ABS Agricultural Census as well as discussions with the current owners of the largest part of the land who have been farming it since the early 1980s.

The ownership is such that only Reid and Stevens land is of a size that can be operated as an agricultural use with the other land holdings not being used for agriculture.

3.2. Constraints for Agriculture

The combination of slope, drainage lines and the lack of good soils and rockiness create significant constraints to using the land for the growing of plants – both intensive and extensive cropping. However, some of the site could be used for protected cropping of horticulture or ornamental plants or viticulture which would require a significant amount of investment. This applies to the flat to undulating land to the western part of the study area. However, the current owners do not have the expertise nor capital to invest in such an operation.

The constraints do allow for some grazing of the site with limited rain fed cropping to be used as feed for the animals. The proximity of the land to the urban area of Canberra makes it unsuitable for sheep grazing because of attacks by dogs from the adjacent urban areas.

Therefore, the constraints of the site only allow for cattle grazing with some cropping to provide a feed source for the cattle. This is the current operation on the site.

3.3. Current Agricultural Practices

The current agriculture on the site is grazing of Angus cattle with limited rain fed cropping to provide feed for the cattle. It is estimated that only 10% of the land is able to be cropped. It is not exported off the property. It has a size of 332 ha and is grazed in conjunction with approximately 670 ha of land in the ACT. It is used as an adjunct to the operation of an earthmoving business so that plant and workers can be occupied during times when not engaged in the earthmoving side of the business.

The grazing operation breeds and raises vealers for sale at 10 months of age. There are a total of 380-400 cows on the site.

The majority of the site is natural pasture with approximately 30 ha of land that is sown to dryland lucerne as well as phalaris grass and clover. The lucerne is on the north western corner of the site along the banks of the Ginninderra Creek that is sown with dryland lucerne on more fertile soils created by the alluvial creek flats. The phalaris and clover is grown on both sides of Parkwood Rd on the western side of the site. This is cut for fodder and produces on average 250 large round hay bales which are used for supplementary feeding of the cattle. Without this source hay, feed would have to be bought in to feed the cattle.

Sheep would be more suited to the landscape of the site, however the proximity to the urban area of Canberra causes problems with a sheep operation. Urban dogs attack sheep and for this reason, it is not possible to run sheep on the property.

The current operation does not have a large enough herd of cattle to make it a sustainable operation. It is estimated that it would have to be double the size of the combined NSW and ACT land to make a sufficient return to support a family full time and this would be considered to be marginal.

3.4. Suitability of Agriculture

The site is constrained for its use as an agricultural operation by a number of factors as follows:

- Slope of the land
- Soils and rockiness
- Size of land

These combine to make it not suitable for agriculture in its current form and it is estimated that it would have to be approximately 2,000 ha to make a sufficient income from grazing.

The physical separation from the land to the north across Ginninderra Creek also adds to the constraints of the property. This presents very real problems with increasing the size of the holding, because Ginninderra Creek presents a physical barrier to accessing the land for the cattle as well as for managing the property. A suitable bridge would be required and this is considered to be too expensive to construct having regard to the return on the investment from the grazing operation.

Therefore, for the reasons outlined in this and previous chapters, it can be said that the agriculture on the NSW land is not economically sustainable.

Chapter 4: Urban Agriculture

4.1 Introduction

Urban agriculture has been defined by Hodgson et al 2011 as

“... the production of food for personal consumption, education, donation or sale and includes associated physical and organisational infrastructure, policies, and programs within urban, suburban and rural built environments.”
(p2)

Food grown within the urban boundaries consists of the backyard gardens, community gardens, market gardens, school gardens, rooftop gardens, windowsill gardens, aquaculture and urban farms.

There is the opportunity to employ these urban agriculture concepts within the residential subdivision to make it a food positive one. This will require a significant investment in infrastructure but this can be minimised if the necessary infrastructure is provided in conjunction with the construction of a residential subdivision.

4.2 Community Gardens and Backyard Gardens

Community gardens can be incorporated into the open space network in suitable locations that are accessible to the surrounding houses. Ideally they should have a 500 m to 1 km radius for walking but this depends on the location of the open space network and how it fits with the subdivision layout.

The demand for community gardens is evidenced by the number of existing gardens in Canberra. There are 19 currently and all but one of them has been constructed on public land long after the development has been completed. This causes issues with the provision of reticulated water, electricity, security and storage buildings. This infrastructure has to be retrofitted, often at a high cost. The Crace Community Garden has been constructed as part of the residential subdivision and is oversubscribed by local residents. The opportunity exists for community gardens to be constructed as the subdivision is being developed, thus limiting the cost of infrastructure.

They can also fulfil social function as well as being part of the healthy food and nutrition objective of the ACT Government.

Backyard gardens are also something that can be encouraged by the development although, it is likely that some people will opt to join a community garden, especially if they have a small lot size.

The potential to have edible streetscapes in certain areas such as near the location of the community gardens will also be investigated.

4.3 Commercial Food Production

Commercial food production can be carried out on land that is not suitable for urban development. It is considered that vegetable production should be the focus as well as cattle grazing. Due to the limitations of the site (topography, urban environment,

etc.) extensive cropping is not considered appropriate as well as any form of intensive animal production is not considered appropriate because of land use conflict due to odour, dust and noise issues.

The location on the site for the agriculture needs to be considered. This can include the land fill, land fill buffer, power line easements as well as the edge of the conservation corridor within the bushfire asset protection zone.

The feasibility of food production will require adequate and suitable water supply to supplement the limited natural rainfall of the ACT. The potential water sources can include the Lower Molonglo STP as well as harvested stormwater from the site.

4.4 City Farm

The Canberra community has been looking for a site for a City Farm for some time and there is an active group of people who have been looking for a site. Discussions have been held with this group and they are continuing in a positive manner.

There is potential for the Belconnen farm to be used as the base for the City Farm. There is potential to reuse of some of the farm buildings for use in the city farm.

One aspect would be a café that will cook food grown on the site as well as any excess from community gardens in the development. This will help to raise awareness about seasonality and local food.

4.5 Farmers Market

There are two farmers' markets operating in Canberra which are as follows:

- Capital Region Farmers' Market and
- Southside Farmers' Market

There is scope for another farmers' market in Canberra and it could be accommodated on the site. The location needs to be investigated and Strathnairn and Belconnen Farm are considered to be the sites to be looked at.

The site will have to be all weather with good access for the farmers as well as the shoppers.

Chapter 5: NSW Local Planning Directions

5.1. Introduction

The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act makes provision for the Minister to issue Local Planning directions pursuant to section 117.

Any Planning Proposal prepared for land covered by the relevant direction must be consistent with the direction or justify why it is not consistent.

This chapter will outline the planning directions and will provide justification for the inconsistency.

5.2. Relevant Planning Directions

There are two local planning directions that are relevant to the subject land as follows:

- Direction 1.2 Rural Lands
- Direction 1.5 Rural Lands

Each direction will be separately addressed.

5.2.1. Direction 1.2 Rural Lands

The objective of this direction is as follows:

- to protect the agricultural production value of rural land.

The direction states that the planning proposal must be consistent with the direction unless the inconsistencies are "... justified by a study prepared in support of the planning proposal which gives consideration to the objectives of this direction"

Comment

The constraints of the site for agriculture have been outlined in chapters 2 and 3. The agricultural value of the land is constrained by the soils, slope and rockiness as well as the size of land in question. This limits its ability to make an adequate return to provide sufficient income to support a family. Chapter 5 discussed how urban agriculture can be introduced into the residential subdivision. The agriculture will change from cattle grazing to vegetable production on a small localised scale as well as some cattle grazing. This will allow the site to continue to produce agriculture but on a different scale and one which will add to the health of the people living.

5.2.2. Direction 1.5 Rural Lands

The objective of this direction is as follows:

- (a) protect the agricultural production value of rural land,
- (b) facilitate the orderly and economic development of rural lands for rural and related purposes.

The direction states that any planning proposal must be consistent with the Rural Planning and Rural Subdivision principles set out in State Environmental Planning Policy (Rural Lands) 2008.

The Rural Planning Principles of the SEPP Rural Lands are as follows:

- (a) the promotion and protection of opportunities for current and potential productive and sustainable economic activities in rural areas,

Comment

It has been outlined in chapter 3 that the current operation is not economically sustainable because of the size of the operation and the physical constraints of the land.

- (b) recognition of the importance of rural lands and agriculture and the changing nature of agriculture and of trends, demands and issues in agriculture in the area, region or State,

Comment

This is not considered to be relevant to the current planning proposal.

- (c) recognition of the significance of rural land uses to the State and rural communities, including the social and economic benefits of rural land use and development,

Comment

This is not considered to be relevant to the current planning proposal.

- (d) in planning for rural lands, to balance the social, economic and environmental interests of the community,

Comment

This is not considered to be relevant to the current planning proposal.

- (e) the identification and protection of natural resources, having regard to maintaining biodiversity, the protection of native vegetation, the importance of water resources and avoiding constrained land,

Comment

The natural resources of the site have been identified and protected as part of the planning proposal. Detailed reports have been prepared that address this issue dealing with biodiversity and native vegetation, water resources as well as the land fill site which is considered to be constrained land.

- (f) the provision of opportunities for rural lifestyle, settlement and housing that contribute to the social and economic welfare of rural communities,

Comment

This is not considered to be relevant to the current planning proposal.

- (g) the consideration of impacts on services and infrastructure and appropriate location when providing for rural housing,

Comment

This is not considered to be relevant to the current planning proposal.

- (h) ensuring consistency with any applicable regional strategy of the Department of Planning or any applicable local strategy endorsed by the Director-General.

Comment

The Sydney – Canberra Corridor Strategy applies to the study area because it is part of the Yass Valley LGA. The Strategy has outcomes and actions similar to the ones outlined in the Rural Lands SEPP. The comments made above about the suitability of the site for agriculture are relevant to the Sydney to Canberra Corridor Strategy.

The Rural Subdivision Principles of the SEPP Rural Lands are as follows:

- (a) the minimisation of rural land fragmentation,
- (b) the minimisation of rural land use conflicts, particularly between residential land uses and other rural land uses,
- (c) the consideration of the nature of existing agricultural holdings and the existing and planned future supply of rural residential land when considering lot sizes for rural lands,
- (d) the consideration of the natural and physical constraints and opportunities of land,
- (e) ensuring that planning for dwelling opportunities takes account of those constraints.

Comment

The planning proposal is to rezone the land to residential development and as such, the land will not be subdivided for rural use. For this reason, the Rural Subdivision principles are not considered relevant.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Reid and Stevens is currently preparing a rezoning of land in West Belconnen which is in both the ACT and NSW. The land is owned by Reid and Stevens and 4 other landholders. The Riverview Group has the largest holding and currently farms it in conjunction with land in the ACT.

This report has provided sufficient justification to show that the land is not suitable for agriculture because of a combination of the size of the holding, slope, soil types and rockiness.

The report has provided sufficient justification for the planning proposal to be inconsistent with the local planning directions 1.2 and 1.5.

There is a potential for the site to be developed into a food positive urban subdivision by incorporating a number of facets of urban agriculture.