

**HOUSING — MORTLOCK GARDENS — NORTHAM**

*Grievance*

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [9.57 am]: I will endeavour to stay within my seven minutes, too, Deputy Speaker.

I rise to grieve to the Minister for Housing. This is the second time I have done so on the matter of the Avon Community Development Foundation's proposed expansion of the Mortlock Gardens project to deliver additional affordable housing stock in the community of Northam. I thank the minister for taking the grievance. The Mortlock Gardens housing project was commenced by the Avon Community Development Foundation in 2014 and was opened in 2016, and the accommodation units have been at almost 100 per cent occupancy since that time. The project was delivered with funding from royalties for regions and land contributed by the ACDF to create 18 residential units to support businesses to attract and retain residential employees rather than have drive-in, drive-out workers.

The ACDF would now like to develop the second stage of Mortlock Gardens and has been in discussion with the Department of Communities for some two years about how to best progress this. It would like to leverage its equity in the precinct to build stage 2 on land it owns adjacent to stage 1. However, there is a caveat over stage 1, which was due to expire in 2021, that is an impediment to securing finance for the development of stage 2. Its proposal is to add another 20 units, the first four of which, it tells me, could be delivered within 12 months. As someone who was involved in progressing and supporting the initial project, I can advise that it was never the intent for there to be a caveat over the development of the property in perpetuity. The ACDF has met with the Department of Communities, first making contact in advance of when the caveat on stage 1 of the project was supposed to expire, but, unfortunately, despite the fact that we have since met the minister, there really has not been any further advance in removing the red tape that seems to be blocking it from progressing this project to address housing shortages in our community. Labor Party member for the Agricultural Region Hon Darren West has been briefed. It does not seem that he has been able to resolve the issue. The ACDF has sought to meet with the minister, and, as I said, we have met with the minister. The ACDF and I have followed this up a number of times with the minister's office. With the greatest of respect, the ACDF has an exemplary record of delivering projects for this community. The original agreement was for the caveat to expire in 2021. For some reason, that has not been honoured. It is not the ACDF's responsibility to explain itself; rather, the department should explain why it has maintained this caveat that is preventing the development of the project.

I ask again that the minister considers removing this caveat to allow this community-run not-for-profit organisation to progress with delivering much-needed accommodation for Northam. I am sure that the minister shares the same aspiration to increase housing stock in our regional communities and across the state. Since raising this issue with the minister in the Parliament in June this year and meeting with him on 5 December, the issue has been followed up with his office on a number of occasions. At one stage, I understand that the minister's office advised that legal advice was being sought, but we have not been advised the outcome of that legal advice and no solution has been offered to the ACDF. We often stand and debate the housing shortages in this state, and it is frustrating beyond belief that there is a project in front of the minister with levers that are available for him to pull to assist ACDF to deliver this project. ACDF is willing to compromise and work through a legal arrangement that would give the minister and the Department of Communities some certainty that it will not simply develop the project, sell it off and benefit from it. This project is for community outcomes and will bring no individual benefit to anyone on the ACDF. Anything that is raised as a result of the project will be developed and reinvested back into the community.

It has been two years since the ACDF first started discussions, in advance of the time that the caveat was supposed to be raised. I ask the minister to exercise his prerogative and power as minister and allow the ACDF to get on with the job. I have been a minister and I understand that the minister can take all the advice that he needs, but these projects are waiting to deliver additional housing and are there for him to make the decision on. It would be wonderful for this community group to have some positive news prior to Christmas so that it can revisit the preliminary planning that it has already invested some funds into and can actually start to talk about delivering the first of those —

[Interruption.]

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Members for Roe and Moore! Thanks.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The group can then start to deliver the first of these houses, which are desperately needed in Northam and the greater Avon Valley. The minister is in charge, not the department. I hope that we can have some positive news today—not more delays.

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [10.03 am]: I thank the member for her grievance. As the member has indicated, at the time, the state provided substantial funding for the construction of 15 units as part of stage 1 of the Mortlock Gardens development through a royalties for regions grant. I find the question of the caveat

perplexing. A caveat was put on the title, which happens all the time. Agreements may expire; that is different from a caveat being put on a land title. As the member has just stated, I know that the caveat was never intended to be held over this project in perpetuity, but the agreement allowed for that, and that is a common occurrence. In fact, I can point to plenty of projects on which caveats are lodged to protect the state's investment.

The advice is that the department previously offered to lift the caveat so that the group could get its finances and then put the caveat back on. This is common practice. Other local governments or landholders that wish to develop projects with caveats remove the caveat, as we proposed, get their finances in place and then put the caveat back on. I say this sincerely, member. It was not made clear in that meeting and I do not understand why that was not an acceptable offer or compromise made by my agency. I respect the Avon community and the association, but it could not explain to me or the department what was the issue with the bank. If we can lift caveats for other proposals while people sort out their finances and then we put the caveat back on, I do not understand why that was not acceptable in this case. Can the member explain on the public record why that was not acceptable?

**Ms M.J. Davies:** In the meeting, it was explained that the bank understands that the caveat will be replaced, so it doesn't make any difference. There will be a caveat in perpetuity.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Member for Central Wheatbelt, why is it that other organisations and people can do that, but it is not acceptable for this particular bank?

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I cannot explain that. I am saying that is the advice that it has received from its financial institution.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The member knows this, because there are caveats to protect interests on a large number of landholdings. I met with the member and the Avon Community Development Foundation. I was comforted by the fact that the Avon community has said that it will continue to operate that key worker accommodation as it is, and it maintains that commitment. It is true to say that state governments of all political persuasions have been burnt in the past whereby they make a contribution to a project understanding that it will be one particular purpose; then, lo and behold, it changes. That is not unfamiliar. I understand the agency's caution and advice to me. However, I have made it clear that I want to see this project progress, and I am hopeful that we will get resolution to it. I know that the member wants me to say more today. I cannot, but I can say that I have asked the agency to work to resolve this. I point to our current record. We are working with a range of different stakeholders and landholders to utilise land. For example, we announced a land transfer for a childcare centre in Dalwallinu. We are very cognisant of being able to use government land for housing projects.

I thank the member for her grievance and her advocacy. I have made very clear to the agency that I hope to get this resolved.