

Client

NSW Department of Planning

Project

OK Caravan Corral - Background Study

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Executive Summary

This Background Study has been prepared by Elton Consulting to consider potential impacts of a future closure of the OK Caravan Corral, a caravan park in Sydney's north west. The assessment has largely been undertaken as a desktop exercise following discussions with the caravan park owner. The scope of the work did not include consultation with residents. This is because there has been no indication from the land owner that closure is imminent.

The Department of Planning (DoP) has also undertaken consultation with Housing NSW to understand the Government's response to caravan park closures and to allow Housing NSW to proactively implement a strategy to deal with closure of the OK Caravan Corral, if this occurs in the future.

The OK Caravan Corral lies on rural residential land within the Area 20 Precinct of the North West Growth Centre, an area which is in the process of being rezoned as a major new area of housing for Sydney. Once rezoned, the area is likely to experience rapid housing development and its character will change markedly. Although there are currently no plans for changing the use of the OK Caravan Corral site, there may be a time in the future when its owner may wish to sell the property.

Closure of other caravan parks in Blacktown LGA and across Sydney and the Central Coast has contributed to a range of important social impacts, which tend to be consistent across different caravan parks, due to the nature of this type of housing and typical characteristics of residents. The DoP has requested this Background Study to help identify key issues likely to emerge if future closure of the caravan park occurs, and to assist Housing NSW in its response to a future closure. This information will assist Blacktown City Council and the Department in planning for future changes and developing strategies to minimise resulting impacts.

Section 1 summarises relevant background information and an outline of the scope of the report.

Section 2 includes descriptions of the location, zoning and physical characteristics of the OK Caravan Corral. The park currently houses 200 residents across 130 sites, mostly permanent mobile homes.

Section 3 outlines planning policies affecting this region and legislation which governs caravan parks (including park closures) in NSW. The North West Growth Centre will experience significant growth and change over the next 30 years, with Area 20, the area in which the OK Caravan corral is located, expected to accommodate around 7,000 residents in 2,500 dwellings. The key legislation which applies to caravan park living is the NSW Residential Parks Act 1998. Some key sections of this Act are extracted in Appendix A. In addition, a group of key NSW government agencies has developed an Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closure. It is described in Section 3.3 and attached in Appendix B.

Demographic characteristics of the caravan park residents specifically and the local Census Collection District (CD 1272807) are described in Section 4, based on discussions with the owner and census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Characteristics of the population in the caravan park appear to differ slightly from caravan parks in Sydney and the Central Coast, with a wider income profile and no very low income or unemployed tenants. However, it is not possible to obtain firm details without additional consultation, including discussions with residents. Nevertheless, the demographic profile of residents likely to be attracted to the North West Growth Centre as residential precincts are developed is expected to differ substantially from that of existing caravan park residents.

In Section 5, potential social impacts of caravan park closures are discussed based on a review of literature including social impact assessments of previous park closures. Issues typically include:

- Cumulative effects of a trend in caravan park closures on reducing the availability of low cost housing alternatives and flow on effects to other agencies
- Loss of community and support networks, especially for long-term or high need residents, leading to social isolation
- Potential for household break-up
- Negative impacts on existing employment or future opportunities, including the potential for residents to be relocated further from workplaces
- Stress and uncertainty, potentially triggering negative health outcomes
- Loss of ability for some residents to live independently due to loss of daily support

networks, service provision and changes to the immediate environment

- Potential homelessness, particularly if residents have been homeless before moving to the caravan park
- Potential for tenancy rights to be violated.

The loss of this form of low-cost housing needs to be seen in the context of housing affordability issues in the wider area of western Sydney. This information, and assistance which can be provided by the Department of Housing and other agencies, is given in Section 6.

Section 7 outlines a range of mitigation measures which could be used to help reduce potentially adverse social impacts for those most vulnerable residents, if the OK Caravan Corral should eventually close. DoP has liaised with Housing NSW to respond to the potential need which may arise from the future loss of this form of housing.

1 Introduction

Elton Consulting has been engaged by the NSW Department of Planning to prepare a Background Study in relation to the OK Caravan Corral, a caravan park located at 51 Terry Road, Rouse Hill, within Blacktown LGA. The assessment has largely been undertaken as a desktop exercise following detailed discussions with the caravan park owner, as it was not within the scope of the work to consult with residents. This Study provides an indication of the existing demographic profile within the park, discusses potential impacts that may result from caravan park closure and the Government's response, should this occur.

The OK Caravan Corral caravan park is situated within the Area 20 Precinct, within the North West Growth Centre. The current population is understood to be approximately 200 residents, some of whom have lived at this address for more than 25 years. Given the long term development plans for this area and expected changes to the zoning, rating and demographics in the region, the future of the caravan park is not certain.

In 2006 the NSW Government announced plans outlining the future of land releases in the North West and South West Growth Centres of Sydney. The Growth Centres will together provide for 180,000 homes over the next 30 years, characterised by staged delivery of infrastructure co-ordinated with land releases and a focus on sustainability to achieve world's best practice standards. The North West Growth Centre extends across 10,000 ha within The Hills, Blacktown and Hawkesbury Local Government Areas (LGAs). This area will contain about 70,000 new homes and employment areas in 16 precincts, as it is progressively planned and released over the next 30 years.

Area 20 was released by the Minister for Planning in June 2008. The North West Structure Plan dictates that the Precinct would be developed for higher density housing. While the proposed rezoning of Area 20 is not expected to lead to imminent development of the OK Caravan Corral, it may not remain viable into the longer term.

Closure of other caravan parks at Parklea, in Blacktown LGA, in Fairfield LGA, and other closures in Sydney and the Central Coast have resulted in a range of important social impacts on park residents. These impacts tend to be relatively consistent across different caravan parks, due to the nature of this type of housing and typical characteristics of residents. In order to better

understand the issues arising from previous closures and hence the likely impacts of a future closure on the residents and local communities, a Background Study was commissioned. This assessment will assist Government in its planning for future change in line with the Growth Centres process.

Under NSW legislation, caravan park closures must adhere to specific procedures, including notification of residents. Due to the early stages in the planning process, this Background Study did not include scope for discussions with residents themselves. However, a deeper understanding of social impacts particular to this community will require profiling of residents and detailed consultations to identify needs for, and barriers to, relocation and future housing options. This additional research and consultation will need to be completed at a later date in order to understand, in more detail, the social impacts if the OK Caravan Corral were to close.

The impacts of recent caravan park closures in NSW on the work of Housing NSW have prompted the Department, in conjunction with other agencies, to develop *The Assistance Protocol on Residential Park Closures (The Protocol)*. The Protocol, while not yet utilised in practice, provides a general framework for assisting residents displaced by residential park closure. The Protocol and key legislation related to residential parks in NSW are discussed in more detail in Section 3 of this report. However, the summation provided by this report should not replace careful consideration of existing legislation and regulation in the case of any residential park closure.

1.1 Scope of work

This Background Study has been prepared by Elton Consulting, social planners with extensive experience in social impact assessment and social planning for a range of residential, infrastructure and other commercial projects.

The Department of Planning (DoP) has requested this Study at this early stage to help identify key issues likely to emerge if future closure of the caravan park occurs, to advise Housing NSW and Blacktown City Council of potential impacts and implications and to assist in developing strategies to minimise resulting impacts. Details of the caravan park and its current population were obtained from discussions with the owner and an analysis of census data.

The Study includes:

- Demographic analysis and social profiling of the area to understand the characteristics of existing residents, including their broad income

and occupational characteristics, housing tenure arrangements and linkages into the local community.

- Documentation of consultation with the owner of the caravan park to discuss his plans and timing of closure and potential impacts of relocation.
- Documentation of discussions with Housing NSW and other relevant social /affordable housing providers or advocates to discuss availability of alternative accommodation for displaced residents, expected impacts on residents, service needs and mitigation strategies to minimise potential impacts on caravan park residents.
- Review of available information regarding the likely social issues associated with relocation of other caravan park residents or closure of caravan parks in the past.
- Preliminary identification and analysis of potential impacts of park closure on residents and the local community and development of strategies to mitigate or minimise them.

The scope of this Study did not include consultation with residents of the OK Caravan Corral. This would need to be undertaken as part of a detailed Social Impact Assessment (SIA) if and when closure plans are announced or the Assistance Protocol is activated. Consultation would assist in understanding particular characteristics of residents and their future housing needs.

It should be noted that a caravan park is a form of residential park, and throughout this report these terms are used interchangeably.

2 Site description

2.1 Location

The OK Caravan Corral is located at 51 Terry Road, Rouse Hill, within Blacktown LGA, in Sydney's north west (see 'A' on map below).

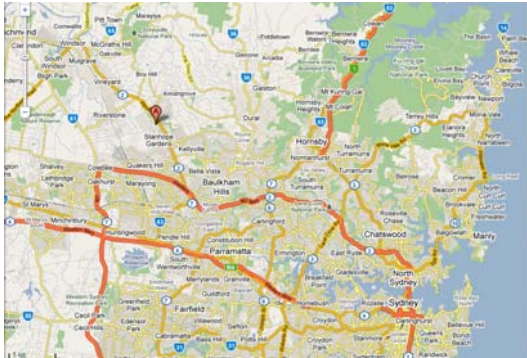


Figure 1a Location of the OK Caravan Corral in the Sydney region



Figure 1b Locality of the OK Caravan Corral

The site is set amongst 2-3 hectare rural residential and market gardening properties. However, the wider area is clearly in transition, with a number of large new residences and a new Anglican school located along Rouse Road and Terry Road and major residential and commercial development at nearby Rouse Hill, the Rouse Hill Regional Centre and Kellyville Ridge, within approximately 500 metres to the east and south.

Windsor Road provides a high standard transport route for north-south movements, with a signalised intersection at Rouse Road and dedicated Transitway lanes for services to and from Parramatta.

2.2 Zoning

The site is located on land zoned for rural residential uses under Blacktown Local Environment Plan (LEP) 1998.

2.3 Property description

On 5 July 2009, a meeting and site visit was held with Michael Chapman, owner of the OK Caravan Corral. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss characteristics of the park and its operations, as well as to gain a sense of potential impacts, should the park close in the future.

The 9.09 acre site was developed as a caravan park in 1979 and the current owner has lived there for much of this time. The caravan park is located in a quiet rural setting, surrounded by other rural properties and market gardens. A large fenced pond at the entrance to the caravan park is home to ducks and goats, and the pond provides a filter and storage area for runoff and highly treated sewage. Signs of encroaching development at Kellyville Ridge are beginning to appear as new housing becomes visible in the distance. However, there have been few other changes to adjacent uses in recent years, despite large scale residential and commercial development in the wider region.

The caravan park's website indicates that it offers a range of cabins, caravan sites and tent sites for short and long term guests. Cabins and caravans are neatly arranged in a grid pattern consisting of four long parallel streets. The manager's office, a small convenience shop, amenities, pool, barbecue facilities and grassed open area are located at the far eastern side of the property.

A bus from the front gate provides access to the Rouse Hill Town Centre and to the nearby Transitway. Buses service all nearby centres including Parramatta, Castle Hill, Blacktown, Riverstone and Windsor. It is a five minute drive, or 15 minute walk, to the Rouse Hill Town Centre. Other business centres such as Norwest Business Park are also located nearby. The local school bus also services children from the caravan park.

The site targets employees such as tradesmen working on projects in north-western Sydney seeking value-for-money accommodation with a range of essential services and good access to shopping and business centres.

2.4 Nearby caravan parks

A brief review of existing caravan parks listed in the vicinity of OK Caravan Corral reveals that a number of caravan parks are located in the surrounding area, including some that are within

10km and 20km catchment areas of the caravan park (see map below).

broader issue of affordability of housing in this area.

However, it is not known if the caravan parks in the surrounding area are stable or facing similar pressures to close in the next ten years. Their status would be relevant to an assessment of the ability to find alternative accommodation and the

The trend towards caravan park closures and decreases in availability of alternative accommodation in existing caravan parks in NSW is discussed in greater detail in Section 5 of this report.

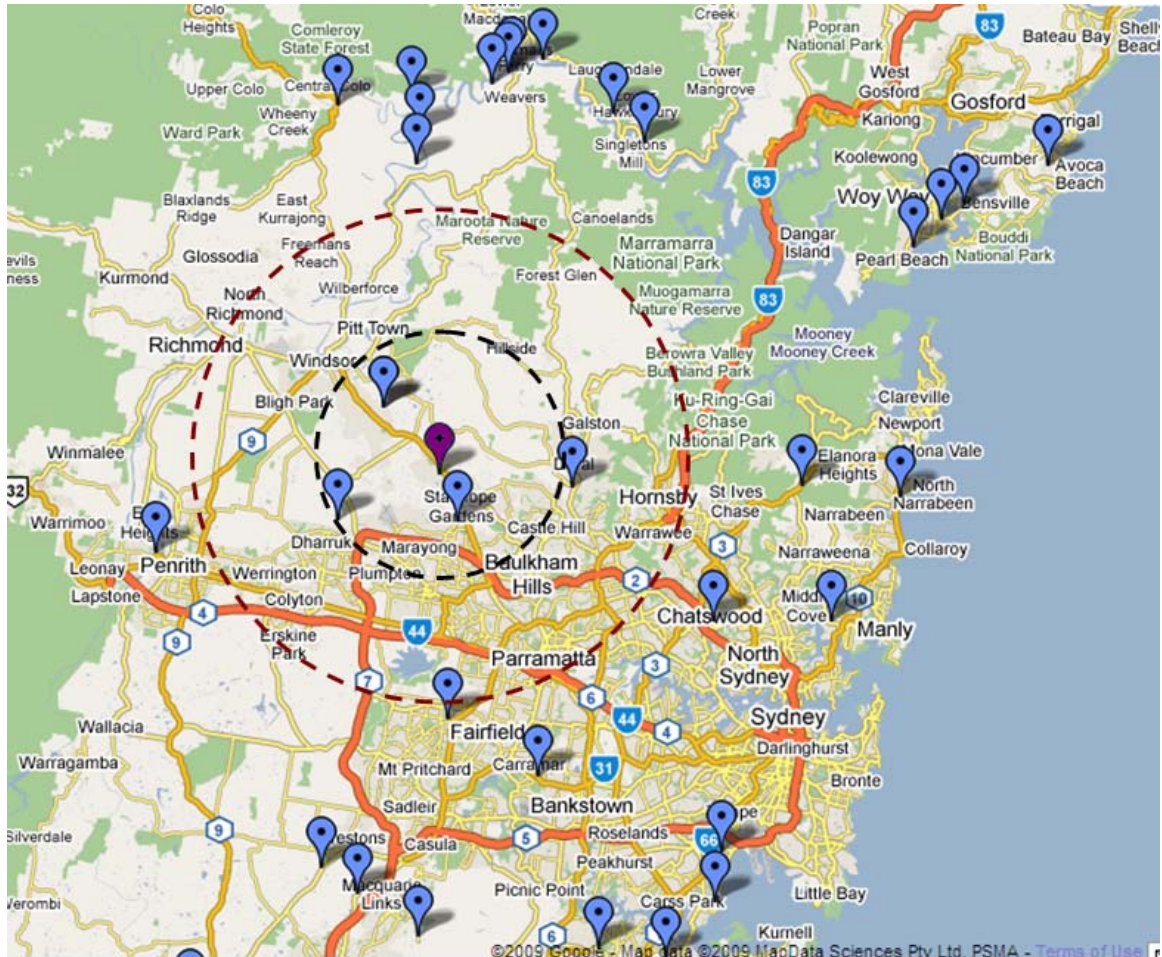


Figure 2 Caravan parks within 10km and 20km of OK Caravan Corral, based on data provided by Google Maps, 19 May 2009

3 Planning and legislative context

This section of the report describes key elements of the NSW planning and legislative context relevant to the possible closure of the OK Caravan Corral. It includes a brief review of relevant planning policies and legislation.

3.1 Planning context

3.1.1 Sydney Metropolitan Strategy

The Sydney Metropolitan Strategy is a strategic document that outlines a vision for the greater Sydney area over the next 25 years.

As Sydney is expected to grow by an additional 1.1 million people by 2031, the city will require an

additional 640,000 new homes and 500,000 new jobs. To accommodate this growth, 60 to 70% of new homes are planned to be built within Sydney's existing suburbs. The remaining 30 to 40% of homes will be in land release areas, including the North West and South West Growth Centres.

The Metropolitan Strategy has shaped the objectives of the North West Growth Centre Subregional Strategy and planning for individual precincts within it.

3.1.2 The North West Growth Centre

As outlined in Section 1.1, the North West Growth Centre is a major component in meeting Sydney's future housing and employment needs. The Department of Planning, in liaison with Councils, is overseeing planning for future development of this 10,000 ha area which will contain about 70,000 new homes and employment areas when it is released over the next 30 years (see map below).

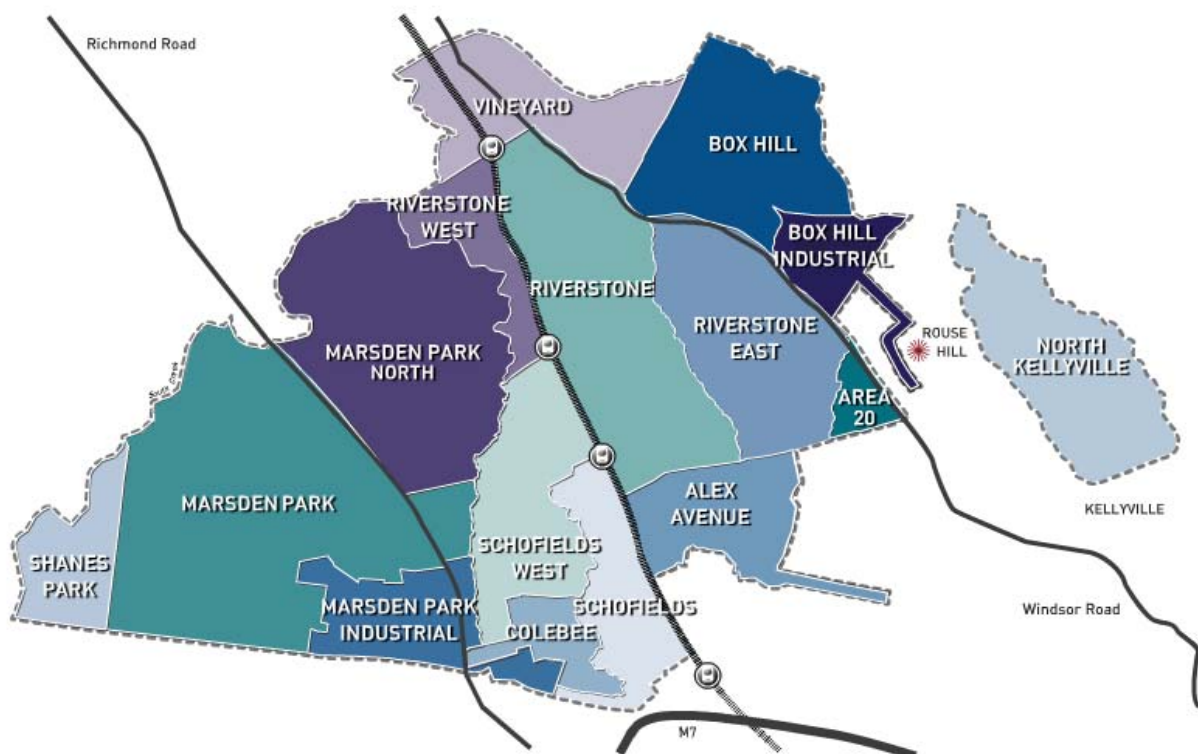


Figure 3 North West Growth Centre
Source: www.qcc.nsw.gov.au/north+west-21.html

Of the precincts shown on the above figure, precinct planning is either underway or completed for:

- North Kellyville
- Alex Avenue
- Riverstone
- Riverstone West
- Colebee
- Area 20
- Marsden Park Industrial Precinct
- Schofields
- Box Hill / Box Hill Industrial Estate.

Development of these areas will see land which has been traditionally rural residential uses transformed into new suburbs or employment areas, accompanied by new infrastructure to support the incoming population.

3.1.3 Area 20 Precinct

The OK Caravan Corral is located within the Area 20 Precinct in the eastern-most part of the North West Growth Centre.

The Area 20 Precinct is roughly diamond-shaped, being bounded by Windsor Road to the east and Schofields Road to the south. Its northern boundary lies between Guntawong and Macquarie Roads and the western boundary is near Tallawong Road, Rouse Hill. Second Ponds Creek runs in an approximately north to south direction through the centre of the Precinct.

Much of the Area 20 Precinct currently has 2-3 hectare allotments of rural lifestyle and low intensity agricultural uses. The Precinct contains part of Rouse Hill Regional Park, the historic Rouse Hill House and Farm, a quarry and Rouse Hill Anglican College. The OK Caravan Corral is located in the south eastern corner of the Precinct, off Terry Road.

The DoP has adopted a target of 2,500 dwellings and a population of approximately 7,000 for the Area 20 Precinct over the next 20 years.

It is expected that the Area 20 Precinct will contain a mix of housing types, including some medium and high density housing. This may include standard detached dwellings, terrace and townhouse accommodation and low-rise residential flat buildings.

While planning for this precinct is in its early stages, the site of the caravan park may eventually be rezoned for residential uses. A rezoning to residential would result in an increase in Council rates for the caravan park, from rural to residential rates, which, in the long term could be expected to impact on the viability of its continued operation.

3.1.4 Blacktown City Social Plan 2007

The Blacktown City Social Plan 2007 (Blacktown Social Plan) was prepared following extensive research and analysis of available population data, as well as based on consultations with key stakeholders, service providers and targeted groups of the community. The plan explores the overall characteristics, social needs and aspirations of the Blacktown LGA population, and it identifies three areas or sectors within the LGA for more localised recommendations. The OK Caravan Corral is located in the area identified as the North-West Sector by the Plan.

The Social Plan indicates that there is considerable diversity within the Blacktown City LGA population, with a number of suburbs having populations that are under considerable socio-economic stress.

The plan also identifies eleven aspects of the social and economic circumstances affecting social wellbeing and health in Blacktown LGA. Key concerns identified for the North-West sector with relevance to OK Caravan Corral and future development in Area 20 include:

- Concerns with distance to travel to work from home and the impacts on family
- Concerns about lack of services: youth activities, facilities, family locations, transport (especially youth services for the area)
- Concerns focused on employment locations being very distant from residential areas

There is little emphasis in the Social Plan on the issues of housing and housing affordability, other than a reference to the need for affordable housing for young people in crisis.

3.1.5 Blacktown City Affordable Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan 2009

This Strategic Plan was developed following the establishment of a Taskforce charged with developing an understanding of the local circumstances related to affordable housing and homelessness in the Blacktown City Council area. The Taskforce included representatives from Council, individual community members and a large number of other agencies including:

Table 1 Agencies represented on the Blacktown Affordable Housing and Homelessness Taskforce

Agencies

Affordable City Housing	Holy Family Centre, Emerton
Anglicare	Homelessness NSW
Blacktown Community Aid	Housing NSW
Blacktown Youth Services Association	NSW Office of Premier & Cabinet
Centre for Affordable Housing	St Vincent de Paul Society
City of Sydney Homelessness Unit	SydWest Multicultural Services Inc
The Community Foundations of NWS (The Hills Community Aid & Information Services)	The Salvation Army
Eddy's Out West Accommodation	The Wash House
Fusion Western Sydney	Wesley Homeless Aged Services

The Strategic Plan describes current Local, State and Federal government policies and funding programs and identifies immediate opportunities where Council can seek resources or develop local projects and services. It was considered critical to position Blacktown City for funding opportunities for both Affordable Housing and Homelessness programs at the State and Federal level. Other key affordable housing issues included:

- Increasing the supply of affordable housing available for purchase
- Increase the supply of affordable rental properties
- Support for people experiencing mortgage stress
- Capacity of community members to participate

Key homelessness issues included:

- Increase number of spaces in local emergency accommodation services
- Early intervention support for people at risk of homelessness
- Increased coordination of service providers
- Increase availability of social housing accommodation.

An Action Plan has been developed with a lead agency responsible for each. The Taskforce will monitor progress over time.

In addition to its recognition of the need for inter-agency cooperation to source funds and implement

change, the Action Plan for Homelessness notes the importance of early intervention for people at risk of homelessness. As some residents of caravan parks in the North West Growth Centre could be considered to be at risk of homelessness, this Plan has direct relevance to the future rezoning and development of this area.

3.2 Legislation and plans governing caravan parks

A large number of different laws and planning policies govern the development of caravan parks, the responsibilities of owners and the protection of tenants in NSW. Those most relevant to the OK Caravan Corral are summarised below.

3.2.1 NSW Local Government Ordinance 71

NSW Local Government Ordinance 71 was introduced in December 1986 requiring all caravan parks and camping grounds to be licensed. Prior to this Ordinance, it was illegal in NSW to live permanently in a caravan park.

Local Government Ordinance 71 helped to establish legal support for the idea of permanent residency within caravan parks, in conjunction with State planning documents such as the Residential Parks Act 1998. Despite the legal recognition for permanent settlement in caravan parks offered by this Ordinance, some local councils and housing advocates have argued that existing regulation does not adequately protect residents of caravan parks or recognise the significant role that residential parks play in providing affordable housing in NSW (The Shire of Hornsby, 2004).

3.2.2 NSW Residential Parks Act 1998

The NSW Residential Parks Act 1998 provides limited protection for residents who live in caravan parks (and other forms of residential parks) as their principal place of residence (PAH, 2007). This includes residents who occupy their own dwelling and rent the site and residents who rent a park-owned dwelling. Residents have different rights and responsibilities according to the type of dwelling and their rental/ownership arrangement.

The Residential Parks Act 1998 establishes the minimum requirements for mitigating a caravan park closure where the owner is seeking to terminate tenancy agreements and take possession of residents' sites for the purpose of a change of use. Specifically the Act requires that:

- Development approval must be obtained before valid notice of termination can be given
- If development approval is not needed, consent of the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal

(CTTT) will first have to be obtained before a notice of termination can be given

- The notice of termination is to include specific information about residents' rights
- At least 12 months notice of termination must be given where there is a residential site agreement
- Where the resident rents both the dwelling and the site, a minimum of 30 days notice of termination is to be given where the site is to be sold and a minimum of 60 days notice of termination is to be given where there is a change of use
- The park owner is required to notify the Director-General of the Department of Housing within 7 days that termination notices have been issued to residents with residential site agreements.

Appendix A of this report includes a summary of key sections of the Act that relate directly to caravan park closures. The Act and other relevant regulation will need to be reviewed and considered if the OK Caravan Corral were to close. The Act also forms a key component of the *Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closure*, which is summarised in Section 3.3.

3.2.3 NSW Office of Fair Trading, *Residential Park Living*

The NSW Department of Commerce, Office of Fair Trading summarises in their publication *Residential Park Living* many of the laws governing caravan parks in NSW. In general, caravan park residents have legal protections (subject to certain exceptions) when they have signed an agreement with park owners to rent:

- A site only or
- A site and dwelling (a trial period sometimes applies).

In NSW, residents of caravan parks are not granted legal protections when:

- The caravan park is not their principal place of residence, or
- Residents are renting a site or a home for holidays.

The law requires that individuals intending to be a permanent resident of a residential park sign an agreement with the park owner. Specifically, residents should sign:

- a **residential site agreement** if they rent:

- A site for a caravan with a rigid annex or
- A site for a manufactured home.

- a **moveable dwelling agreement** if they rent
 - A site for their caravan without a rigid annex
 - A home and site from the park owner.

Agreements are typically for a fixed term, a specific period of time anywhere from a few days to weeks, months or years, as negotiated with the owners. After the fixed term has ended, the agreement automatically becomes a continuing agreement.

According to the owners of the OK Caravan Corral, permanent residents have typically signed two week fixed term agreements. It appears that a large number of residents (approximately 100) of OK Caravan Corral would have a residential site agreement with the owners, under the above definition, although this is not language that the owners are familiar with or have used in describing the tenancy arrangements. The distinction between agreement types for permanent residents is important as the laws governing park closure have measures specific to the type of agreement.

3.2.4 SEPP (Affordable Rental Housing)

This SEPP, released on July 31, 2009, repeals an earlier SEPP No. 10, which aimed to retain low cost rental accommodation in NSW. However, the new Affordable Rental Housing SEPP does not specifically refer to caravan parks, nor are they included in its definition of affordable housing. Affordable Housing, under this SEPP, is defined as:

"Housing for very low income, low income households or moderate income households who:

- Have a gross income less than 120% of the median household income for the ABS Sydney statistical division and who pay no more than 30% of their income in rent; or
- Are eligible to occupy rental housing under the National Rental Affordability Scheme and who pay no more rent than what they would pay if they were actually living in housing provided under that Scheme."

This definition appears to apply to a much wider range of properties than previously (as the SEPP defines 'affordable housing' according to specific rental costs) and links the availability of affordable housing stock to Sydney's housing market prices. By setting the definition of rents being at or below 30% of 120% of Sydney's median household income, the SEPP appears to ensure a relatively large number of properties will meet the definition of 'affordable housing'. For example, in 2006, the median household income for Sydney Statistical Division was \$1,154 per week (ABS). Properties renting for \$415

per week or less would therefore have been classified as affordable. Median rents across the SSD were \$250 and in Blacktown LGA were \$200.

The Affordable Rental Housing SEPP definition of a 'low-rental residential building' does not cover accommodation in caravan parks and this type of accommodation is not specifically addressed by any statutory provision (Shelter NSW, p. 11).

Nonetheless, the SEPP aims to facilitate the development of affordable housing options, which the rezoning of Area 20 would not preclude.

3.2.5 SEPP No. 21 – Caravan Parks

The main objective of this SEPP No. 21 (1992) is to ensure the orderly and economic use and development of land used or intended to be used as a caravan park for short-term and/or long-term residency.

Key aims of SEPP No. 21 include promoting:

- The social and economic welfare of the community
- The provision of community facilities
- The protection of the environment

SEPP No. 21 also states what a local council must consider before granting development consent for a caravan park. These considerations include:

- Whether, because of its location or character, the land concerned is particularly suitable for use as a caravan park for tourists or for long-term residence
- Whether there is adequate low-cost housing, or land available for low-cost housing, in that locality
- Whether necessary community facilities and services are available within the caravan park to which the development application relates or in the locality (or both), and whether those facilities and services are reasonably accessible to the occupants of the caravan park

This SEPP again recognises the role of caravan parks in providing a form of low cost housing, and the need for residents to have access to community services and facilities.

The OK Caravan Corral was established before SEPP No. 21 was enacted, and it is not certain that these factors were considered by Council prior to granting approval for the development of this particular caravan park.

3.3 Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closure

This legislative and planning framework, together with the experience of recent caravan park closures, has prompted the Department of Housing, in conjunction with other NSW government and non-government agencies, to develop *The Assistance Protocol on Residential Park Closures (Protocol)*. The Protocol provides a framework for assisting caravan park residents displaced by park closure and is an important element of the State Government's broader Partnership Against Homelessness (PAH 2007). The Protocol is activated when a park owner issues notices to terminate residential site agreements, in accordance with the *Residential Parks Act 1998*. The key focus of the Protocol is to co-ordinate targeted assistance to individuals and families who are most vulnerable and at risk of homelessness.

In particular, the Protocol:

- Sets out the roles of a range of Commonwealth, State, local government and non-government services in a co-operative approach so that residents are relocated in a timely, orderly and dignified manner
- Requires the establishment of a Park Closure Liaison Officer within the Department of Housing
- Outlines how a closure response team is to be established who will develop an assistance plan for each resident and ensure residents are aware of their rights under the law
- Details how applications for assistance from residents are to be processed
- Provides for reporting on the closure process and development of a communications strategy so that all affected parties continue to be informed on the progress of the closure.

The Protocol (see Appendix B) is available from the NSW Department of Commerce, Office of Fair Trading website:

http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/Tenants_and_home_owners/Residential_parks/Moving_out/Assistance_protocol_for_residential_park_closures.html

As the owners of the OK Caravan Corral have not expressed a desire to develop the site, they have not issued notices to terminate residential site agreements and the Protocol has not been activated. It should also be noted that although the Protocol was developed through experience with other park closures, the establishment of the Protocol is a relatively recent development and is understood to have not yet been tested in practice.

4 Demographic characteristics

This Section contains details of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population of the local area in which the OK Caravan Corral is located.

Demographic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) can only be obtained for an area considerably larger than the caravan park itself. As discussions with residents of the caravan park were beyond the scope of this study, information about population characteristics of residents has been collected using a combination of anecdotal information from discussions with the park owner and small area data from the ABS. In addition to the readily available on-line census statistics, it has been possible to obtain some population details for residents of the caravan park on the basis of the additional 'caravan, cabin and houseboat' classifications as a discrete dwelling structure. However, there remain a number of data problems associated with existing data. In particular:

- It is unclear whether all caravans in this CD were located within the OK Caravan Corral and whether all caravans and mobile homes within the caravan park have been included in the census counts
- The small numbers of residents means that numbers are unlikely to be accurate, as small data samples are randomised by ABS. In addition, some totals may be inconsistent or unreliable
- There will have been changes in numbers since the 2006 census.

The following summary outlines available data on the broad characteristics of the caravan park residents. This would need to be verified if a more detailed Social Impact Assessment including discussions with residents is to be undertaken prior to closure.

4.1 Census data for CD 1272807

The following demographic summary is based on data from the ABS Census. The smallest area for which ABS data is available is the Collection District (CD). CD Number 1272807 coincides very approximately with the boundaries of the Area 20 Precinct. However, the match is not precise and, although the part of the study area that lies outside the CD is similar to the area within the CD, the following data should nevertheless be taken as indicative.

- On Census day in 2006, 490 people nominated an address in CD 1272807 as their place of usual residence, including 112 who said that their home was a "Caravan, cabin, or houseboat". It is reasonable to assume that all, or almost all, of the 112 lived in the OK Caravan Corral.
- There were 183 occupied dwellings (excluding those occupied by visitors) on Census night, comprising 115 freestanding houses and 68 caravans. This equates to approximately 3 persons per dwelling in the houses and 1.65 persons per dwelling in the caravans. 38% of dwellings were fully owned (including 19 of the caravans) and a further 13% were being purchased (including 6 caravans)
- 68% of residents stated they were born in Australia. Other common responses were: Malta 4%, England 4%, New Zealand 3%, Italy 2% and Croatia 2%
- Family households comprised 52% of all households in the area. Of these, exactly half were families with children, a third were couples without children and the remainder were sole parent families. Lone person households comprised 30% of households and group households, only 5%. Given the low average number of occupants in the caravans, it is likely that many of the lone person households live in the caravan park.
- 11% of residents were aged 65 or over and a further 17% were aged 55-65 years. Only 5% were children aged 0-4 years, with 12% aged 5-14 years, suggesting that the majority of families with children were mature families
- 59% of residents aged 15 years or over were in employment and 2.2% were unemployed. Among employed persons, 18% worked in construction, 13% in manufacturing, and 10% in retail trade. Only 5% worked in agricultural occupations
- Average incomes in CD 1272807 were relatively low. Median individual weekly income was \$478, and median household income \$1,005. However the income profile reveals a cluster of lower incomes (particularly among non-family households) and a cluster of higher incomes. It could be assumed that the low income households are concentrated in the caravan park, however there is no concrete evidence to support this (see below).

4.2 Caravan park residents

4.2.1 Discussion with park owner

From discussions with the current owner, Michael Chapman, it is understood the OK Caravan Corral contains 130 sites, ranging in size from 80m² to 120m². The site numbers have remained relatively stable for the past five years and are broken down as follows:

- 38 permanently occupied sites containing a caravan and annex
- 7 tourist sites, which are mainly used at weekends
- 70 motel style cabins, of which around half are occupied by long term rental tenants who have lived at the park for between several months and several years
- 5 other cabins
- 10 tent sites which are rarely used.

The caravan park is home to approximately 200 residents, although numbers vary throughout the week as occupants of the motel style cabins and tourist sites come and go. A large proportion of residents have lived at the site for more than ten years, and some for more than 25 years.

Most residents of the permanent caravan sites tend to own their caravan and be retired or nearing the end of their working lives. Occupants of the cabins include young singles (aged 25-29 years), middle aged couples and divorced people, single parents with children and a few two parent families. In total, around 15 children live in the park. The caravan park also accepts pets.

Unlike many caravan parks across NSW, the OK Caravan Corral does not offer accommodation on behalf of the NSW Department of Housing. Residents must be employed and rental references are checked prior to being accepted at the park. This process has been adopted in order to reduce turnover rates and increase stability for existing residents.

Rental rates are increased in line with the consumer price index (CPI) each June. Site rates currently start at \$129 per week. Cabin rentals range from \$150 for a 1 bedroom cabin to \$260 per week for a 2 bedroom cabin.

Most residents were reported to own a car.

4.2.2 Census data for 'Caravan, cabin, houseboat' classification

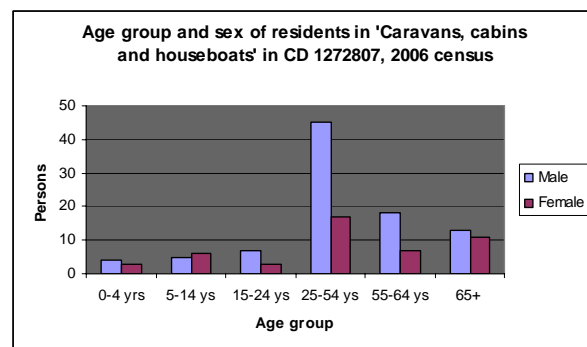
In order to obtain a more detailed picture of caravan park residents specifically, census tables were

analysed to identify characteristics of residents and dwellings classified as 'caravans, cabin or houseboat' within the CD. In addition, a small number of special-purpose data tables were commissioned from ABS for persons living in the 'Caravans, cabin or houseboat' classification for the following characteristics:

- Age by sex and median age
- Dwellings by household income and median household income
- Labour force status
- Household and family types.

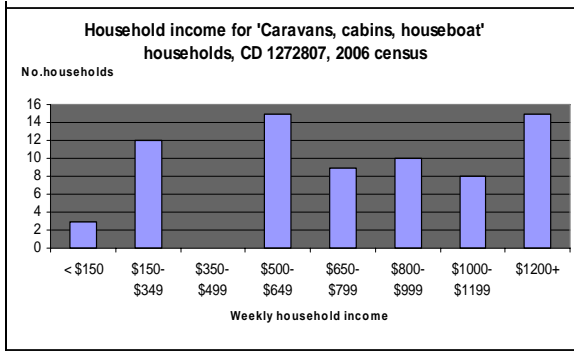
The data differs from that reported above due to some differences in classification methods (ie place of usual residence vs location on census night; count of occupied private dwelling vs total dwellings) and the use of random error by ABS to small sample sizes. Key features of this analysis indicated the 'caravans, cabins and houseboat' classification' comprised:

- 88 caravans, representing 41% of the 220 dwellings within the CD 1272807
- 132 people, including about 60¹ (48%) living in single family households, 47 (36%) living in lone person households, 18 visitors and another 11 unclassified family types
- A predominantly male population, with 92 males and 47 females, or a ratio of two to one
- A median age of 44 years (46 years for males and 33 years for females.) Almost half of male residents aged between 25 and 54 years

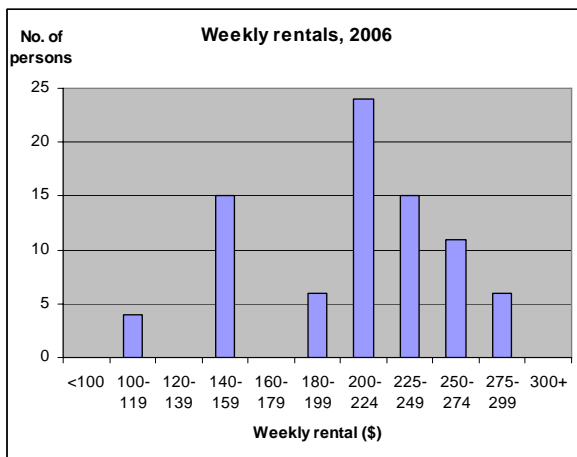


- Weekly household income varied considerably from less than \$150 to more than \$1,200. The median income across households was \$749, compared with \$1,005 for the CD overall

¹ Note: this figure varied from 56 persons in one table to 65 persons in another



- 20 dwellings (23%) housed single families, around 42 dwellings (48%) housed lone person households and about 11 dwellings (13%) housed visitors, with 8 dwellings being not classifiable. On this basis, single families averaged three persons per dwelling, but represented around one quarter of all caravan park households
- 59 people lived in approximately 34 x 2 bedroom dwellings, 39 people lived in approximately 29 x 1 bedroom dwellings and 17 lived in approximately 10 x dwellings with 0 bedrooms/bedsits. Another 23 people in approximately 11 dwellings either did not state their dwelling type or were not applicable
- 44 (50%) rental dwellings, 26 (30%) fully owned dwellings and approximately 8 dwellings (9%) being purchased. (Note: a high proportion of responses did not state their tenure type)
- 88 people (67%) were counted in the rental dwellings, 31 (23%) were in fully owned dwellings and another 7 (5%) lived in dwellings which were being purchased. This indicates average occupancy rates of approximately 2 persons per rental dwelling compared with less than 1.2 persons per fully owned dwelling.
- Weekly rentals for 'caravan, cabins and houseboat' structures in CD 1272807 varied widely, as shown below:



- 53 residents worked full-time or part-time and another 32 were not in the labour force, but the unemployment rate for residents aged over 15 years was 0%.

4.2.3 Summary of demographic characteristics

In comparing the anecdotal and demographic data for the caravan park, there are many discrepancies. These could be better clarified through a targeted survey of residents or a formal request for further information from the owner. Although there is no specific requirement at this stage for more detailed data, it would be important background information if the Department of Housing or Blacktown City Council are called upon to assist in responding to a future closure.

Key demographic features of relevance appear from the above data to be:

- A high proportion of elderly or retired residents and a low proportion of children
- A high proportion of lone person households
- A high proportion of male residents
- High rates of employment
- Relatively wide income distribution.

4.3 Characteristics of residents of the wider area

The following brief profile relates to the area comprising the suburbs of Rouse Hill, Schofields, Kellyville Ridge and Stanhope Gardens. These suburbs form a boundary between Blacktown City and The Hills Shire, and include major recent residential developments (notably Rouse Hill Town Centre, Stanhope Gardens and Kellyville Ridge) as well as extensive but thinly populated areas of longstanding uses including some established residential areas and semi-rural areas. The following data is drawn from the ABS Census 2006. There were 15,200 residents in these four suburbs in 2006.

In essence, the area is characterised by the predominance of family households and by employment in middle to upper middle income occupations.

- 82% of households in the area are family households compared to 69% for the whole of the Sydney Statistical Division (SSD). Among these family households, 59% are couples with children, which is significantly higher than the SSD (49%)

- Only 13% of households are lone person households, which is significantly lower than the SSD portion of 21%
- Children aged 0-11 years make up a high proportion of residents (24%) as compared to the SSD (16%)
- The proportion of older people is well below the Sydney average. In particular, only 4% are aged 70 years or older as compared to the SSD of 9%
- Among employed people in the area, 15% are managers and 20% are professionals (SSD 13% and 23% respectively), and the occupational profile of employed people is broadly similar to the Sydney average
- The income profile of the area shows that at the time of the Census, 10% of households had a weekly income under \$500 (SSD 17%) while 31% had an income over \$2,000 a week (SSD 23%)
- In regard to local housing stock, detached dwellings comprised the majority (87%), which is significantly higher than the SSD (57%). Only 1.5% of dwellings in the area were medium density at the time of the Census. (Figures include vacant dwellings).
- The area demonstrates a high level of home ownership with 53% being purchased with a mortgage compared to only 31% in the SSD. Conversely, there is only a small proportion of rental properties (19%) as compared with the SSD (30%)
- Levels of car ownership, internet usage and housing loan repayments are all above the Sydney average.

4.4 Future growth and change

4.4.1 Estimates of population and dwelling yield

The Area 20 Precinct will contain a mix of housing types, including higher density housing forms in close proximity to Rouse Hill Town Centre. A study of housing markets for the *Social Infrastructure and Open Space Report for Area 20 Precinct* (Elton Consulting, August 2009) found that the market for low density (freestanding) homes in the region is well established, and until recently there have been limited opportunities to buy or rent townhouses or apartments.

Preliminary estimates of dwelling yields for Area 20 were originally set by the Growth Centres Commission (GCC) and have recently been revised to take account of the enlargement of the proposed Precinct Release Area.

The target yield has been revised from approximately 1,500 dwellings to approximately 2,500 dwellings to reflect the amendment to the Precinct boundaries and current estimates of developable land capacity.

In policy terms, the Area 20 Precinct is well located for medium density housing which is known to be particularly popular in accessible locations close to facilities and transport. Area 20, particularly the section to the east of Second Ponds Creek, has good transport access (including Windsor Road, the bus interchange and the T-Way, and the proposed North West metro station) and excellent facilities across Windsor Road at Rouse Hill Town Centre. The Town Centre itself has helped to enhance the appeal of the area to a diverse range of households, including non-family households, by providing a variety of retail, dining and entertainment facilities as well as a resident population.

In market terms, Rouse Hill appears to be moving beyond the “pioneer” phase, that is, the early years of development in a new residential area during which incoming residents are mostly family households seeking house and land packages. There is local evidence of good demand for smaller and more affordable homes, including appropriately located units, as well as for larger, lower density houses. This pattern is expected to continue. In particular, the affordability of attached homes compared to low density houses is expected to lead to continued demand from first time buyers. This demand is currently being evidenced in some of the areas surrounding Area 20 such as Rouse Hill, Kellyville Ridge and Schofields and is expected to remain constant as development in the area continues.

In summary, the Area 20 Precinct will be suitable for a mix of low, medium and high density dwellings in future. Given the location of the OK Caravan Corral within walking distance of Rouse Hill Town Centre and public transport services, the area is likely to attract higher density development. Nearby areas are continuing to show strong demand.

4.4.2 Future population characteristics

Characteristics of the future residents of Area 20 are not yet clear. However, there are certain similarities across new release areas in western Sydney. Such similarities include:

- Households tend to move into the area from within a 5-10 km radius
- There is a general predominance of young families with young children and couples who have not yet started a family
- Most adults are in the 25-49 years age cohorts

- There is a small but significant number of single person households
- There is a relatively high proportion of home owners
- Family sizes increase over time, as couples have children.

These demographic trends could be expected to result in a population which differs significantly in their characteristics from those living in the OK Caravan Corral. In particular, there is likely to be a greater proportion of couples or young families who are in the early stages of family formation and who aspire to move into this newly developed area from other nearby suburbs. This demographic would contrast with the older and mostly small or lone person households living in the caravan park at present.

Future development of this area will have implications for existing caravan park residents, as well as for Blacktown City Council, as demand for its services grows and changes over time. At the same time, future development of this area also provides opportunities for the provision of housing which could meet some of the needs of this current population, if they are required to move in future.

5 Potential social impacts of caravan park closures

This section of the report explores key issues and impacts that have arisen with previous caravan park closures. The issues identified in this section are based on a broad range of research on caravan parks in Australia, as well as the lessons learned from recent closures in NSW. It was not within the scope of work to carry out consultations with residents of the caravan park, although this would need to be undertaken if and when notice is given that the park will close and the Protocol is triggered. Appendix D of this report includes a summary of the issues, impacts and mitigation measures proposed for four recent caravan park closures in Sydney and on the Central Coast.

5.1 Trends for park closures

The potential closure of the OK Caravan Corral must be viewed in terms of a general trend in Australia, and Sydney particularly, towards the closure of established caravan parks. This has resulted in an overall reduction in the number of sites available for permanent housing within remaining residential parks (University of Melbourne, 2003) and in the availability of the lifestyle afforded to residents by this type of accommodation. The number of caravan parks in the Sydney region alone has halved in the last seven years from 164 establishments in 2000 to 74 in 2007, and many regional areas have experienced similarly marked declines in supply (Marks, 2008).

In general, the following factors are understood to be driving caravan park closures in Australia, as well as reduction in the number of permanent sites available within existing parks:

- Rising land prices (including on the edge of Sydney and areas of high amenity) and pressures for urban development on the fringe of cities
- Rising land taxes
- Rises in retirement tourism and the desire for the year-round temporary patronage of caravan parks
- Upgrading of caravan parks to more expensive manufactured home estates
- Closure of parks managed by Councils seeking to return control of the land to the Crown Lands

Department, due to increases in public liability insurance (The Shire of Hornsby, 2004).

A related factor driving the decreasing number of sites available for permanent residency within residential parks is the perceived “liability” that long-term tenancies present to owners who are contemplating park closure (Brown, 2008). The decreasing number of sites available for permanent housing within existing residential parks is also due in part to pressure to “upmarket” existing parks in order to cater to tourists for more lucrative short-term stays as caravan-based tourism has increased in popularity.

This on-going development is creating cumulative impacts through the progressive loss of affordable housing in Blacktown LGA and the greater Sydney area (see Section 6).

Given that residential parks provide long term accommodation to substantial numbers of low to moderate income households in NSW, the Council of Social Service of New South Wales (NCOSS) has advocated for the prevention of residential park closures in NSW. NCOSS has also been opposed to the reduction in capacity of existing residential parks to house permanent residents, based on similar grounds. Where park closure cannot be avoided in NSW, NCOSS advocates for coordinated assistance to displaced residents, with a particular emphasis on providing assistance to those who are at risk of homelessness or have other unmet support needs. To this end, NCOSS seeks that the continuing availability of affordable housing in residential parks be explicitly addressed in regional and sub regional strategies.

Figure 2, in Section 2, shows the location of other caravan parks in the Western Sydney region. Although not contacted as part of this study, many of these parks are likely to face pressure for closure as surrounding development intensifies over the next 20 years. Research has found that many people are unable to secure this type of accommodation as the number of parks drastically declines and site rents increase at a rapid rate (Marks, 2008). Most of Australia’s caravan parks were built prior to 1979, and with infrastructure with a life expectancy of approximately 25 years (Reed, 2004). This factor could also be driving caravan park closures currently, and could impact on the quality of housing enjoyed by caravan park residents.

The cumulative impacts of caravan park closure are likely to increase in intensity with time as similar pressures prompt other caravan parks to close in NSW, removing the remaining very low cost housing options from the Sydney basin. Research indicates that caravan parks are an important provider of housing for a population that tends to have extremely limited incomes and other barriers to finding appropriate accommodation elsewhere. Loss

of this housing option could add to the number of high needs clients seeking assistance from the Housing NSW and related services, increasing waiting times and service shortages for other clients.

Other related flow-on-effects from the reduction of very low cost housing include:

- Increased pressure on existing health-related services, including the Department of Health, as the result of potential increases in challenges to physical and mental health. This could include the need for medical or emotional support for particularly vulnerable residents (see Section 5.3)
- Increased pressure on existing employment-related services, including Centrelink, as workers are displaced by relocation
- Increased pressure on existing social services, as relocated residents may require long-term support to mitigate increased social isolation and challenges to capacity for independent living caused by relocation.

The impacts of park closures on residents themselves are discussed in following sections. However, given the trends outlined here, it may be difficult for caravan parks in surrounding areas to accommodate residents on a permanent basis if they were displaced from the OK Caravan Corral.

The outcomes of preliminary discussions between the DoP and Housing NSW to discuss potential future closures are summarised in Section 5.8 and Appendix D. Further information is required to better understand the future plans and occupancy rates of nearby caravan parks. In addition, discussions with residents are required to understand their alternatives and implications of a future closure at the OK Caravan Corral.

5.2 Impacts on social networks and lifestyle

Many residents of caravan parks elect to live there on a permanent basis due to the attractive location and lifestyle offered by specific caravan parks. This can be due to a preference for independence in housing choice as opposed to reliance on public or supported housing (Greenhalgh, 2003). Research involving interviews with caravan park residents suggests that many residents have very positive views of where they live. Specifically, research indicates that:

- Caravan park residents are generally very positive about where they live
- Many like the lifestyle of caravan park living

- There tends to be a perception that people “look out” for one another in caravan parks
- Most enjoy the very strong sense of community that exists, as enriched by friends, family and neighbours. This sense of community might not exist for residents in other types of housing
- Most tend to rely heavily on social networks and friendships existing within the park – being at high risk of social isolation and dislocation in the broader community (Stubbs, 2007).

Similarly, research has shown that a number of factors (including the urban design of residential parks, homogeneity of resident populations, sense of safety, and individuals’ time spent in parks as opposed to offsite) can create a strong sense of social connectedness within residential parks (Morris, n. d.). Older residents, in particular, have been shown to foster and utilise social connections within residential parks to ‘look out for each other’ and maintain independent living (Newton, 2006).

Discussions with the owner of the OK Caravan Corral and the fact that many residents have lived in the one location for more than 25 years, confirm that there is a strong network of relationships between some residents in the caravan park. The owner described residents as feeling comfortable, safe, part of a community and pride in their homes and the setting.

Closure of the park would threaten this sense of connection, community and the established lifestyle of its residents, which can take many years to develop. For those who have lived here for a decade or more, this could leave them with few support networks or social ties to other parts of Sydney. A comparable lifestyle would also be difficult to find.

5.3 Impacts on a vulnerable population

While caravan parks offer a lifestyle choice for some residents, frequently, permanent residency in residential parks is prompted by some form of crisis, such as housing affordability issues, relationship breakdowns, eviction, lack of alternative housing options, or inability to access other forms of private rental housing (Stubbs, 2006). A typical caravan park resident receives less than half the weekly median income compared to all Australian households (Greenhalgh, 2003). In addition, caravan parks are noted to contain greater proportions of older residents, lone person households, fewer households with children and fewer households owning cars.

Other commonly observed characteristics of permanent residents in caravan parks include:

- Lower incomes than the general population

- A reliance on government benefits (unemployment, aged pension, disability)
- Higher mobility rates compared to the general population
- Lower labour force participation rates than the general population
- Young men coming to the area for work
- Fewer post-school qualifications (Greenhalgh, 2003; Marks, 2008).

Research has also shown that inland caravan parks are frequently home to some of the most vulnerable groups in society:

- Itinerant workers
- People with intellectual disabilities who once lived in institutions
- People suffering from mental illnesses
- People suffering from substance abuse
- People exiting prison
- Women and children escaping domestic violence
- People who had been unable to sustain tenancies and cannot find a house to rent (Marks, 2008).

In contrast with the perceived benefits of a caravan park lifestyle outlined in the previous section, research has also found that, in some cases, residents can instead feel challenged by the high level of surveillance and limited autonomy associated with this type of housing arrangement. Typically, caravan park owners live on site with residents, and park owners have the right to screen (and sometimes refuse) guests and visitors and otherwise influence resident's lifestyles and living arrangements. This factor, if combined with the precarious nature of tenancy in caravan parks, can lead to a sense of powerlessness and insecurity amongst residents of caravan parks (Newton, 2006).

Interestingly, the discussion with the park owner and analysis of census data indicate that residents of the OK Caravan Corral may not be consistent with demographics of residents in other parks. While many residents are elderly and there is reportedly a high proportion of itinerant workers, census data shows a wide range of incomes, relatively high labour participation rates and no clients of the NSW Department of Housing. It is therefore difficult to comment on the potential vulnerability of residents or their future needs. Moreover, the owner has expressed his desire to continue operating for the indefinite future and residents have not been asked

to consider alternatives for the longer term. This differs from other park closures as any future need for assistance under the Protocol is hypothetical at this stage.

Without discussions with residents, it is not possible to determine the extent of vulnerability, need for assistance or the nature of challenges likely to be faced in finding alternative accommodation should this park close. Nevertheless, the experience of other caravan park closures is that some residents would be particularly vulnerable and may require assistance from the Department of Housing and other government and social housing providers.

5.4 Caravan parks as a providers of emergency housing and housing of last resort

A review of the literature has shown that often, residents of caravan parks have experienced an event which has affected their life chances and their housing situation – such as a family or health breakdown. Frequently, caravan parks are utilised by Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAPS) as places of temporary residence, respite from family circumstances, and overflow accommodation due to lack of vacancies elsewhere (Marks, 2008). Research has shown that the following groups are most likely to be using caravan parks for crisis or emergency housing:

- Young people
- Single males
- Females escaping domestic violence
- Indigenous people (Greenhalgh, 2003).

Research also indicates that for some residents, living in a caravan park can represent the final step before primary homelessness (Marks, 2008). This can include deinstitutionalised populations such as individuals with mental illnesses and former prisoners.

It is primarily to avoid potential impacts on these vulnerable individuals that caravan park closures are opposed by housing groups and Councils and the Assistance Protocol was developed. Closure could create demand for public housing from those with high needs. These individuals may also be amongst the last to actively seek alternative accommodation, as the complexity of this task can be overwhelming.

Again, the OK Caravan Corral appears to differ from other caravan parks in that the owner does not have an arrangement with the Department of Housing, nor does the park accept tenants who are unemployed or lacking rental references. It therefore

does not appear to fill this role in the community housing market and may not include this group of marginalised individuals.

These issues would be examined in detail by Department of Housing and its partners if and when the park owner notifies residents of a future closure, at which time the Assistance Protocol would be activated.

5.5 Opposition to park closure

Due to the direct threat to living arrangements and the potential for adverse impacts on vulnerable individuals, it is common for announcements of a pending closure to be met with strong opposition from housing groups, Councils and residents themselves.

NCOSS, amongst other groups, has publicly advocated for the need to retain this form of accommodation (see Section 5.1).

In addition, with any caravan park closure, it is likely that some residents will be forced to move against their will. Research reviewed as part of this study has identified significant adverse impacts associated with involuntary relocation of residents. Previous park closures in NSW have highlighted the following impacts which can occur if residents are relocated involuntarily:

- Relocation to a different style of accommodation or less suitable locations
- Breaking down of bonds within a mutually supportive community resulting in significant losses in quality of life and capacity for independent living
- Deterioration in both physical and mental health, due to the stresses of relocation, uncertainty and loss of control
- Increased social isolation
- Increased levels of personal stress and family conflict
- Potential for grief-like symptoms and insecurity
- Increased risk for alcohol abuse, family violence and marital breakdown, as well as risk for more accidents
- Long-term negative impacts, including risk that new housing will not be sustainable.

These organisational, psychological and emotional impacts which the news of potential closure and involuntary relocation can have on residents, highlight the need for sensitivity in discussions

between owners and residents and the importance of the Assistance Protocol in mitigating against the potentially serious impacts on caravan park residents.

At present, there is no indication of a vocal resident group within the OK Caravan Corral as there does not appear to have been any issues of concern raised relating to potential future plans.

5.6 Impacts on residents' dwellings

Based on research and previous park closures in NSW, the following are some of the potential key impacts of caravan park closure on the dwelling owners and their homes (Stubbs, 2006; Stubbs 2007):

- Difficulty in finding another park that will accept their dwelling (particularly if the dwellings are old or fail to meet modern specifications)
- Owners competing for a limited number of long-term sites
- Potential damage or inability to move some dwellings, due to their age, design or composition
- Compensation for relocation of dwellings of limited use if owners are unable to secure another long-term site
- Loss or devaluation of owners' main asset due to pressure to accept unreasonably low prices for dwellings, motivated by fear
- Residents not able to afford to buy a house, unit or a relocatable home in a secure residential park in the local government area or within 300km of their current dwelling with the proceeds of the sale of their relocatable homes
- Loss of site value in the purchase of homes (relative value of the site compared with other parks).

In addition, there is the concern that residents who do not own their dwellings will not be adequately compensated based on existing regulation if they are required to relocate by park closure.

5.7 Impacts on surrounding community

Little is known about how residents of the OK Caravan Corral integrate with the local community and economy.

Research and the experience of previous park closures in NSW, suggests that the caravan park closure could have some minor impacts on the surrounding community.

In the case of the OK Caravan Corral, the main community impact would be a decline in low cost rental accommodation in the area. This is likely to contribute to upward pressures on rents in the locality, especially when combined with the expected increases in housing prices and rentals associated with the new styles of housing proposed for the area. Park closure would also reduce the availability of inexpensive tourist accommodation, which is likely to be replaced with more traditional styles of motel accommodation or rental units as population and demand for short-term accommodation grows.

Any impacts on employment associated with closure of this park would be insignificant given the size of future residential communities.

5.8 Housing NSW experience in western Sydney

As a result of the issues raised in this study, preliminary discussions have taken place between the DoP and Housing NSW about the potential for future closures of caravan parks within the North West Growth Centre and the future housing options for residents.

The discussions enabled Housing NSW to consider their role in assisting caravan park residents and to begin a planning process. Housing NSW has initiated consultations with the owner and residents of a caravan park in the Marsden Park Industrial Precinct, which will also be rezoned in future. Issues raised by residents in this caravan park included practical questions and concerns for residents' well-being:

- Location of alternative housing
- Eligibility for Housing NSW / community housing
- Process for registering on social housing waiting list
- Impacts of a move on existing ties to local communities
- Fear of relocation, especially for older people
- Support available through tenant advocacy group.

Housing NSW has advised that western Sydney has large quantities of public or community housing suitable for high needs residents, and that recent NSW State and Federal government policies and funding will lead to further increases in supply in future.

5.9 Summary of expected social impacts

Currently, little is known about the residents of the OK Caravan Park or the likely needs of its residents in the event of a decision to close the park. Research into characteristics of caravan park residents and the effects of previous park closures in NSW, indicates the following types of impacts could be expected:

- Loss of community and support networks, leading to social isolation
- Potential for household break-up
- Negative impacts on existing employment or future employment opportunities, including the potential for residents to be relocated further away from workplaces
- Stress and uncertainty, potentially triggering negative health outcomes
- Loss of ability for some residents to live independently due to loss of daily support networks, service provision and changes to the immediate environment
- Potential homelessness
- Potential for tenancy rights to be violated.

Consultations between Housing NSW and caravan park residents in North Western Sydney have identified some similar concerns and a process is underway to support residents, including those most in need.

If the OK Caravan Corral caravan park were to remain open as new development occurs in the area, or if the caravan park were to be closed in stages, residents could experience substantially reduced amenity – including noise, dust and changed access routes due to new construction in the area.

Impacts of uncertainty about future living arrangements or involuntary relocation could contribute to potentially serious emotional impacts including stress, breakdown of support networks, reduced quality of life and physical and mental illness.

There will also be impacts to the mobile homes themselves. Importantly for the affected residents, there can be ongoing adverse cumulative impacts on the availability of affordable housing and upward pressures on prices for rental accommodation can be expected.

Future closure of the caravan park also needs to be considered in the context of more general issues of housing needs and affordability within Sydney. These issues are discussed in the following section.

6 Housing issues

6.1 Housing and housing affordability in western Sydney

Studies of the housing market in western Sydney have been reviewed to provide an overview of alternative accommodation options and housing affordability.

A study completed by Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) indicates that housing affordability in the Greater Western Sydney Region has declined sharply in recent years, with the decline in affordability most marked in the areas in the south west and far west of the Sydney region where housing traditionally has been more affordable. Specifically, in the period of 2000-2006:

- Rent levels for two bedroom dwellings throughout the greater western Sydney increased on average 19.7%
- Overall rental levels for two bedroom dwellings were high or very high, on average 40% of the average individual income for 20-24 year olds
- Traditionally more affordable LGAs (including Blacktown) recorded higher proportional mortgage increases, averaging 64%
- Median sale prices for all dwelling in the region increased by \$138,000 (approximately 59%) In addition, while average weekly salaries increased approximately 26.2% in Blacktown LGA during the period of 2000-2006, average weekly rents across the LGA increased approximately 23.2% during this same time period, increasing to an average cost of \$210 per week. In addition, average house prices in Blacktown LGA increased by approximately 70%.

Although this data is dated, they provide evidence of significantly declining affordability in the region over time, both within Blacktown and in other traditionally more affordable areas.

Another report (DAVIS Company, 2008), available through the NSW Department of Housing website, indicates that the private rental market in Blacktown is currently not catering adequately for the needs of smaller lower income households and single person households. It reports that, based on 2006 Census data, approximately 48% of all low and moderate income households renting in the private rental market in Blacktown are experiencing "housing

stress," as defined by more than 30% of income being devoted to housing costs.

According to the report, approximately 987 people live permanently in caravans and manufactured homes in Blacktown statistical division; this includes residents living in caravans in backyards at road sides and on vacant lots. Based on Centrelink data, it reports that approximately 292 of these residents (or 30%) are in receipt of a pension or a benefit. The report also indicates that, based on the number of people living in caravans in Blacktown, there is insufficient affordable rental accommodation available in the area.

The report identifies the following key housing issues for Blacktown LGA:

- Vacancy rates in Blacktown are very low and tightening, rents are rising strongly, demand is increasing and more people are in housing stress
- More diversity of housing stock is needed for single person households
- The importance of protecting caravan park accommodation in Blacktown as it provides a housing option to people with limited choice
- The need for housing suitable for older people, well located in relation to services
- The increasing difficulty of purchasing housing in Blacktown for low and moderate income earners.

This data demonstrates that housing affordability is a key issue for Blacktown LGA, as well as for western Sydney more generally. This suggests that it could be a challenge to find suitable replacement housing in the area for residents of the OK Caravan Corral when closure eventually occurs. For those on very low incomes, realistic alternatives include moving outside of the local area, living with friends and family or seeking assistance through the NSW Department of Housing. These options and their implications were discussed in Section 5.

In response to the pressures on housing affordability and availability in the Blacktown area, BCC convened a Taskforce in late 2008 to discuss issues and identify actions to address housing affordability and homelessness. The *Blacktown City Affordable Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan* (June 2009, see Section 3.1.5 above) outlines key issues and actions to access funding opportunities and address known issues. It also achieved the important step of initiating discussions around these difficult issues across a wide range of Federal, State and local government, non-government and community organisations and individuals. Funding of affordable housing and community housing and implementation of these and other homelessness initiatives require

knowledge of myriad departmental programs and a complex network of responsibilities. This knowledge and established relationships will be critical in meeting affordable housing needs and addressing homelessness in the area.

6.2 Opportunities for future housing

Although residents of the OK Caravan Corral may not fall into the most vulnerable or high needs categories of residents found in many other caravan parks, at least some residents may face challenges in finding suitable accommodation elsewhere.

As outlined in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, current NSW Government policy is aimed at providing new housing and employment to meet demand, including substantial development in the North West Growth Centre. Planning for rezoning of Area 20 to enable development to proceed is only in its initial stages. However, in the longer term, Area 20 is expected to house around 7,000 residents. While this rezoning would not be the trigger, the land owner's desire for a change of use would be the trigger for formal notification of residents of the OK Caravan Corral and a one-year notification period under the *Residential Parks Act 1998*.

The provision of new employment opportunities in the area will help reduce travel distances to work from home and contribute in a positive way to availability of family and personal time for new and existing residents - key objectives of Blacktown City Council Social Plan 2007. However, should the caravan park remain as nearby development occurs, there would be concerns about incompatible uses on adjacent lands and disruption to quality of life.

Additional housing in the North West Growth Area will go some way towards addressing housing needs and affordability issues across the LGA by offering residents greater housing choice and improved amenities. Zonings which provide for higher densities and smaller properties will also support housing which is more affordable than conventional detached dwellings. In addition, the Affordable Rental Housing SEPP (see Section 3.2.4) should encourage further low cost rental housing throughout western Sydney.

Yet, the OK Caravan Corral currently provides 120 low cost dwellings for 200 residents. Significant numbers of people and an established stock of affordable housing will be displaced in the process. Given plans for 2,500 new dwellings and 7,000 people in Area 20 (see Section 3.1.3), the displaced housing stock would be equivalent to around 5% of planned new dwelling numbers. While some new dwellings may be classed as 'affordable' housing, there is unlikely to be low cost housing available in a similar price range to the mobile homes at OK Caravan Corral. Existing caravan park residents are therefore unlikely to be in the target market for this

new release area (see Section 4.3) and hence will need to find accommodation elsewhere.

A future closure of the OK Caravan Corral would therefore support increased growth and development of housing and employment in western Sydney, while also displacing an established supply of affordable housing, with many social impacts such as those discussed in Section 5. As there is likely to be a mismatch between targeted future residents and displaced caravan park tenants, the closure will generate demand for low cost accommodation. As with other park closures, many residents will find alternative accommodation either through their own contacts or with the assistance of the park owner or Housing NSW. However, it would be desirable for some of the expected need to be offset through provision of at least some replacement low cost or affordable housing in the immediate area.

Discussions with Wentworth Community Housing, a community housing provider in western Sydney, highlighted the growing role of community housing as an option which is becoming increasingly viable. The current trend for community housing providers to work in partnership with developers is creating new opportunities for affordable housing. In particular, community housing can help cater for the needs of those who do not qualify for Housing NSW dwellings but cannot afford market rents.

6.3 Role of the Housing NSW

Discussions have been held with officers of Housing NSW, in relation to their role in dealing with residents affected by a caravan park closure. The officers contacted represented both policy and regional interests and had been involved in previous closures or in developing the Closure Protocol to assist in future cases of caravan park closures.

6.3.1 General assistance

Housing's Planning Team has an interest in caravan park closures because of the loss of affordable housing for people on the margin and the impacts on the residents themselves. In several cases, the Department has also had clients living in accommodation in caravan parks which have closed.

The Department is facing the situation where caravan park accommodation is disappearing and not being replaced. In addition, the private rental housing market is tight, as outlined in Section 6.1. Previous closures have seen residents relocate to other caravan parks, which then may face closure, resulting in multiple moves for residents and on-going impacts.

In some cases, the Department indicated that the developer agreed to pay financial compensation to residents over and above that required by law.

In the past, if caravan park residents have not been able to find accommodation, they have approached the Department. Criteria for eligibility are fairly strict and resources are limited. If the affected individuals are classified as 'working poor', the Department can only provide some bond payments and short term rental assistance. The Department can also assist in finding temporary accommodation, but only offer small amounts of financial assistance.

Caravan park closure can lead to potentially large increases in demand for the services of Housing NSW. Residents need to know their rights, where they can get assistance if needed and to be pointed in the right direction to agencies who can help (ie the Assistance Protocol).

6.3.2 The Assistance Protocol

Housing's Homeless Unit is charged with overseeing implementation of the Assistance Protocol (see Section 3.3 and Appendix B), by coordinating agencies to provide an intensive response when a caravan park closure occurs. The specific actions depend on the process for closure and individual needs. The Department tries to remain neutral, but to be available if residents ask for assistance.

As noted earlier, the Protocol has not yet been formally implemented but is based on the actions taken during previous caravan park closures. The Protocol would be activated when either residents contact the Department or the Area Office of Housing NSW is asked to play a role. A designated Housing NSW officer would liaise with residents, assess their levels of need and if they want help. The office would take a case by case approach. If it is a large closure (more than 100 people) the Department may set up a contact point or office on the caravan park site, to make an officer readily available. Part of the initial assessment may involve speaking to residents and possibly a survey of their needs. The officer would develop a 'case support plan' for each high-needs tenant to help them identify the best accommodation and necessary resources. A core group, including Housing, Centrelink, local community housing providers and other agencies, would work closely with those in need of assistance. Not all residents will need help and some have shown a fear of assistance in the past in other park closures.

Activation of the Protocol would be managed with existing resources. The Protocol does not trigger any additional funding; it just allows residents to be placed on the Department's Priority Housing Waiting List in order of their needs and housing urgency.

There is no provision for follow up within the existing Protocol, except to the extent that residents continue to deal with or need the services of DoH.

Advice from the Fairfield office of DoH confirmed their involvement in the closure of two local caravan parks, at Lansdowne and Casa Paloma (Leppington) and the development of the Protocol based on the perceived success of this process. It is understood that the Protocol initiative came out of a mitigation measure recommended in the Lansdowne Caravan Park, where 270 residents were affected by the closure. Experience from both park closures was that, while around 100 residents in each park sought advice or assistance from the Department in some form, only one family in each case required assistance over an extended period, and these were high needs clients (ie with disabilities or multiple support issues).

6.3.3 Options for OK Caravan Corral residents

As noted in Section 5.8, discussions were held between DoP and Housing NSW to specifically discuss the potential future closure of two caravan parks in the North West Growth Centre and the housing options for residents (see Appendix E). Early notification of the potential future closure of the OK Caravan Corral will enable Housing NSW to consult the owner and residents at an early stage and plan to address their needs.

A range of options are available to residents who meet eligibility criteria, if required. These include:

- Social housing
- Income eligibility for programs such as 'Rent Start' or special assistance subsidy
- Private rental brokerage advocacy
- Tenancy guarantee
- Tenancy facilitation in the private rental market
- Assistance with relocation to other caravan parks, particularly those in the north western Sydney / Hawkesbury area.

Housing NSW has agreed to contact the caravan park owner directly and to then develop an approach to consultations with residents, should the need arise in future.

6.4 Community housing providers

Community housing providers are responsible for managing leases on properties owned by the NSW Department of Housing.

Discussions with the Affordable Housing Co-operative, a provider in Western Sydney found that although the representative had had no direct experience with caravan park closures, the caravan

parks were considered to be the last resort housing for those unable to maintain their community housing leases. Community housing providers make every effort to ensure tenants are offered the opportunity to continue in their existing housing, despite financial hardship or other obstacles. Currently, this agency has a waiting list of over 2,000 tenants. Rents are set at 25% of the tenant's income, which, if receiving unemployment benefits, would be approximately \$40 per week. However, in the few cases where eviction is necessary, a tenant will not be accepted back on DoH waiting lists and the only real alternative for independent living is a caravan park. Beyond that, the options involve staying with family or friends.

There is evidence of recent improvements in the availability of affordable housing under the governments' Social Housing Growth Fund and the Stimulus Package for Social Housing, which aim to provide around 9,000 new properties in NSW for low income residents over the next two years. Much of this is expected to be provided in western Sydney by agencies such as the Affordable Housing Co-operative. Properties are beginning to come onto the market, although many more are thought to be required to meet demand.

6.5 Role of Blacktown Council

It is clear there are opportunities to formally acknowledge the existence of at least two caravan parks within the Council area, including the OK Caravan Corral in Area 20, in its Affordable Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan. This could best be done by including it as an action under preventing homelessness and seeking agreement of Taskforce members to work towards provision of a small amount of low cost housing which could be made available as an offset for the dwelling numbers which will be lost when and if this caravan park is closed.

One strategy would be to ensure local community housing providers such as Wentworth Community Housing and Affordable Community Housing are advised at the time that notice of a future closure is given to allow them to work closely with NSW Housing. In addition, Council should ensure residents are advised that they may qualify for social housing.

7 Conclusions

The range and significance of social impacts which typically arise when a caravan park closes have been outlined in Sections 5 and 6. This Section outlines strategies which can be put in place to help mitigate the known adverse effects of closures.

7.1 Mitigation within the planning framework

Despite the adverse social impacts outlined in previous sections, and their incidence on some of the most vulnerable people in the community, there are few avenues available to the Department of Planning or BCC to actively assist in mitigating the adverse effects of closures. There is no legislative basis for Councils to require affordable housing to be provided by a private owner within their municipality.

Opportunities for BCC to mitigate potential impacts of the closure of this caravan park are therefore limited to:

- Formally recognising the risk of future caravan park closures in its *Affordable Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan* and encouraging a collaborative approach amongst Taskforce members so that high needs caravan park residents can easily access services of NSW Housing and community housing providers
- Encouraging a future developer to provide some component of affordable housing in its concept plan for the site, in recognition of the caravan park's former presence in the area
- Offering concessions to a developer in return for the provision of low cost or affordable housing above some minimum level
- Seeking Social Impact Assessments of development proposals that replace caravan park sites.

7.2 Mitigation through the Assistance Protocol

As outlined in Section 3.3, the *Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closures* was developed under the auspices of the Department of Housing, specifically to mitigate social impacts by mobilising the necessary contacts and resources to assist residents affected by caravan park closures.

In general, activation of the Protocol occurs when development approval is given for a change of use and an owner issues notices to terminate residential site agreements use under the *Residential Parks Act 1998*. However, Protocol partners can also enact the Protocol following a report from the Park Closure Liaison Officer, an officer of the regional office of the Department of Housing. This report would also consider information provided by stakeholders and community groups.

Under the Protocol, park owners are required to provide a minimum of twelve months notice to residents with residential site agreements. Shorter notification periods apply where the resident rents both the site and dwelling. Owners are also required to notify the Director General of the Department of Housing and provide other specific information about residents' rights.

When activated, Protocol partners, headed by the Park Closure Liaison Officer, establish contact with park residents and respond to requests for information about alternative accommodation and assistance if required. The Liaison Officer and Protocol partners work with residents to ensure they are adequately assisted in:

- Understanding their options
- Accessing the health, housing and support services they need to cope with the transition.

A preliminary step in determining resident needs may be a form of resident survey. In general, the types of residents who might seek assistance would include:

- Low to very low income older couples and singles, and households with a disabled member
- Low to very low income families with children
- Low income single men.

There is also an important role for the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) in mediating relocation arrangements and determining appropriate compensation for residents forced to relocate against their wishes. Determinations by the CTTT can cover all relocation costs incurred by residents including moving and establishment expenses, site improvements and compensation for loss of value.

As legislative requirements under the *Residential Parks Act 1988* and arrangements under the Protocol are relatively complex, further guidance should be obtained from the NSW Department of Commerce, Office of Fair Trading or the Department of Housing's Homelessness Unit. DoP has met with Housing NSW to initiate planning for potential future closures, including Housing NSW consultations with caravan park owners and residents to assist with advice and support with housing options.

7.3 Mitigating the cumulative effects of closures

The cumulative impacts of park closures in north western Sydney and Sydney generally were discussed in Section 5. Given the long term strategic changes planned for western Sydney, there is an opportunity for an innovative response to the progressive loss of this housing form.

It is recommended that Housing NSW continue in its lead role, in association with Blacktown and other local Councils, DoP, community housing agencies and other interested parties, such as the Partnership Against Homelessness (PAH), in developing a strategic response to the expected loss of this form of 'last resort' housing. The response should explore Federal and State funding options, identify landholdings in Council or government ownership and develop a demonstration project for rehousing displaced caravan park residents or formally incorporating appropriate alternative housing for the most disadvantaged of these residents in this part of Sydney.

The mitigation measures offered here have been developed in the absence of detail of the residents' specific housing characteristics and needs. Additional information and consultation is needed when notification of closure is formally given to residents to determine more specifically what the impacts of caravan park closure could be and what would be appropriate mitigation measures. This information could be collected by Housing NSW in their role as Park Liaison Officer, or by specialist independent consultants familiar with the issues likely to impact on residents. Preliminary steps are to provide assistance have been initiated as a result of this Study.

7.4 Summary of potential future actions

In summary, the *Assistance Protocol* provides the main mechanism by which the NSW Government can assist residents affected by caravan park closures.

Preliminary discussions have been held between the DoP and Housing NSW to discuss the potential for closures to occur in this area in future. This has enabled Housing NSW to plan for assistance needs and housing options.

However, the main trigger for activation of the Protocol occurs when a caravan park owner applies and receives approval for a change of use. This is unlikely until land within Area 20 is rezoned.

Should a future closure of the caravan park occur following the rezoning, the process would be:

- Caravan park owner submits a Development Application to BCC for a change of use

- Caravan park owner:
 - Issues notices to terminate residential site agreements use under the Residential Parks Act 1998 – minimum of 12 months notice is required (Shorter notification periods apply where the resident rents both the site and dwelling)
 - Notifies Director General of Housing NSW – *Assistance Protocol* is activated
 - Provides information to residents about their rights.
- BCC considers application and, if appropriate, approves change of use. A Social Impact Assessment may be required.
- Housing NSW works with the caravan park owner and residents to offer assistance with relocation.

Although the Protocol partners officially establish contact with park residents once the Protocol has been activated, the preliminary work being undertaken by Housing NSW as a result of this study should ensure residents will be aware of the process and future housing options well in advance of the obligatory timeframe set out above. Housing NSW plans to consult with the caravan park owner and residents early in this process. Further details can be obtained from Housing NSW, Mount Druitt office, Access and Demand (contact: Acting Manager, Tim O'Connor, telephone 9675-8924).

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Appendix A: Key sections of the Residential Parks Act 1998

The following is a summary of the key requirements of the Residential Parks Act 1998 which relate to residential park closure. This summary should not replace a detailed review of the Act and other regulations in regards to any possible caravan park closure.

From Section 102:

- A notice of termination in respect of a residential site must not specify a date for vacating the residential site earlier than:
 - 12 months after the day on which the notice is given, or
 - in the case of an agreement that creates a tenancy for a fixed term, the day following the date on which the fixed term ends,whichever is the later.
- A resident to whom a notice of termination is given may, within 60 days after receiving the notice, apply to the [Consumer, Trader and Tenancy] Tribunal [established by the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal Act 2001] for an order postponing the date for vacating the residential site.
- A notice of termination under this section must include the following statements, either in the body of the notice or in a separate document accompanying the notice:
 - a statement to the effect that the resident is not required to deliver up vacant possession of the residential premises until ordered to do so by the Tribunal
 - a statement to the effect that the resident may be entitled to be paid compensation under section 128 which, if payable, must be paid in full before the resident is required to deliver up vacant possession
 - such other statements as may be prescribed by the regulations.

- A resident whose residential site agreement is terminated under this section is entitled to be paid compensation by the park owner (in accordance with section 128).
- Before determining an application under this section, the Tribunal:
 - must ensure that both the park owner and the residents are given a reasonable opportunity to make submissions to the Tribunal with respect to the proposed change of use, and
 - must give proper consideration to any such submissions that are duly made.

From Section 127:

- Instead of issuing a notice of termination under section 101, 102, 104 or 118, the park owner under a residential site agreement may, by notice in writing, require the resident to relocate to a different residential site, whether within the same residential park or some other residential park within a reasonable distance operated by the same park owner.
- A notice to relocate must specify the date by which the resident must relocate, being a date not earlier than:
 - 90 days after the notice is given, or
 - in the case of a residential site agreement that creates a tenancy for a fixed term, the day following the date on which the fixed term ends, whichever is the later.
- A resident who relocates in accordance with the requirements of a notice under this section is entitled to be paid compensation by the park owner in accordance with section 128.
- The period of notice that must be given under section 101 (2) (a) or 102 (2) (a) or (4) (a) is reduced by the period of notice given under this section in the event that a notice of termination is given under section 101 or 102 as a result of the resident failing to relocate as required by the notice.

From Section 128:

- The amount of compensation that a resident is entitled to be paid by a park owner under this Division is to be fixed by agreement between the resident and the park owner or by an order of the Tribunal.
- An application for such an order may be made, by the park owner or by the resident:

- in any proceedings on an application under section 113, being an application made on a ground referred to in section 101, 102 or 104, or
 - in any proceedings on an application referred to in section 118 in respect of a residential site agreement, or
 - in any proceedings commenced within 6 months after the resident vacates a residential site in compliance with a notice or order referred to in section 101, 102, 104, 118 or 127.
- An application for a further such order may be made by the resident on the ground that the compensation fixed by any earlier order or orders is inadequate, having regard to the matters referred to in subsection (3) or (4), as the case requires.
- In fixing the amount of compensation to which a resident is entitled in connection with the relocation of a dwelling to a new residential site, whether in accordance with the requirements of a notice under section 127 or otherwise, the Tribunal must have regard to the following matters:
 - the reasonable costs of removing the dwelling from the old residential site (including the costs of disconnecting any services),
 - the reasonable costs of transporting the dwelling, and the possessions of its residents, to the new residential site,
 - the reasonable costs of installing the dwelling at the new residential site (including the costs of connecting to the available services),
 - the reasonable costs of repairing any damage to the dwelling arising from its relocation,
 - the reasonable costs of landscaping the new residential site so as to bring it up to the condition of the old residential site,
 - the value of any financial or other assistance that the park owner has given to the resident in connection with the relocation.
 - In fixing the amount of compensation to which a resident is entitled otherwise than in connection with the relocation of a dwelling to a new residential site, the Tribunal must have regard to the following matters:
 - the reasonable costs of removing the dwelling from the old residential site (including the costs of disconnecting any services),
 - the reasonable costs of transporting the dwelling to its new location or disposing of the dwelling,
 - the reasonable costs of transporting the possessions of the residents of the dwelling to their new place of residence (whether at the dwelling's new location or some other location),
 - the reasonable costs of repairing any damage to the dwelling arising from its relocation,
 - the value of any financial or other assistance that the park owner has given to the resident in connection with the relocation.
 - Compensation is not payable under subsection (3) (d) or (4) (d) for an amount in excess of the value of the dwelling.
 - Compensation is not payable under subsection (4) (b) or (c) for a distance of travel of more than 500 kilometres.
 - This section operates to the exclusion of any provision of any Act that limits the amount for which the Tribunal can make an order.
 - Despite any other provision of this Act, a resident who becomes entitled to compensation before he or she gives up possession of residential premises may not be required to give up possession of the premises until the compensation has been paid in full.

From Section 130:

- The park owner and resident under a residential site agreement may agree to the relocation of the resident to a different residential site, whether within the same residential park or some other residential park operated by the same park owner.
- The rent payable under a residential site agreement that is varied may be reduced, but (in the case of a relocation resulting from a notice to relocate under section 127) may not be increased, by reason of the relocation.
- The object of this section is to enable the Tribunal to assist a park owner and a resident to come to an agreement as to the value of the resident's dwelling where there is a proposed sale of the dwelling from the resident to the park owner.
- The Tribunal may, by order, determine the value of the resident's dwelling and, for that purpose, may obtain a valuation of the dwelling, or seek advice as to the valuation of the dwelling, from one or more registered valuers.

- An application for such an order may be made by the resident or by the park owner, or by both.
- The Tribunal's determination may not have regard to the dwelling's location.
- The Tribunal's determination of the value of the resident's dwelling is advisory only, and does not bind the resident or the park owner or affect any agreement between them for the sale of the dwelling.

Appendix B: Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closures



Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closures

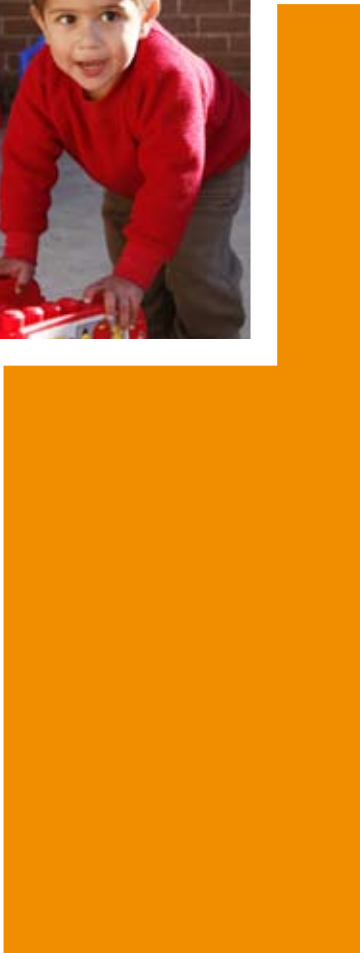
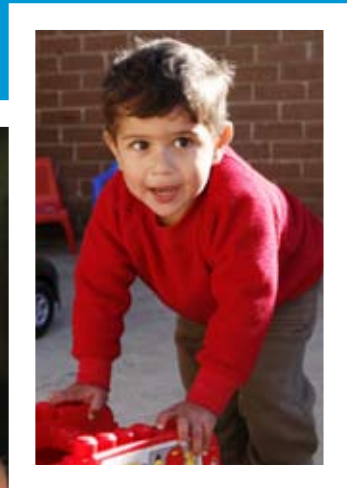


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KEY ORGANISATIONS**ACRONYM**

Caravan and Camping and Manufactured Housing Industry Association of NSW	CCIA
Centrelink	
Consumer Trader and Tenancy Tribunal	CTTT
Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care	DADHC
Department of Community Services	DoCS
Department of Corrective Services	DCS
Housing NSW	
Department of Planning	DoP
NSW Health	
Office of Fair Trading, within the Department of Commerce	OFT
Park and Village Service of NSW	PAVS
Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Program	TAAP

OTHER ACRONYMS USED IN THIS PROTOCOL**TERM****ACRONYM**

Aged Care Assessment Team	ACAT
Home and Community Care	HACC
Non Government Organisation	NGO
Partnership Against Homelessness	PAH
Partnership Action Resource Group	PARG
Supported Accommodation Assistance Program	SAAP

PART ONE: PROTOCOL PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Assistance Protocol for Residential Park Closures (the Protocol) was developed by Housing NSW in conjunction with other agencies. The Protocol is a response to issues arising from the Government Working Party on the future of Residential Parks, which was established following a round table on park closures called by the Deputy Premier in November 2002.

The Protocol provides a framework for cooperation between agencies in providing assistance for residential park residents displaced by a residential park closure, in order to assist them to access the services they require, and to prevent them from becoming homeless.

The key focus of the Protocol is to coordinate targeted assistance to those individuals and families most vulnerable, and at risk of homelessness. This group will typically have specific accommodation and support needs, and may include:

- people with disabilities
- young people unable to live at home
- frail older people
- women with young children
- marginalised Aboriginal households
- women in transition from domestic violence
- former inmates or offenders under the supervision of Community Offender Services (COS)
- people with mental health problems and disorders.

A range of Commonwealth, State, local government and non-government services need to cooperate to assist park residents to achieve a successful relocation in an orderly, timely and dignified manner.

The purposes of this Protocol are to:

- provide a coordinated approach to the process of assisting all park residents, displaced by a residential park closure, who would otherwise be at risk of homelessness or losing access to support services or networks critical to their health and well-being;
- set out the principles to be applied by the Protocol partners in assisting park residents who are in need of assistance and eligible for the standard services provided by the participating agencies; and
- document the procedures for assisting with the relocation of those residents.

The Protocol will be reviewed in 2010.

1.2 RESIDENTIAL PARK RESIDENTS

“Residential parks” include caravan parks, manufactured home estates and establishments often called “mobile home villages” or “relocatable home parks”. For the purpose of this document park residents are only those people for whom the residential park is their principal place of residence.

Residential park residents are a diverse group of people and traditionally include retirees and others attracted by the location and lifestyle. Residential parks can also offer a low cost form of housing. Consequently, some residential park residents are people who cannot afford or manage other forms of housing tenure and many have a

range of support needs and will require assistance to relocate in the event of a park closure. If not for residential parks these people might otherwise be homeless.

There are several peak bodies and advocacy groups that represent park residents including:

- the Residential Parks Forum
- the Affiliated Resident Park Residents' Association
- the Northern Alliance of Park Residents' Association of NSW
- the Park and Village Service.

Residential park residents can own their dwelling and rent the site, or rent their dwelling and rent the site. Dwellings can include manufactured homes, caravans and campervans, with or without fixed annexes. In the event of a park closure, residents have different rights and responsibilities according to the type of dwelling and rental/ownership arrangement within the residential park. The Assistance Protocol aims to provide assistance to all residents in the event of a closure.

1.3 RESIDENTIAL PARK OWNERS

Residential parks are generally for-profit businesses run by a private business or a local council. The peak body/advocacy group representing for-profit park owners is the Caravan and Camping and Manufactured Housing Industry Association of NSW (CCIA).

Under the *Residential Parks Act 1998* a park owner may appoint a person as a park manager with responsibility for the day to day management of the park. For the purposes of this document park owner includes both park owners and park managers.

1.4 RESIDENTIAL PARK CLOSURE

For the purposes of activating this Protocol a park closure is deemed to occur when a park owner issues notices to terminate residential site agreements in accordance with the *Residential Parks Act 1998* for a 'change of use' of the park for a purpose other than that of a residential site. Section 102 of the *Residential Parks Act 1998* sets out the procedures a park owner must follow when terminating residential site agreements for a change of use.

In instances where a tenancy agreement or site agreement may be terminated in other ways, the Protocol partners may also enact the Protocol should they deem it necessary. This will be determined following a report from the Park Closure Liason Officer on the situation and any evidence or information provided by stakeholder and community groups (see section 3.4 & 3.5). The Protocol partners will give specific consideration to instances where those who rent both the dwelling and site have been issued with termination notices as these people may often be vulnerable and have a range of support needs.

The Protocol partners will provide information, support and advice to any residents faced with termination notices, as appropriate.

As outlined in the *Residential Parks Act 1998*, in the event of an impending park closure, the following must apply where a park owner is seeking to terminate tenancy agreements and take possession of residents' sites for the purpose of a change of use:

- development approval must be obtained before a valid notice of termination can be given

- if development approval is not needed, consent of the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) will first have to be obtained before a notice of termination can be given
- the notice of termination is to include specific information about residents' rights
- at least 12 months notice of termination must be given where there is a residential site agreement
- where the resident rents both the dwelling and the site, a minimum of 30 days notice of termination is to be given where the site is to be sold and a minimum of 60 days notice of termination is to be given where there is a change of use
- the park owner is required to notify the Director-General of Housing NSW, within 7 days that termination notices have been issued to residents with residential site agreements.

Early advice on residential park closures can greatly assist in achieving a smooth transition to alternative accommodation. Housing and community service agencies will seek to provide clear information and timely advice about the assistance available to residents. It is the responsibility of park owners to inform park residents of current or proposed arrangements (including the lodging of a development application) that may affect the residents' continued use of their site.

The Protocol should only be invoked when a park closure is lawful. Where it appears that park residents were not properly informed of the proposed change of use of their sites, or that residents have been asked to vacate without being given termination notices as required under the *Residential Parks Act 1998*, the matter should be referred to the Office of Fair Trading for investigation.

1.5 LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Planning

Under State Environmental Planning Policy No 21 – Caravan Parks (SEPP 21), development for the purposes of a caravan park on land within a local government area requires the development consent of the relevant council.

Development for the purposes of a Manufactured Home Estate (MHE) is permitted with development consent under State Environmental Planning Policy No 36 – Manufactured Home Estates (SEPP 36) on certain land within the City of Gosford, the Shire of Wyong and other areas in the State outside the Sydney Region. For land in council areas not subject to SEPP 36, enquiries need to be made to the local council regarding where MHEs are permissible with development consent in its area (eg. under any applicable local environmental plan).

Conversion of an existing residential park to an alternative use will (where the other use is not prohibited on the land) in most cases require development consent from the local council. In determining development applications, the consent authority is required to take into consideration such matters under Section 79C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 as are of relevance to the development applied for.

Closure

There are a number of Commonwealth and NSW laws that set out the rights and responsibilities of owners and residents of residential parks in the event of closure. These include, but are not limited to, the *Residential Parks Act 1998*, the *Residential Parks Regulation 2006*, the *Landlord and Tenant (Rental Bonds) Act 1977*, the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987*, the *Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal Act 2001* and Commonwealth and State privacy legislation.

The *Residential Parks Act 1998* provides protection for residents who live in a residential park (caravan park, mobile home village or manufactured home estate) as their principal place of residence. This applies whether the resident occupies their own dwelling and rents the site or if they rent a park owned dwelling. While the laws apply differently to these two situations, it is a very serious offence for a park owner or manager to wrongly terminate an agreement and evict residents from their homes.

No resident can be compelled to leave a residential park because they receive a notice of termination from the park owner. The park owner must obtain an order for termination and possession from the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) if a resident has failed to deliver up vacant possession on the day specified in the termination notice. Residents may present a case to the Tribunal that a termination order should not be made or, if an order is made, the Tribunal can extend the timeframe available to find alternative accommodation. The Tribunal may also order compensation for a resident's relocation costs prior to a resident vacating in certain circumstances but only if they have a residential site agreement.

Residents who are uncertain about their situation should always be advised to contact the Office of Fair Trading or local TAAP service for information about their rights. TAAP services may also provide assistance with the application and hearing process for the Tribunal.

1.6 ENDORSEMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The Protocol has been endorsed by:

- Housing NSW
- Department of Community Services (DoCS)
- Department of Corrective Services (DCS)
- Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC)
- NSW Health
- Department of Commerce (Office of Fair Trading)
- Department of Planning
- Centrelink

Management of the implementation of the Protocol is the joint responsibility of the Protocol partners including:

- Housing NSW
- Department of Community Services
- Department of Corrective Services, Community Offender Services
- Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
- Area Health Services, represented in this Protocol by NSW Health
- Department of Commerce (Office of Fair Trading)
- Centrelink

This Protocol may be supplemented by more detailed operational documents and agreements concerning the management of park closure responses.

Housing NSW is the lead agency in applying the Protocol and will coordinate the Protocol via the NSW Partnership Against Homelessness, a network of government agencies responsible for homelessness service provision.

1.7 PARK CLOSURE TASKFORCE

A Park Closure Taskforce (the Taskforce) is to be established as a working group of the NSW Partnership Against Homelessness (PAH) Sub-Committee and will oversee the establishment and implementation of the Protocol. The Taskforce will monitor systemic issues arising from park closures and develop a coordinated response to the strategic policy issues arising under this Protocol, both in relation to park closures and to the Protocol partners' responses to park closures. The Taskforce will be coordinated by Housing NSW.

The Taskforce will report to the PAH Sub-Committee and will consult with the Partnership Action Resource Group (PARG) on the implementation and management of the Assistance Protocol, as well as any emerging issues related to residential park closures.

The Taskforce will be chaired by Housing NSW and includes representatives from:

- Housing NSW
- Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
- Department of Community Services
- Department of Corrective Services, Community Offender Services
- Department of Commerce (Office of Fair Trading)
- Department of Planning
- Centrelink

NSW Health will contribute to the work of the Taskforce through its membership of the PAH Sub-Committee.

The standing responsibilities of the Taskforce include:

- monitoring the scale and scope of park closures and the loss of longer-term sites within parks occurring across NSW, through the Protocol notification process
- monitoring and evaluating the overall application and outcomes of the Protocol
- considering ways residents can be better helped during park closures and refining the operational policy concerning park closure responses, including on-going review of this Protocol.

The Taskforce will regularly consult with the Park and Village Service regarding park closures as appropriate.

Housing NSW is responsible for providing relevant information to Taskforce members, providing administrative support and maintaining records and data on residential park closures.

PART TWO: ASSISTANCE PRINCIPLES

2.1 SERVICE RESPONSES FOR PARK RESIDENTS

Under law, the residents of a closing residential park have a right to:

- be informed by the park owner of any current or proposed arrangement or restriction that may affect their continued use of their site
- be given notice to terminate their tenancies as required by the provisions of the *Residential Parks Act 1998*
- have their privacy respected.

The parties to this Protocol acknowledge that the *NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* applies to them in regard to this Protocol and that they will adhere to these Acts when collecting information and/or referring residents to other Protocol partners and services.

2.2 COOPERATION WITH PARK OWNERS

Residential park owners participating in the Protocol:

- will be kept informed of the role of the officers implementing the Protocol (the Response Team; see section 3.7) and requirements of the officers within the residential park
- will be able to work in collaboration with the officers implementing the Protocol to minimise disruption to the park and to the residents who are assisted.

2.3 PROVISION OF ASSISTANCE

All residents are entitled to request assistance in the event of a park closure. The Protocol partners will seek to ensure that residents who request assistance:

- are offered assistance to find suitable alternative accommodation and support
- have access to accurate and timely information on the relevant services, including accommodation and support products, offered by each agency
- are advised on how to contact advocacy, financial and legal advice services
- participate in the development and implementation of their Individual Assistance Plan and be provided with a copy of the Plan (see section 3.8)
- are kept informed about the progress of the Closure Response Plan (see section 3.6)

Residents are entitled to refuse an offer of assistance and can choose to access assistance at any time during the implementation of the Protocol, even after an initial refusal of assistance. An initial refusal will not reduce a resident's right to assistance in any way.

Specific agency services provided to individual residents will depend on the eligibility criteria of each agency (see section 3.9).

2.4 IMPARTIALITY

In the case of any dispute or conflict of interest between a residential park owner and residential park residents, the officers implementing the Protocol should not take an advocacy role on behalf of either party, but refer the parties to appropriate advice and advocacy services.

PART THREE: RESIDENTIAL PARK CLOSURE RESPONSES

3.1 AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

Housing NSW is the lead agency in applying the Protocol and will coordinate the Protocol response to specific residential park closures.

Housing NSW will manage this via a Closure Response Team drawn from a range of agencies (see section 3.6) which will be established in the relevant region in response to that closure and disband when the closure response process is completed.

3.2 ROLES OF PROTOCOL PARTNERS IN PROVIDING ASSISTANCE

Where appropriate the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, the Department of Community Services, the Department of Corrective Services, NSW Health and Housing NSW will jointly develop strategies to meet the needs of people with multiple support needs. The roles of individual Protocol partners in providing assistance are outlined below.

Housing NSW

Housing NSW can provide Temporary Accommodation, RentStart, rent assistance, Public Housing, referral to community housing and, where available, Tenancy Guarantees, to provide short term or longer term assistance to residents eligible for these services. Due to high demand in particular locations applicants eligible for Public Housing may need to wait for suitable accommodation to become available.

In addition Housing NSW will provide project coordination for the closure response.

NSW Health and the Area Health Services

NSW Health, primarily through the Area Mental Health Services (AMHS), can provide clinical services for people with mental health problems or disorders on the basis of clinical need. Area Health Services may be asked to provide Aged Care Assessment Teams for assessing the aged care needs of older residents.

Residents should have access to health and medical services, and be able to contact a general practitioner as required. The Closure Response Team will seek to complement and help to maintain these existing arrangements.

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

DADHC's regional services and funded agencies can provide support for frail older people and people with a disability, subject to needs-based prioritisation and available resources. DADHC will work in partnership with specialist and general health and community service organisations to help address the needs of these client groups. In addition to information and referral, DADHC funds or directly provides a range of services for older people and people with a disability, including personal care, domestic assistance, food services, community access and accommodation support.

Department of Community Services

DoCS, through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) and Families NSW (FNSW) Program can provide support to vulnerable individuals and families.

CSGP and FNSW services, provided by community organisations, include Family Support Services, Family Workers, and Neighbourhood Centres. These services

provide assistance to families in need of extra support, or advice and referrals. Under SAAP, funding is provided to over 400 community services throughout NSW to assist people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and people affected by domestic violence.

Where children or young persons have been reported to the DoCS Helpline as either a risk of harm report (Section 23) or a homeless report (Section 120,121) under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act*, or where DoCS currently is involved with the family, DoCS officers will continue to make appropriate referrals to promote the safety, welfare or well being of these children and young persons.

Department of Corrective Services

DCS provides advice and assistance to offenders either being supervised on community-based court orders by Community Offender Services or, to those offenders in custody in correctional centres.

Office of Fair Trading

OFT, within the Department of Commerce, safeguards consumer rights and advises business and traders on fair and ethical practice. Besides direct services for individuals, the legislation that OFT administers sets the rules for fairness in the transactions between consumers and traders. Unfair practices are investigated and compliance action is undertaken, which can result in serious penalties.

Consumers, including park residents, can contact OFT for information on their rights and responsibilities and assistance with resolving disputes. Park residents can obtain information and assistance directly from OFT as well as from non-government tenant advice and advocacy services under the Tenants Advice and Advocacy Program (TAAP) which is administered by OFT. Park owners can receive information on their rights and obligations under fair trading laws from OFT. OFT also investigate alleged breaches of the *Residential Parks Act 1998*.

TAAP services are funded to assist park residents in pursuing their rights and in handling Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal proceedings. TAAP services may also help park residents with the negotiation of individual compensation packages with the park owner where the park owner is willing to negotiate this issue. Residents may also be given assistance in making relocation arrangements.

Centrelink

Centrelink offers a range of government services and payments to the Australian community. Centrelink will work with the other Protocol partners to provide a range of services. This will be managed within Centrelink by the Area Business Manager responsible for the Emergency Management portfolio.

The services that Centrelink can offer, based on the residents' circumstances, may include identification of eligibility for appropriate payments and services including those to assist with managing transitions, such as Rent Assistance for those renting in the private market. Centrelink can provide assistance in making arrangements with Centrepay for payment of ongoing expenses as well as assessing if customers are eligible for certain payments under special circumstances.

Centrelink will also identify and consider the customer's current difficult circumstances which may impact on their ability to maintain and comply with all job seeking requirements. Where significant numbers of residents are affected, Centrelink may provide an out-servicing arrangement through the provision of Centrelink staff to attend the site. Centrelink staff would assist with assessing customers' eligibility for payments and entitlements and their change of

circumstances. Information would also be provided about other Centrelink professional services such as Social Workers.

Centrelink may also be the first point of contact in relation to assessment and referral of customers to other government and non government local community agencies and services such as housing assistance, counselling, health and legal services, support groups and emergency financial assistance.

3.3 NOTIFICATION OF A CLOSURE

In the event of an intention to close a park, a park owner must give residents notice of termination in compliance with the *Residential Parks Act 1998*. The process is different depending on whether the resident owns the dwelling and what type of dwelling it is.

If the closure is for 'change of use' of the park (see section 1.4 of this Protocol) the *Residential Parks Act 1998* requires the park owner to notify the Director-General of Housing NSW that termination notices have been issued to residents with residential site agreements.

Further, any Protocol partner, on becoming aware of an actual or pending closure, should contact Housing NSW.

3.4 PARK CLOSURE LIAISON OFFICER

On being notified of a closure Housing NSW will nominate an officer to the role of Park Closure Liaison Officer (Liaison Officer).

The Liaison Officer will contact the park owner to enquire about the park closure, and will ascertain what timeframes apply, for example the dates at which termination notices take effect. The Liaison Officer will also seek the park owner's participation in the Protocol, and will contact the Residents' Committee or residents' representative to discuss the closure with them. The Liaison Officer may also seek further information from other parties such as the Local Council, TAAP services, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse or Aboriginal community organisations or other community organisations as appropriate. The Liaison Officer will report back to Housing NSW within five working days on the following:

- the number of residents affected by the closure and their dwelling type and status
- the likely nature and extent of the task in relocating those residents who are likely to need help in relocating
- the presence of any community organisations currently assisting residents
- the willingness of the park owner to cooperate in the closure process
- the date on which the closure is likely to take effect
- an initial estimate of time lines for action.

Where it appears after consultation with the relevant agencies and stakeholders that the residents' accommodation and support needs can be met without invoking this Protocol, the Liaison Officer will report accordingly.

If the Liaison Officer learns, in the course of making enquiries, that it appears park residents were not advised of the proposed change of use of the sites, or that residents have been asked to vacate without being given termination notices as required under the *Residential Parks Act 1998*, the Liaison Officer may refer the matter to the Office of Fair Trading.

3.5 APPLICATION OF THE PROTOCOL

Housing NSW will arrange for the other Protocol partners to be supplied with a copy of the Liaison Officer's report. A copy of the report will also be tabled at the Park Closure Taskforce. Where the closure is occurring for reasons other than a 'change of use', the Protocol partners will liaise to discuss the report in order to decide whether it is necessary to invoke the Protocol.

On invocation of the Protocol, each Protocol partner will estimate the number of their current clients that are living in the residential park who may need help relocating, using existing records. Access to records will only be made in accordance with the *NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and any other applicable legislation. Personal information about affected residents will not be exchanged between the agencies in this undertaking.

Following this estimation, each Protocol partner will advise Housing NSW as to whether they need to be represented on the Closure Response Team for that particular park closure and nominate a senior officer from the relevant region to represent that agency in the Closure Response Team within two working days of receiving the report (see section 3.6).

The Liaison Officer will have day-to-day management of the closure response.

3.6 CLOSURE RESPONSE TEAM

The Closure Response Team will use its best endeavours to convene within three working days of its officers being nominated. At this meeting they will identify which members, other government agencies such as the Department of Education and Training (if there are school aged children concerned) and non-government partners will need to be involved in providing information, advocacy, accommodation and support services as required. The Response Team may decide to establish links with local councils and real estate agents if this is appropriate.

The Response Team will, taking into account the report of the Liaison Officer and following consultation with residents, relevant NGOs and the park owner, as soon as possible develop a Closure Response Plan. The Closure Response Plan for delivering the required forms of assistance will include an identification of the agencies responsible for specific actions, a timeframe for the closure response and a risk management strategy. The Closure Response Plan should ensure that:

- residents have contact information enabling them to organise their own relocation and to access assistance, including that of advocacy groups, as and when required
- the housing and/or support needs of all residents who are eligible for assistance and require assistance to relocate or access support services are assessed
- residents are made aware of their rights under relevant legislation
- residents' written consent will be sought before assistance is provided, or before any sharing of personal information between agencies: personal information recorded on the assistance plan will be kept to a minimum to protect individuals' privacy
- an assistance plan is developed for each resident who requires assistance, specifying the form of assistance considered appropriate, the agencies responsible, with areas of jurisdiction clarified where a joint agency response is required, and specifying the desired outcome and timeframes

- other residents not identifying as requiring assistance know how to contact the Response Team if they subsequently find that they do require assistance.

The Response Team will advise the Taskforce and the Park Residents' Committee or nominated Residents' representative on the planned process and progress made. This report will not include personal information on individual residents. However it can indicate identified potential problems and the steps being taken to resolve or avoid those problems.

3.7 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The Response Team will implement a communication strategy aimed at providing general information to residents, the park owner, the park residents' committee where one exists, and other agencies as appropriate, on:

- the assistance that is available to residents
- contact information for accessing assistance, information and advice from the agencies represented in the Closure Response Team
- interview and application processes.

The Communication Strategy will take into account the needs of people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds, Aboriginal people and those with limited literacy skills. Resources will be developed in plain English and may be translated into community languages as required. The Park Closure Liaison Officer will coordinate and monitor provision of the information required by this section.

During the closure period the Response Team will communicate regularly with the park owner, the park residents and any residents' groups where relevant. It will not include any personal information regarding individual residents.

3.8 RESIDENTS' NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Members of the Response Team (or their nominees) will interview residents requesting assistance to develop an Individual Assistance Plan and to assess the most appropriate forms of assistance for which they are eligible and which can realistically be provided before the termination notice expires. It may be necessary to provide short-term options where suitable accommodation or other assistance is not available once the termination notice period has expired. If a short-term option is provided, the Response Team will continue to liaise with the resident until a more appropriate option is available.

These interviews will be conducted by the Response Team members (or their nominees) as required to assess the needs of the park's residents:

- Housing NSW officers to determine residents' accommodation needs
- DADHC officers where residents include older people and people with a disability
- Area Mental Health Service officers where residents include people requiring mental health services
- Area Health Services officers where frail older residents may require Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) assessments
- probation and Parole officers where there are residents who are offenders on community based court orders and subsequently under supervision of Community Offender Services

- Correctional Centre staff (e.g. Welfare Officers) where residents are currently incarcerated
- where the legislation mandates, or where deemed appropriate by DoCS, officers will also be involved in the Response Team to assist children, young people and their families that are being case managed in the Child Protection Program
- officers from other agencies, who may be invited into the team if park residents are identified as having needs best assessed and met by other agencies such as drug and alcohol services or the Department of Education and Training.

In situations with significant numbers of affected residents, Centrelink officers or Centrelink contracted workers may join the Response Team where the residents are likely to need detailed advice with issues concerning statutory incomes, to assist with processing payment entitlement enquiries and other change of circumstances.

Based on a generic pack of resource materials, the Response Team will assemble a kit consisting of:

- information on the range of appropriate housing and community services available;
- information on eligibility criteria for these services and products; and
- a supply of application forms for the housing and community services most likely to be required by the residents.

The Response Team will provide those residents requiring help with information on the assistance options available, and seek information from residents to assess their eligibility and need for a range of housing and community services. Some residents will have been given shorter termination notice periods than others and response planning should take this into account.

After discussing assistance options with the resident, and having assessed their eligibility and needs, interviewers will reach agreement with the resident on the most appropriate form(s) of assistance for their circumstances and develop an individual assistance plan based on these options. The interviewers will also offer assistance in completing the appropriate application form(s).

The interviewers will seek the residents' written consent before any sharing of personal information, concerning that resident, with other agencies, as provided for in the *NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998, the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* and other relevant legislation.

3.9 PROCESSING APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE

Applications will be sent to the local office of the appropriate agency to be processed according to the standard procedure and criteria applied by each agency, taking into account all relevant factors including the termination date. Each agency will be responsible for coordinating offers of assistance with other agencies, where the coordination of services was identified in a resident's assistance plan. When the Response Team becomes aware that a resident has a case coordinator, the team will, with the consent of the resident, consult that case coordinator and seek their involvement.

After processing applications, offers of assistance will be made to eligible residents.

3.10 RESIDENTS HAVING SPECIAL DIFFICULTY RELOCATING

Where a resident is declined the form of assistance for which they applied, or they have been found to be eligible for assistance but the assistance is not currently available, and the resident is at risk as a result, the Response Team will re-contact the resident and develop a further Individual Assistance Plan.

Residents with special housing needs may be offered assistance such as crisis accommodation, Temporary Accommodation and other programs as appropriate.

3.11 COMPLAINTS

Individuals or groups with a complaint regarding the services of a specific agency should utilise the complaints policy of that agency to resolve the issue. Those who have concerns with the overall application of the Protocol should make a written complaint to the Park Closure Taskforce through Housing NSW.

3.12 REPORTING AND CLOSURE

The Response Team and other relevant stakeholders will meet to discuss the implementation of the Protocol once the residents are re-located and the park has closed in order to make a final report to Housing NSW.

On receiving the Response Team's final report and on being satisfied that:

- all residents have been relocated or suitable offers of assistance have been made to any remaining residents seeking and eligible for assistance
- residents entitled to community services have been referred to appropriate services where such services are available
- participating agencies have processes in-train to assist vulnerable residents who are entitled to longer-term assistance, but have been placed in temporary accommodation or otherwise provided with a short-term solution, while waiting to secure an appropriate longer-term solution to their housing and support needs.

Housing NSW will determine that the closure response is completed, and the Response Team may disband. After the closure, individual agencies will be responsible for any ongoing delivery of services and support to former residents that were assisted through the Protocol.

The Response Team report will be forwarded to the Park Closure Taskforce and Housing NSW will provide a briefing to the Taskforce on the outcomes of the application of the Protocol, unmet need and any recommendations regarding the future implementation of the Protocol.

FLOW CHART: ASSISTANCE PROTOCOL

STAGES

PROCESSES

1 Notification of closure

Housing NSW notified of closure

Housing NSW notified of closure

2 Liaison Officer

Liaison Officer investigates number of people affected, likely assistance needs, and time of closure

Housing NSW Divisional office (DO) advised; nominates Liaison Officer

Initial alert from DO to other Protocol partner contact officers

Liaison Officer provides DO & Taskforce with initial report on closure

Housing NSW refers Liaison Officer's initial report to Protocol partner contact officers

3 Closure Response Team

Protocol partners nominate local officers to manage closure response

Contact officers nominate and brief their senior local manager

Housing NSW confers with contact officers, to agree on whether to invoke Protocol. If no, process ends. If yes: –

Senior regional managers nominate local officers to Closure Response Team

Liaison Officer and nominated local officers form Closure Response Team

4 Assessment

Residents interviewed; where necessary assisted to apply for appropriate assistance

Response Team interviews residents who request assistance, seeks agreement on their assistance plans. Forward applications to local office of Protocol partner. Applications are for existing services, and subject to existing eligibility criteria.

Closure Response Team plans closure response, may contact councils and NGOs.

5 Processing of applications

Local offices process applications

Local offices (of Housing NSW, Area Health Services, DADHC, etc) process applications and/or assess requests for assistance.

Offer of assistance made; resident accepts offer (links made to case coordinators)

6 Assistance

Resident assisted to relocate, or other assistance given. Further work with some residents may be needed.

Resident's application or request for assistance declined, or offer of assistance is unsuitable

7 Closure

Response Team reports on Closure to Taskforce & disbands.

Closure Response Team contacts resident, discusses alternative forms of assistance and offers further assistance, subject to eligibility

Closure response ends when all residents eligible for assistance are relocated or have assistance in-train. Report on Closure provided to Taskforce.

Appendix C: Demographic profile

		CCD 1272807	Blacktown LGA	Australia
	Total persons (excluding overseas visitors):	490	271,709	19,855,288
Population	Males	280 (57.1%)	49.6%	49.4%
	Females	210 (42.9%)	50.4%	50.6%
	Indigenous persons	9 (1.8%)	2.6%	2.3%
	0-4 years	27 (5.5%)	8.2%	6.3%
	5-14 years	57 (11.6%)	16.3%	13.5%
	15-24 years	71 (14.5%)	14.6%	13.6%
	25-54 years	200 (40.8%)	43.4%	42.2%
	55-64 years	84 (17.1%)	9.2%	11.0%
	65 years and over	53 (10.8)	8.2%	13.3%
	Australian citizenship	402 (82%)	84.0%	86.1%
Employment	Employed full-time	158 (64.2%)	64.9%	60.7%
	Employed part-time	55 (22.4%)	21.9%	27.9%
	Unemployed	5 (2.0%)	6.8%	5.2%
Housing	Separate house	119 (57.5%)	83.8%	74.8%
	Other dwellings	88 (42.5%)	0.8%	1.7%
	Median rent (\$/weekly)	\$221	\$200	\$190
	Fully owned	76 (36%)	23.5%	32.6%
	Rented (including rent-free)	83 (40.1%)	40.0%	27.2%
Household	Family household	107 (51.7%)	78.1%	67.4%
	Couple families with children	55 (49.1%)	53.3%	45.3%
	Couple families without children	37 (33.0%)	25.4%	37.2%
	Lone person household	63 (30.4%)	19.8%	22.9%
Income	Median individual income(\$/weekly)	\$478		\$468
	Median household income (\$/weekly)	\$1,005		\$1,027

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006. Quickstats website

Appendix D: Summary of recent proposals for residential park closures in NSW

The following outlines four recent proposals for residential park closures, highlighting issues, impacts, and mitigation recommendations for each proposal.

Casa Paloma Caravan Park

The proposal to redevelop Casa Paloma caravan park in Leppington in Liverpool LGA targeted a park of approximately 256 sites, and it required approximately 100 people to be relocated. Opponents of the proposal argued that the proposal encouraged reductions in the level of affordable housing in the Sydney area. Opponents also argued that it would be an almost impossible task to appropriately relocate park residents, due to their low incomes (Parliament, 2006).

The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the proposed redevelopment of Casa Paloma Caravan Park in Leppington, prepared by Judith Stubbs and Associates (2006), identifies the following key factors and issues:

- Inland residential parks tend to house people with limited or no other housing options – housing people who:
 - cannot afford other types of private rental,
 - have failed to maintain a private or public tenancy
 - have had a relationship breakdown
 - are unemployed or on a disability pension
 - are leaving institutions
 - have a disability or mental illness
 - are in a crisis who have been referred from government or community agencies
 - are waiting for public housing
 - are itinerant or new workers in an area
- Residential parks tend to serve critical dual housing roles:
 - Final housing option in a locality for those with few alternatives
 - Important housing supply for itinerant workers
- Based on surveys, residents of Casa Paloma tended to have moved there because of affordability issues, relationship breakdowns,

eviction, lack of alternative housing options or inability to access other forms of private rental.

- Demographic study of the population indicated severe socio-economic disadvantage with low employment levels, high percentage of the population on some form of pension, high proportions of divorced or separated single men and high percentage of elderly residents.
- In terms of attitude about the park, the majority of residents were generally or very positive about living in the park and liked the life style and the strong sense of community that exists.
- Residents also reported feeling a sense of the park being a place where people “look out” for one another, and a place where social networks and friendships are strong. They do not feel isolated living in the park. Residents also reported liking the proximity of the park to work and services.
- People living in the park tend to be those most at risk of social isolation and dislocation in the broader community.

In addition, the following **impacts** of park closure on residents and the surrounding community were identified:

- Loss of community and support networks
- Sudden decline in low cost rental accommodation, creating a crisis for all residents
- Potential for homelessness and/or family break ups
- Negative impacts on existing employment or on future employment opportunities
- Stress-related illness, particularly amongst the elderly
- Displacement of the elderly
- Possible abuse of housing rights
- Difficulty in finding another park that will accept their dwelling
- Owners competing for limited number of long-term sites
- Compensation for relocation useless if a another long-term site can't be secured
- Loss or devaluing of primary asset

In regards to **mitigating** the impacts of residential park closure, the SIA suggests the following:

- Replace all homes lost by park closure
- Approximately 30% of any new housing stock generated through new development should be available as affordable rental accommodation, targeting groups currently housed in the park
- Establish an Independent Tenant Advocate / Relocation Office for the period of the relocation
- A relocation and rent assistance package of approximately \$3,000 per package (supported by research on cost of 'establishing a tenancy')
- Payment of any rent difference for approximately two years
- For owners who can relocate, the full costs per RPA 1998 paid in advance of the move (ideally, to a park that is guaranteed not to close within 10 years) – at a cost of approximately \$18,000-\$30,000, plus any removalist and reconnection costs
- For owners who cannot relocate, the purchase of a reasonable quality second hand manufactured home paid in advance of the move (ideally, to a park that is guaranteed not to close within 10 years) – at a cost of approximately \$70,000-\$90,000, plus any removalist and reconnection costs

Lansdowne Caravan Park

This proposal involved the redevelopment of Lansdowne Caravan Park in Lansdowne, within Fairfield LGA, targeting approximately 276 residential units and establishing approximately 69 new lots. The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the proposed redevelopment, prepared by Judith Stubbs and Associates(2005), identifies the following key factors and issues:

- The park is an important housing resource to the locality, and its loss would constitute a significant loss that could not be remedied in the locality
- The LGA has a high percentage of households living in unaffordable housing
- An absence of adequate alternative accommodation in the locality (3km radius)
- Likelihood that some residents will be actually or effectively homeless or face severe housing stress in alternative rental housing

In addition, the following **impacts** of residential park closure on residents and the surrounding community were identified:

- Closing of the park would increase the imperative to move further from workplaces, social networks and services
- Closing the park would likely exert significant upward pressure on prices on an already stressed housing market
- Closure of the park will result in the loss of an important affordable housing “stepping stone” - including for young people.

In regards to **mitigating** the impacts of residential park closure, the SIA suggests the following:

- Difficulty in recommending mitigation as closure of the park could impact thousands of potential renters in the locality over the next 5-10 years
- Any mitigation is likely to be unsustainable given the nature of the population – issues resulting in individuals living within the park have not been resolved
- Need to establish an Independent Tenant Advocate / Relocation Office for the period of the relocation
- For renters, a relocation package of approximately \$3,000 per package should be offered (based on research into costs of starting a dwelling)
- Payment should be made for any rent difference experienced by residents as a result of relocation, for approximately two years
- For owners who can relocate, the full costs per RPA 1998 should be paid in advance of the move (ideally, to a park that is guaranteed not to close within 10 years) – at a cost of approximately \$18,000-\$30,000 per unit plus any removalist and reconnection costs.

Tingari Residential Village

This proposal involved the proposed redevelopment of 90 residential units at Tingari Residential Village Southside residential park into a retirement village, impacting approximately 120 current residents. The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the proposed redevelopment, as prepared by Dr. Rigmor Berg (2004), identifies the following key factors and issues:

- Most residents are low income retirees with no significant assets other than their relocatable homes
- Half have lived in the park for more than five years, and 25% percent have lived in the park for more than 10 years

- Most residents are opposed to park closure
- Most residents have existing disabilities and/or chronic health problems, many of them life threatening
- Sites for possible location are substantially inferior to the current park location in regards to:
 - Distance from family, friendship networks and established relationships with health and support services
 - Poor access to shops, services, entertainment and public transport
 - Demographically different and less compatible resident population
 - Poorer quality homes with poor landscaping
- Maintain consistency in communication with park residents
- Pay for the cost of moving possessions as well as for the cost of moving dwellings
- Pay for the cost of relocation beyond 300km if there are no comparable sites within a 300km area
- Add the cost of improvements made to relocatable homes and surrounding gardens by their owners to the purchase price
- Pay residents for any loss in the value of their homes from moving locations

In regards to the **impacts** of park closure on residents and the surrounding community, the SIA identifies the following that could apply to OK Caravan Corral:

- Relocation of residents against their wishes to a different style of accommodation or less suitable locations
- If redevelopment is staged, residents will live with substantially reduced amenity – including noise, dust and changed access routes due to demolition/removal of relocatable homes
- Breaking down of bonds within a mutually supportive community resulting in significant losses in quality of life and capacity for independent living.
- Deterioration in both physical and mental health, due to the stresses of relocation, uncertainty and loss of control and, in many cases, increased social isolation
- Residents not able to afford to buy a house, unit or a relocatable home in a secure residential park in the local government area with the proceeds of the sale of their relocatable homes
- Loss of ability to live independently for some residents, due to loss of daily support networks and changes to the immediate environment.
- Loss of site value in the purchase of homes (relative value of the site compared with other parks)

In regards to **mitigating** the negative impacts of park closure, the SIA identifies the following measures:

- Provide support services to help residents experiencing difficulty in coping with unwanted changes (not just provision of information)

- Provide compensation also for long term residents who do not own their home. And long term owners who do not occupy their home
- Make sure that residents do not lose eligibility for rent assistance as the result of any mitigation efforts
- The owner should support independent support services needed by residents to assist them in:
 - Understanding their options and making the best choice for themselves
 - Accessing the health, housing and support services they need
 - Coping with the changes.

Sundowner Village

This proposal involved the removal of an existing caravan park estate containing 330 units to be replaced by 169 conventional allotments (Parliament, 2006).

In response to this proposal, Council received 58 individual submissions, 56 which were objections to the proposal. The main grounds for objections related to the displacement of approximately 720 residents, many of whom could be considered as low income earners and would subsequently have significant difficulties in finding alternative affordable housing.

Other objections to the park closure with significance for OK Caravan Corral included:

- Concern that park closure would result in a significant reduction of affordable housing within the area
- Danger that park closure would result in some residents being made homeless

In regards to **mitigating** the impacts of residential park closure, the SIA identifies the following measures:

- Spreading relocation of residents out over a period of two years, closing the park in stages
- Inform residents about the details and timetable for closure as soon as possible
- Provide a minimum of 6 months notice to each resident
- No re-letting of sites once they are vacated
- A minimum of 10% low cost two bedroom units be provided as part of the ensuing development
- A Liaison Officer position should be funded for 12 months to work with residents to ensure they are adequately assisted in relocating and gaining access to community services
- Provide all residents with at least a one week rent holiday to contribute to the costs of relocating
- Install a bulletin board listing housing options that are available within the surrounding area, updated on a weekly basis
- In the case where a resident chooses to vacate the park prior to their lease termination date or scheduled closure timeframe, the applicant shall accommodate this without penalty to the tenant.

Appendix E: Notes of meeting between Department of Planning and Housing NSW

Meeting Note

Meeting	Meeting with Housing NSW	Ref No.	09/1268
Project	Area 20 Precinct, OK Caravan Park	Date	28 May 2010
Venue	Mount Druiitt Department of Housing office	Time	2.00pm
Chaired by	Lee Mulvey	Recorded by	Jenny Vozoff
Purpose	To discuss with Housing NSW the potential future closure of the OK Caravan Park, within Area 20, and discuss future housing options for residents and the role of Housing NSW		

Attendees

Lee Mulvey (LM)	Precinct Project Manager, Department of Planning	Margaret Bailey (MB)	Housing NSW
Tim O'Connor (TO)	A/Manager, Access and Demand, Housing NSW	Jacque Samoley (JS)	Housing NSW
Jenny Vozoff (JV)	Project Manager, Elton Consulting		

Discussion points

1 Introductions and background

LM explained the broad purpose of the meeting: to introduce ourselves, the Area 20 Precinct project, its relationship to the Marsden Park Industrial Area Precinct/ Town & Country Caravan Park discussion held recently between TO and Bruce Colman of Planning, and to discuss the role of Housing NSW if a future closure of the OK Caravan Park within Area 20 is planned.

LM stated that there has been no indication that the owner would seek to close the park in the short term, however, there is a possibility this could occur.

2 Housing NSW background

TO explained the current status of Housing NSW in relation to recent State and Federal funding to increase supply and the new funding model based on transferring assets to community housing. \$8 billion has been transferred to community housing to help the sector grow. Over time, this will lead to a large increase in social housing, as community housing providers can leverage finance based on their assets.

In addition, there is greater liaison with community housing providers, including a single consolidated waiting list.

3 Approach in Marsden Park Industrial Area

MB explained she had already begun consultation with the Town & Country residents, following Bruce Colman's meeting. She had appreciated being notified early so there was time to adequately plan. MB had met with Alf, the owner, and then with residents. Approximately 90-100 residents attended. The main issues are:

- Where can residents move to? There is little caravan park accommodation within a 300 km radius. Some are now on HousingNSW waiting lists or can qualify for SEPP 5 (older persons) housing.

- Residents tend to have strong ties to their local communities.
 - The local advocacy group is being involved
 - Some residents are fearful, especially older people
 - However, western Sydney has large quantities of public or community housing for the most needy.
-

4 Options available for Area 20 residents

TO explained that, in contrast to Marsden Park, there is little public housing stock in the areas near Area 20. It may therefore prove difficult to provide housing options within the same geographic area should the park close in the future. Options include:

- Social housing
- Income eligibility – based on:
 - income limit –weekly household income minus medical expenses
 - rent start – provides bond and advance rent, can assist with temporary accommodation for the homeless
 - private rental brokerage advocacy
 - tenancy guarantee
 - tenancy facilitation in the private market
 - social housing tenancy
 - special assistance subsidy paying 75% of rental

However, based on a cursory review of park demographics, most OK Caravan Park residents may not be eligible for these assistance options. Many are working and therefore would not qualify.

Over time, community housing providers will buy into this area, but this will not happen within the required timeframe.

There are also opportunities to relocate residents to other caravan parks, such as those further to the north west, where there are many caravan parks closer to the Hawkesbury.

Actions:

- Housing NSW will arrange to visit the owner of OK Caravan Park soon. These discussions will help determine their approach to consultations with residents in the future should the need arise.
 - Following that meeting, and **AFTER** the Area 20 draft documents have been exhibited, Housing NSW intend to let residents know about the proposals for the area and begin consultations in relation to future options. This would be informed by further discussions with the owner of the OK Caravan Park.
-