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Plans for Canberra unacceptable

The plans recently proposed as Draft Amendments to the National Capital Plan for Canberra are described by the Walter Burley Griffin Society as an inadequate and unacceptable planning and design response to the promise of *The Griffin Legacy* study. This study was undertaken 'to protect the integrity of the Griffin Plan, recognizing its stature as a work of both national and international significance.'. It was prepared by the National Capital Authority (NCA) and widely acclaimed when it was published in 2004 as a significant re-examination of the Griffin Plan.

However despite this good foundation work completed more than two years ago, major aspects of the recent proposals are significant departures from the Griffin Plan for Canberra that would be very detrimental to public amenity, and to the vision that Griffin had for Canberra that has only in part been realised.

To date, the development of Canberra has lacked an 'urban' quality in terms of the vitality, diversity, intensity of everyday life; the integration of public activities and public institutions; and the creation of high density urban districts. *The Griffin Legacy* project seeks to overcome the 'suburban' character of Canberra by building new, street-defining urban precincts in the centre of the city.

The plans recently proposed for West Basin, City Hill Precinct and for Constitution Avenue by the NCA were on public exhibition from 18 – 20 September at Regatta Point, with comments closing on 29 September 2006. After assessing the proposals, Professor James Weirick, President of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Incorporated has stated that they are "significant departures from the Griffin Plan, which should not be advanced in Griffin's name. The immensely important spaces of central Canberra are at risk of succumbing to mediocre urban development."

The nation's capital is deserving of the highest quality urban design outcomes. Yet what is being proposed is a high risk, irreversible step, which could go seriously wrong. The cultural, social, aesthetic and ecological dimensions of urban planning, architecture and landscape design are highly complex inter-related aspects deserving of best practice.

It is thus unacceptable that the 3 proposals have been prepared prior to the completion of the studies assessing the heritage values of the Lake setting and the Parliamentary vista that are in train. Nor have any planning studies been prepared to assess demand for land use type. Neither do the proposals contain urban design controls to ensure best practice outcomes.

Instead, the proposals seem excessive and counter-productive in terms of human scale and urban vitality, and promote piecemeal development. For example the scale of the proposed development at the West Basin Precinct is excessive, and would establish a dangerous precedent for urban encroachment on Canberra's greatest asset, Lake Burley Griffin, in order to merely create property development opportunities to the lake's foreshore.