Arcadia House consultation

Drop-in session

Wednesday 17 June 2026

Cook Community Hall

Session overview

- Approximately 86 community members attended the session.
- The session included a mix of community members across different age groups, with strong participation from local residents.
- Many attendees had also participated in the first community drop-in session, reflecting ongoing interest in the project and the opportunity for further discussion.

Overall community sentiment

- Feedback continued to indicate a strong level of opposition to the proposed relocation of Arcadia House to Cook.
- While a small number of attendees expressed support for the proposal, those who did generally preferred option B.
- The predominant view remained that Arcadia House should not be relocated to Cook.
- A key concern expressed by most participants was around the value of the green space and the loss to the community.
- Ongoing concerns were raised by many community members regarding perceived impacts on safety and a potential increase in risk to the local area, particularly for young children, should Arcadia House be located in the community.
- Similar to the first drop-in session, many attendees questioned whether decisions had already been made, with ongoing concerns about the purpose of the consultation process and the extent to which community feedback would influence future decisions.
- Overall, there continued to be a low level of trust among some community members, with attendees seeking greater clarity about the planning process, site selection process, any risk assessments undertaken and next steps for the project.

Site specific feedback

- Overwhelmingly, the majority of attendees strongly opposed either site being developed.
- Feedback continued to indicate that both proposed sites are valued community spaces, with attendees highlighting their importance for recreation, social connection, community cohesion and informal community activities. Some attendees indicated they had chosen to live in the area specifically because of these spaces.

- Concerns were again raised about the suitability of both sites, including their proximity to existing community facilities and the potential loss of open green space. Many noted the range of different uses and groups, not only active, sport, family and children but also a quiet reflection space.
- A number of attendees raised questions about the size of the proposed facility and the amount of land it would occupy at both option A and option B. Many attendees expressed concern about the potential loss of open space and sought more detail on the building footprint, associated infrastructure and how much of each site would remain available for community use.
- Several attendees suggested the service would be better located either in a new suburb where it could be planned for at the start or on a hospital campus with other clinical supports.

Option A

- Many attendees considered option A unsuitable due to its role as a well-used community and family space and close proximity to the playground and Koala Playschool
- Attendees noted that the area is regularly used for:
    - Family gatherings and barbecues
    - Informal sport and recreation, including soccer
    - Dog walking
    - Children's play and other family-oriented activities
- Some attendees also noted that the site is one of the few relatively flat and accessible open spaces in the area and is valued by people with mobility limitations and others seeking accessible opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- Several attendees expressed concern that development on this site could reduce access to an important community gathering and recreation space.
- Several attendees noted that option A is currently used as an evacuation and assembly point for nearby community facilities, businesses and organisations and sought further information on how this function would be accommodated if the proposal were to proceed.
- A representative from the Koala Playschool highlighted concerns about fence heights and sight lines into the children's play area and was seeking information on whether ACT Government would address those issues (as a Government owned and managed site) if this option was selected.
- Concerns were raised around privacy for children attending the Koala Playschool
- A question was raised around what technical studies have already been carried out on the site, noting the area can get quite 'boggy' from water run off in the area. A member of the community suggested that there was a natural spring in the area and was subject to flooding.

Option B

- Concerns continued to be raised about the impact on existing sporting and recreation activities.
- Attendees noted that the site is used for Little Athletics and field events, particularly javelin and discus activities, with some participants highlighting that it is one of the few suitable locations available for these activities.
- Other attendees commented that, outside organised sporting activities, the site is not regularly utilised and may therefore have less day to day community use than option A.
- Among the small number of attendees who expressed support for the proposal, option B was generally viewed as the preferred location, as it was considered to have less impact on existing community activities and family focused uses than option A.

- Some attendees expressed the view that the ACT Government should respect the current zoning of the shortlisted sites and retain these areas for their existing intended purpose, particularly where they are currently designated as community open space or recreational land.

Perceptions of the service (Arcadia House)

- Similar to the first drop-in session, there was a general understanding among attendees that Arcadia House provides an important health and support service. However, concerns continued to be raised about the suitability of locating the service within the Cook community.
- While information was provided about the service model and its operation, many attendees remained uncertain about how the facility would operate in practice and what impacts it may have on the surrounding area.
- Some attendees expressed concerns that alcohol and other drug treatment services may be associated with increased safety risks, crime, and anti-social behaviour in the area.
- A number of attendees raised questions about the day to day operation of the facility and the measures that would be in place to manage potential impacts on the surrounding community, including:
    - How the site would be secured and managed
    - Fencing and boundary treatments
    - Management of needles and other waste in and around the facility
    - How clients are supported, particularly during evening and overnight periods
    - Processes for managing clients who leave the facility or are unable to access services
- Some attendees expressed the view that Arcadia House would be more appropriately located within or adjacent to a hospital setting, including the North Canberra Hospital campus in Bruce or the University of Canberra Hospital precinct.
- Several attendees noted that they believed there was sufficient available land and surrounding open space at the North Canberra Hospital site to accommodate the facility. Some attendees also questioned whether other suitable locations in North Canberra had been fully explored and expressed the view that there may be more appropriate locations available outside Cook.
- One attendee asked why such a siloed facility would be proposed for an open space, while others suggested it may be better to relocate to a residential block.
- Several attendees shared personal negative experiences of other alcohol and other drug services, which influenced their views on the proposed relocation.
- Questions were raised about the clients that accesses Arcadia House, including the proportion of people receiving support for alcohol use compared with other drug related issues.
- Attendees also sought clarification on referral pathways to the service, including whether admission to Arcadia House is voluntary or whether clients can be required to attend through court orders or other mandatory arrangements.
- Several attendees sought clarification on who is responsible for clients once they leave the facility, including how duty of care obligations apply when clients are off site and what measures are in place to support both client wellbeing and community safety.
- One attendee suggested further evidence be provided regarding the need for the service, crime statistics and research for outcomes achieved by similar services would assist with understanding the need for the service and it's proposed community location. They provided the project team with a research paper they had come across by the SaxInstitute 'Evidence Snapshot Community Impacts of residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation services' for further reading. It was noted that further community engagement was believed required.

Accessibility and transport

- Concerns continued to be raised about accessibility for service users, including limited public transport options and the distance to other health and support services.
- Several attendees noted that Cook is serviced by a limited number of bus routes and expressed concerns that this may create barriers for people accessing the service who do not drive or live nearby.
- Additional concerns were raised about the potential impact on accessibility to local open space, particularly in relation to option A. Attendees noted that the site is one of the few relatively flat grassed areas in the immediate vicinity and is regularly used by people with mobility limitations and others seeking accessible opportunities for recreation and exercise.
- Several attendees highlighted the importance of maintaining safe and accessible access to surrounding open space if the project were to proceed. Suggestions included accessible footpaths, pathways, crossings and access points to ensure people with disability, older residents and others with mobility needs can continue to use the surrounding green space.
- Some attendees also noted that preserving access to open space and opportunities for outdoor exercise is important for the health and wellbeing of the broader community.

Support for the proposal

- While opposition to the proposal remained the dominant view, approximately 8% of attendees expressed support for the relocation of Arcadia House to Cook.
- Two attendees shared previous experiences of living near similar alcohol and other drug support services and stated that they had not experienced adverse impacts, noting that the facilities generally operated quietly and integrated well within the surrounding community.
- A small number of attendees expressed support for providing services within local communities and highlighted the importance of ensuring people experiencing alcohol and other drug challenges are able to access appropriate treatment and support.
- One attendee also shared feedback from younger community members, including students from nearby schools, who expressed the view that people accessing Arcadia House should be supported and welcomed within the community**.**

Property and economic concerns

- Concerns about potential impacts on property values continued to be raised by attendees.
- Several attendees expressed the view that the proposal, particularly if option B were to proceed, could negatively affect nearby property values and the desirability of the surrounding area.
- Many attendees raised concerns around the impacts on the local businesses, particularly with the perception of increased criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Environmental impacts

- Concerns were raised about the potential impact of the proposal on existing mature gum trees in and around the shortlisted sites.
- A number of attendees were interested in further information on how many trees would need to be removed if either of these sites were chosen.

Safety perceptions and community wellbeing

- Community safety remained a prominent theme throughout the session, with attendees expressing concerns about the potential impact of the proposal on the character of the local area and their sense of safety. Some attendees also indicated that, if the facility were located nearby, they will no longer feel comfortable allowing their children to play independently in the surrounding area as they currently do.
- Similar to the first drop-in session, many attendees expressed concerns about the location of the facility in close proximity to family oriented community spaces, including playgrounds, sporting facilities and areas regularly used by children and older residents.
- Several attendees raised concerns about how the facility would operate, particularly in relation to people leaving the site, wandering within the surrounding community, or accessing the facility while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Questions were raised about what risk management, security and operational measures would be implemented to support both service users and the broader community.
- Some attendees suggested that additional mitigation measures may be required if the project proceeds, including enhanced fencing around nearby community facilities and clear boundary treatments around the proposed site.
- Concerns were again raised about the proximity of alcohol retail outlets in the local area, with some attendees questioning whether this could affect the suitability of the location for an alcohol and other drug rehabilitation service.
- Many attendees expressed a strong interest in understanding what role ACT Policing, security measures and ongoing site management would play in supporting community safety. Some attendees also expressed concerns, based on their recent experiences, that police resources may be limited and questioned whether ACT Policing would be able to respond effectively if issues were to arise in the area.
- A small number of attendees expressed concerns that the proposal could contribute to increased drug related activity in the area, while others sought more information about the safeguards that would be in place to manage these risk

Community impacts

- Some attendees expressed concern that the proposal could alter the existing character and use of these community spaces.
- Attendees noted that local families currently make extensive use of the area for informal recreation and social connection and felt this may change if the facility were located nearby.
- Some attendees also reflected that the current character and community use of the area has developed organically over time and expressed concern that these qualities could be difficult to replace if lost
- Several attendees expressed a lack of trust in the process and a view that commitments made through previous projects, including the school closure had not been kept.

Consultation

- Some attendees expressed concern that lack of notice for the upcoming community town hall was insufficient and may have limited the ability of some community members to attend, participate and prepare questions.

- Clarification was sought on what consultation has been undertaken or is proposed, with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of the planning and site assessment process.
- Some attendees noted that they lived in Cook and had not received the letter through the letterbox delivery.
- Some attendees indicated that the letterbox distribution was not sufficient to notify the broader community about the engagement and suggested that communication should have extended beyond Cook to include a wider radius of surrounding suburbs near the proposed site.
- Many attendees expressed frustration with the engagement process, describing it as a poor use of community members' time. Concerns were also raised that sessions scheduled during business hours required people to take time off work in order to participate.
- Some attendees indicated that the survey was not adequately capturing community views, with concerns that the questions were insufficient, lacking clarity, or not reflective of the issues most important to the community.

Requests for further information

- Several attendees requested additional information about alternative sites that had been considered as part of the site selection process, including the reasons why the Cook sites were shortlisted.
- Some attendees sought further detail about the assessment process that will be used to identify a preferred site and how community feedback will inform future decisions.
- Many attendees requested detailed information on formal risk assessments undertaken for the proposed location, including the potential impacts on the surrounding community and considerations relating to nearby children's services.
- Questions were raised about the recent Request for Tender (RFT), including why it had been released prior to a final site decision being made and what role it plays in the overall project process.
- Attendees also sought clarification on the project's next steps, including how site investigations, planning activities and future approvals would inform any final decision on the location of the facility.
- Several attendees requested that the findings of the feasibility and site assessment work be made publicly available once completed, to support transparency and community understanding of the decision making process.
- Several attendees requested additional information regarding the service and how it is operated including:
    - How is medical support provided?
    - What does the security and occupational violence support look like?
    - How many people access the day program?
    - What other examples of services already available in the community can be provided?
    - Will the service operate as a needle exchange program?
    - Will the service operate as an outpatient methadone program?
- Some attendees sought additional information on the timeframe for decision making and any program linkages with the Northside Hospital Redevelopment project.