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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Northern Students Accommodation Project

Presented to His Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1914.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Mr *Harriss* (Chairman)
Mr *Hall*

House of Assembly

Mr *Best*
Mr *Green*
Mrs *Napier*

By Authority: Government Printer, Tasmania

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND.....	2
CURRENT SITUATION	3
CONSULTATION	4
PROJECT COSTS	6
EVIDENCE	6
DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE	12
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.....	12

INTRODUCTION

To His Excellency the Honourable Peter Underwood, Officer of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

The Committee has investigated the following proposal: -

Northern Students Accommodation Project – Proposed New Facilities at Cypress Street, Launceston

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Education currently operates three student hostels located in Hobart, Burnie and Launceston. Students also have access to three TAFE Hostels located in the three regional centres.

Currently, a limited number of year 11 students from rural and isolated areas of Northern Tasmania are accommodated at a property known as City Villas located in Elizabeth Street, Launceston while undertaking studies at Newstead or Launceston Colleges. As the Villas placements are limited to 21 students, additional placements were needed to cater for the number of students requiring accommodation. In October 2007 the Minister for Education and Skills the Hon David Bartlett announced that a new student accommodation complex would be built in the grounds of Newstead College for occupation in 2009.

The proposed new facility is part of an overall restructure of post compulsory education aimed at improving retention rates for Tasmanian students. The new hostel will cater for up to fifty students in Northern Tasmania. The new facility will also provide a range of accommodation, for adult learners, students seeking short term accommodation options or those beginning 'year-orientation' short courses.

The new facility will aim to improve retention rates as well as supporting students in a personal, social and educational sense while undertaking further study. To achieve Department of Education duty of care obligations, a degree of supervision will be required for all students and design elements will assist this wherever possible. Younger students will receive a higher level of supervision, while older students will be provided a higher degree of independence through the building design and layout.

Whilst the new accommodation complex is to retain its own identity it is to be seen in the wider context of Newstead College resources and facilities with residents potentially able to access college facilities after hours. It is anticipated that

networking access will be provided through all bedrooms with wireless and radio or via cable link from college IT infrastructure.

The new facility will be an important element in the establishment of the new Tasmanian Academy, Tasmanian Polytechnic and Training Tasmania organisations under the Tasmania *Tomorrow* initiative.

CURRENT SITUATION

City Villas

The existing City Villas accommodation is not considered ideal in regard to limited spaces available, limited potential to increase spaces due to building construction and site restrictions, the current condition of the facility and its location adjacent to a major Launceston city hotel / bottle shop outlet.

Originally designed as a motel / holiday unit complex it is restricted in opportunities for redevelopment, in that:

- the site is land locked preventing expansion without acquisition of adjoining properties;
- the building is constructed from load bearing brick and concrete construction limiting the potential for flexible living arrangements to be introduced;
- bed places are limited to only 21;
- the accommodation is inadequate in terms of basic amenity of light, ventilation and connection with the outside environment;
- accommodation variety is confined to two bed places per unit;
- access for students during the day is unavailable due to supervision issues; and
- supported catering is not available due to building logistics.

Student Accommodation Allowance

The Department of Education operates the Student Accommodation Allowance (SAA) for eligible senior secondary students attending government and non-government schools and colleges.

Of the 307 students receiving the allowance in 2007, 143 reside in hostels, including those attached to non-government schools, while the remaining 164 students reside in private accommodation.

Importantly, the current hostel accommodation arrangements are viewed as being fairly inflexible in that students are given priority for places if they are full-time, full-year students. This presents a barrier to students who wish to undertake studies for either a proportion of the year, on a part-time basis, or even wishing to travel for only a part of the week. Accordingly, the provision of more flexible hostel accommodation

arrangements for students will be possible through providing increased places in hostels.

Alternative accommodation options

The International Services Office (ISO) of the Department of Education also provides a home-stay accommodation service for international students. This service currently caters for 141 students in 102 home-stays offered by over 200 registered home-stay providers. ISO administer all arrangements associated with the home-stay service, including ensuring that home-stay providers are appropriate and meet the relevant checks, and that appropriate accommodation facilities and services for students are provided. The office also administers the payment arrangements.

CONSULTATION

Project Steering Committee

A project Steering Committee comprising representatives of Newstead and Launceston Colleges was established in November 2007 as an advisory group to assist Department of Education in the preparation of a project brief document, selection of the Consultant design team and initiation of the design and project management process. An important part of that process has been an assessment of various alternative facility models in the state and the relative merits of each example.

Some guiding principles developed by the Committee were:

- (1) With a central aim of improving retention rates, the new accommodation facility will need to, in concert with management practices, support students, in a personal, social and educational sense while undertaking further study.
- (2) Younger students, in particular, living away from home for the first time need support in areas such as healthy practices, time management, appropriate social experiences and their educational programme.
- (3) To achieve Department of Education duty of care obligations a degree of supervision will be required for all students and design elements should assist wherever possible. Older students will be provided a higher degree of independence.
- (4) In addition to accommodating year 11 and 12 students, the new accommodation facility may cater for adult learners, students seeking short term accommodation options or beginning 'year-orientation' type short courses.

Identified Needs and Priorities

The Steering Committee further identified the following key project descriptors;

- cost effective accommodation that provides for a variety of service levels from independent living to a fully catered option via established College facilities
- provision of a safe, healthy, homely and comfortable living environment
- building a sense of community and belonging
- secure access for students and their families
- availability of modern technology
- functionality balanced against aesthetically attractive surrounds that students will find stimulating and rewarding well into the future
- an environment that will support a students' first experience of independent living and managing their daily routine
- passive gender separation with appropriate spatial, visual and acoustic privacy
- access to appropriate recreation facilities
- appropriate levels of management, supervision and pastoral care
- energy efficiency and environmental sustainability
- a facility that can be appropriately controlled without being unduly "controlling"
- buildings that can be maintained within acceptable commercial parameters.
- a facility that exhibits due regard to both passive and active environmentally sustainable principles.

Summary of key points from consultations

- The Springvale, (Hobart) model of accommodation with regard to location, 7 day a week provision, and supervisory arrangements, was held up as the ideal model to operate in Burnie and Launceston as well.
- Access during the day is considered important.
- Ideally, a combination of self-catering (i.e. for year 12) and fully-catered (i.e. for years 7 to 11) will be available.
- Flexible arrangements should be provided whereby students can stay for short periods of time (e.g. 3 month blocks) or for proportions of a week, rather than needing to be full-time.
- The age mix of students which exists at Springvale Hostel (i.e. years 7 to 12) was not considered to be a problem and was actually seen as enhancing life experiences for students in a safe environment.
- The TAFE hostel provision for college students at Alanvale was not considered a preferred option.
- The Principals of both Launceston College and Newstead College agree with the establishment of one facility at Newstead College to support both schools.
- Issues relating to the need to improve the Student Accommodation Allowance (SAA) for senior secondary students to enable the eligibility criteria for the scheme to be relaxed to support more students, including part-time students,

and increase the student allowance amount are being pursued by the Department of Education.

PROJECT COSTS

The major project components and estimated costs are as follows:-

Construction estimate (April 2008)	\$3,500,000
Contract Contingency	\$ 108,000
Permits, Commissioning contingency	\$ 50,000
Furniture and equipment	\$ 250,000
Fees	\$ 320,000
Artwork	\$ 72,000
Total Project Costs	\$4,300,000

The construction cost component of the project budget has been developed in consultation with Stehel Consultants, Quantity Surveyor as shown below:

New buildings	\$2,900,000
Site works	\$ 453,000
Site Services	\$ 147,000
Contract Contingencies	\$ 108,000
Cost escalation	(\$included)
Total construction budget	\$3,608,000

EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Friday, 4 July last at Henty House, Launceston whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

- Cath Parker, Manager, Capital Planning and Development;
- Liz Banks, General Manager, Learning Services North; and
- Glenn Smith, Glenn Smith Associates.

Background

The Manager, Capital Planning and Development, Ms Parker provided the Committee with the following overview of the project:-

The Department of Education is seeking approval for the construction of the new student residential facility on the site of the existing Newstead College in Cypress St., Launceston. The submission before the committee details the proposal to replace the existing City Villas hostel

with a new purpose-built facility in the grounds of Newstead College at an estimated cost of \$4.3 million.

As background to the proposal and as outlined in the submission, I can advise that the Department of Education currently operates three student hostels located in Hobart, Burnie and Launceston. Students also have access to three TAFE hostels located in the three regional centres. Currently a limited number of year 11 students from rural and isolated areas of northern Tasmania are accommodated at a property known as City Villas located in Elizabeth Street, Launceston, while undertaking studies at Newstead or Launceston Colleges. As the Villas placements are limited to 21 students only, additional placements are needed to cater for the number of students needing accommodation. The villas are also not considered ideal in regard to the current condition and amenity of the building, the limited opportunity for expansion and its location adjacent to a major Launceston city hotel and bottle shop outlet.

In October 2007 the Minister for Education and Skills, the Honourable David Bartlett, announced that a new student accommodation complex catering for up to 50 students would be built in the grounds of Newstead College for occupation during 2009. This will be an important element in the establishment of the new Tasmanian Academy, Tasmanian Polytechnic and Training Tasmania organisations under the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative. It will provide student residents at the facility with access to the broader Newstead College campus that offers active exercise equipment, tennis, basketball, extensive grassed spaces and passive recreation spaces for dining and socialising. The facility is located within walking distance of the Newstead shopping precinct offering most services, and is located on a trunk bus route enabling access to other education facilities and services.

You will see that there are four main accommodation requirements to the overall facility. There is manager's accommodation, supervisors' accommodation, students' accommodation and common area facilities. Each of these functional areas will cater for different people in different ways in response to the individual responsibilities and needs.

Since presenting the submission to Parliament some weeks ago, an issue has arisen in relation to the access proposed for the site to be used during construction and by students and others in the longer term. As highlighted at the site visit this morning, an appeal against the condition imposed by the council to prevent access via Sherriff Street is currently before the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal. While this does not directly impact on this hearing and gaining approval for the project to proceed, I will be happy to answer further questions in relation to this issue as part of this morning's proceedings.

In summary, the facility has been designed to provide a safe, healthy and comfortable living environment for all residents, students and facility management. Given the large number of younger students, with many living away from home for the first time, the accommodation will provide a homely ethos and support students in a personal, social and educational sense through its planning fabric and management. It has been designed to encourage a sense of community and a sense of belonging.

Accommodation Numbers

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the number of beds available in the proposed works. Ms Parker responded:-

For quite a few years that there has been a demand that we haven't been able to fill in relation to student accommodation, and we have been restricted in our capacity to provide that. The numbers on waiting lists indicate that we will be able to support a population of 50 students. The nature of the students has also been broadened out and we will be accepting part-time students, which we have not been able to provide for in the old accommodation facility, and also students attending TAFE.

The General Manager, Learning Services North, Ms Banks added:-

I was at Scottsdale a couple of days ago. They have 60 grade 10 pupils this year, so it is a really big issue for them. They are really looking forward to the opportunity, so I think it will make a big difference. Fifty will not overextend it and also the way it is configured allows for all sorts of stages as well as permanent full-time, which will suit not only the current older students but also the people doing bridging programs and short courses. That flexibility will support the ongoing enrolment of about 50 in that setting.

Design Configuration

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the design configuration of the proposed works. Mr. Smith of Glenn Smith Associates responded:-

The initial brief had set down a number of different configurations such as three-, four- and five-bedroom complexes - and that was done prior to our engagement - plus the two supervisors units plus a manager's unit. The numbers were sort of pre-determined. The site lends itself for separation of those units into certain groups so that we have the three-bedroom and manager's units at the front of the site. In the middle we have the four-bedroom and at the rear we have the five-bedroom complexes. They are basically separate blocks so that they can be built as separate complexes. We have also tried to maximise the solar aspect of the site, letting in good sun and light to the units because they all face the north or the north-east and the central courtyard not being overshadowed. So the distribution of the units is along the lines of an environmentally-friendly approach so that we get the maximum use and the benefits of the site.

The materials have been generally similar but not identical to the Newstead College complex so that we have brick up to first-floor level then lightweight construction above that in some form of cladding. It marries in with but is not identical to the college. The roof shapes are different and the colours will be different, but it has a family relationship, if you like, without being identical. It was important that the street frontage be very similar in scale to the adjoining properties so that it has a more domestic approach. While it still has a large number of students, we are trying to break it down so that it is much more homely than an institutional block. That is the central thrust of the design... The early analysis of the site selection took into account the location of the flood line and also the imposition of additional costs for building elsewhere on the site. While there is a lot of space at the Newstead College site, it is very restrictive as to where you can build permanent buildings. If you build a complex like this

down in the paddock you really have to build it up high, fill et cetera so that it will comply with the council requirements for the 100-year flood line. That would have added considerable cost to those alternatives.

Outside-School Use

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding the use of the proposed works during school holidays. Ms Parker responded:-

It has been planned in such a way that with those flexible arrangements we could open up just small units depending on the size of groups, and the business model will be developed as to how we can best optimise the use of the college with the hostel accommodation during down times... It is designed to accommodate not only students attending Newstead. As City Villas caters for a larger group, this would also cater for people doing other courses or coming in for a week if they are studying externally or things like that. It will be a much more flexible arrangement than we have been able to offer so far.

Supervision

The following exchange occurred regarding the supervision of the proposed works:-

Mr GREEN - Will a person be living on the site permanently as part of the supervision role so that they would be there effectively 365 days a year?

Ms PARKER - Yes.

Mr GREEN - So they have a broader role with respect to the college campus as a whole? ... Just to make sure that the college itself is okay when the students are not there. Do they have a broader responsibility for the site as well, or just for the accommodation?

Ms BANKS - I think that would be part of the business plan, and it really depends on the skillset of the people who are interested in the position. This is new work, so I think it will be firmed up by what we have learned from the other hostels, the mistakes that we have made along the way and the needs of the students. Obviously the older group will not need the same level of support and supervision as the younger ones, especially kids coming from isolated areas, who have to deal with all the trauma of a new environment, a new school and new subjects. We think in principle that the support for the students in the hostel is the number one game.

Future Expansion

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding possible future expansion of the proposed works. Mr. Smith responded:-

There is the potential to do it there [go into the 100-year flood line]. The network of services and the pedestrian access spine could continue around the corner for another block or two if it became necessary. It is physically possible to do that. I would have thought that you would not separate them; otherwise you have to provide another set of supervisory components

and so on. It would be possible to expand the spine so that it wraps around the corner towards the car park. If we needed to add to the car park, that could go on the end because that is not subject to the flooding.

Ms Parker added:-

Just the way the units are designed gives us quite a lot of scope to pick and choose if it had to be expanded. One of the things in planning for that sort of design, the steering committee, before Glenn Smith Associates came on board, had looked at a number of hostels. They looked at the way TAFE hostels are set up and the university hostels, and picked out the best features from both of those. We did not want something that looked like an institution or a boarding house with bedrooms off a central corridor. The idea of homely cottages lends itself to extension.

Sherriff Street Access

The Committee questioned the witnesses regarding Sherriff Street access. Ms Parker responded:-

Let me just read for the record the situation as we see it. Then I will hand over to Glenn to explain the options that we have in mind for it.

I would like to draw the committee's attention to the statement on page 15 of the submission under the heading 'Existing Conditions'. The second paragraph proposes that the existing access road, car park and pathway will be removed and relocated and future access to the main car park will be from the Sherriff Street entrance. This submission was written and lodged prior to the condition that was imposed on us by the council, so the Launceston City Council in issuing a planning permit for the hostel development has imposed a condition that the Sherriff Street access should not be used during construction and, indeed, it should be permanently closed off. An initial mediation meeting has been held between council officers and representatives of the Department of Education on 23 June. Legal advice on questions of ownership, title and right of access is currently being sought by both parties. Preliminary advice received by the Department of Education through Crown Law has indicated that there is no legal hindrance to the department being able to use the Sherriff Street access.

It is important to note that the removal of this access will not prevent the project from going ahead. The Cypress Street access will continue to be used as the main entrance to the school and the hostel should access from Sherriff Street be permanently closed. I will hand over to Glenn and he can explain those options that we would consider because we do not want to create any dissension between the neighbours and the college.

Mr. Smith added:-

Our initial planning application did not have the connection between the entrance and the car park. We preferred to go through Sherriff Street to the student car park. During initial discussions with council officers, they were happy with that, but during the development application process other departments within the council raised the issue. They then canvassed comment

from local residents, bearing in mind that this was a permitted-use project, not a discretionary use. They opened this door and they received some submissions. Therefore in their wisdom they put in this condition of not being able to use Sherriff St at all. That was of concern to everybody, so we went down the path that Cath just explained.

The consequences of not having access through Sherriff St are that it becomes very difficult to build the project in a timely manner because we have to relocate the road before we can start normal building construction. During the mediation we canvassed the concept of access via Sherriff St during construction to enable us to have more flexibility for builder access and, ultimately, student access during that period. That has not been formalised but the door has been opened in discussion. Subject to legal argument, we may get another forum to clarify the situation of construction access. Apart from long-term use of the site, my only concern is that it makes it very difficult to build within a timely fashion if we do not have access from Sherriff St during construction. That was where we got to with mediation. ... We have accepted that we have to build the connector road anyway. The builder would be more restricted in when he can do certain aspects of the job. It would virtually require him to build the new road before he could get access to the site because the road access goes through the middle of the site at the moment. That would be a disruption to the program. I can't tell you about the cost, but usually if a project goes for longer then there is an associated overhead cost.

The following exchange occurred in relation to the issue of Sherriff Street access:-

***CHAIR** - Would you want to facilitate access to the carpark through Sherriff St as well during construction or just for your construction vehicles?*

***Mr SMITH** - Ideally we would like to have student access through Sherriff St to the carpark so that they do not have to go near the building site for access. That has to be a negotiable situation with local residents and council.*

***CHAIR** - Construction vehicles are likely to use Cypress St, aren't they, for straight access to the site?*

***Mr SMITH** - There will be times when they would need to crane things in; it is quite restricted otherwise. It makes the builders' life a bit easier and hence a more productive site.*

***CHAIR** - On current legal advice there is no prohibition against the department using the Sherriff St access. If that is what you want to do then you can.*

***Ms PARKER** - Yes, that is the preliminary advice we have received.*

***CHAIR** - If the project is approved, are you still looking to begin construction in August?*

***Mr SMITH** - It depends on when the approval is because then we have a three-and-a-half-week tender period. Then we probably have two weeks to commission a builder, so we are probably looking at early September at best.*

Ms PARKER - There has been some slippage in the program because of difficulty in deciding on the access. Anticipated commencement was August 2008, so we expect it now to be September/October.

Mr BEST - You would want this completed for the polytechnic/academy changes and everything else.

Ms PARKER - Most certainly.

Mr BEST - Earlier we were talking about the greater numbers of Scottsdale students, so you would need a larger facility. It is important for education in Launceston to get the project underway.

Ms PARKER - With the best will in the world I suspect it won't be ready for February 2009 - though as soon as possible.

Mr BEST - The existing facility holds 21 and this will take it to 50. Will you construct in phases, so you might have a section complete so that some students might be accommodated?

Mr SMITH - One other implication of this road access is that if we don't have construction access from Sherriff St then we have to build differently, which means it is difficult to hand over in stages. Using Sherriff St and building from the other direction we can have the units commissioned and still be building up at the back.

DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

The following document was taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- Northern Student Accommodation Project – Proposed New Facilities at Cypress Street, Launceston– Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, June 2008.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The need for the proposed works was clearly established. The existing accommodation facilities for students in the north are not considered ideal due to limited spaces available, limited potential to increase spaces due to building construction and site restrictions, the current condition of the facility and its location adjacent to a major Launceston city hotel and bottle shop outlet.

The current buildings are generally in poor condition and require significant redevelopment to provide an effective and contemporary living environment, however the area available for such redevelopment is limited to the extent to make redevelopments impractical. Instead, the new development proposed on the site of Newstead College, Cypress Street, Launceston, provides the design opportunity to

build a larger facility that better meets the changing accommodation needs of students.

The proposed works will provide students with a safe, healthy and comfortable living environment with a homely atmosphere. The new facilities will cater for significantly more students and will support their social, personal and educational development through the encouraged sense of community and belonging. The facility will provide for on-site catering, during the day access, and full supervision. The accommodation will be flexible, offering short term accommodation for people undertaking short courses, as well as longer term accommodation.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the documentation submitted, at an estimated total cost of \$4,300,000.

Parliament House
Hobart
31 July 2008

Hon. A. P. Harriss M.L.C.
Chairman