

**HOUSING — MORTLOCK GARDENS — NORTHAM**

*Grievance*

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [9.23 am]: I rise to grieve about an issue in my electorate regarding a proposal by the Avon Community Development Foundation, and I thank the Minister for Housing taking the grievance. The project is to deliver additional housing into the Northam market, and the ACDF is facing some challenges in achieving this outcome. I note I raised this with the minister via correspondence, so it is something he will be aware of, and I received a response, which arrived in my office on 14 June. Before I go further, I note this project was pushed, shoved, cajoled and coaxed by the late Paul Tomlinson, someone who I held in very high regard and who always had the best interests of Northam and the Avon Valley at heart. He was the CEO of the ACDF and very passionate about opening up this project and a number of others in our community. If we can reach a positive outcome for this, I know he will look down with great satisfaction.

For context, the ACDF has existed since 1989 and it is responsible for delivering a number of significant projects for the benefit of the town and the region. It is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with an experienced board and it seeks opportunities to enhance and develop the district through investment of its own sources of funding, partnering with federal, state and local governments.

Mortlock Gardens is one of these projects. It was commenced in 2014 and opened in 2016, and the accommodation units have almost been at 100 per cent occupancy ever since. The project was delivered with funding through royalties for regions and land that was contributed by the ACDF to create 18 residential units to support businesses and attract and retain residential employees, rather than the drive-in, drive-out that we see so often in the Avon Valley. The ACDF would now like to develop the second stage of Mortlock Gardens and has been in discussions with the Department of Communities about how best to progress this for some time. It would like to leverage its equity in the precinct to build stage 2 on land it already owns adjacent to stage 1. However, there is a caveat, which was due to expire in 2021, over stage 1 that is proving to be an impediment to securing finance for the development of stage 2. The proposal is to add some 20 units, the first four of which could be delivered within the next 12 months if the pin is pulled on this caveat. As someone who was involved in progressing and supporting the initial project, I can advise that it was never the intent of the Department of Regional Development, which was the key funding body, for there to be a caveat over the development in perpetuity.

ACDF has met with the Department of Communities. It first made contact, rightly so, in advance of when the caveat was supposed to expire on stage 1 of the project, but unfortunately there has been little movement, despite meetings that have also included the development commission, the shire president and the department. I understand that members of the Labor government have also been briefed on this issue in the hope that they could advocate and resolve the issue. ACDF has already invested in some preliminary design works and costings, but it is reluctant to progress any further until it has clarity over the caveat of the title.

Further to one of these meetings, a letter, dated 8 December 2022, was sent to the director of the ACDF outlining that the Department of Communities required ACDF to present a case to its asset planning and prioritisation committee, which is what is referred to as “the committee”, and the committee requested evidence for this project—barriers to lending, using lot 500, which is stage 1, as security, demand and governance—in order to progress the issue. That evidence has been provided and it is quite simply a fact that the financiers that the ACDF has approached are unwilling to provide additional funding without the caveat being removed. The solution the minister has put forward, which is that the caveat could be temporarily raised to allow the finance to be raised, does not hold water and unfortunately we are still at a stalemate.

With the greatest of respect, the ACDF has an exemplary record of delivering projects for the community, and the original agreement was for the caveat to expire in 2021, as I understand it, and for some reason this has not been honoured. I ask that the minister consider removing that caveat and allowing this community-run not-for-profit organisation to progress with delivering much-needed accommodation in Northam. I know the minister is well versed in the challenges in the provision of housing facing our communities, so it is frustrating that the ACDF is offering a solution to add to the government program of works and is being faced with some bureaucratic hurdles. Should there be a requirement that the housing remain available for workers’ accommodation, as was originally intended and is continuing to be honoured, perhaps a deed or an alternative to the caveat on the title could be considered. There has to be solutions to get around this, to unlock private finance, not government finance, to allow this project to continue.

Unfortunately, the response I received from the minister on 14 June does not assist ACDF in delivering on its project, and it is highly unlikely that it will secure finance if it has to disclose that there is an unnecessary caveat on the land now or in the future. I simply ask for the minister to take a second look at this issue. I invite him to come to Northam. If he has not visited the precinct, I would love to show him through and invite him to meet with the directors. They are all local community members with significant experience in delivering on complex projects.

I am not sure that this needs to be quite this complex. There is a housing shortage across Western Australia. ACDF has capacity to source or at least partner with the government to deliver stage 2, and in the very short term, the capacity to deliver at least four units over the next 12 months. It is becoming very frustrated that there does not seem to be a pathway forward for it to unlock this opportunity for our community to ensure that the people for whom we know our businesses and government departments require housing can have access to modern accommodation. It is very well managed. The funding is circular. When it goes to the Avon Community Development Foundation, it gets reinjected back into the community. It has a long history of doing that. I appreciate the minister has looked at this and I ask him to have another look. If he would like to come and get more information from the directors and the board, I know that they would be very keen to take him on that journey.

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [9.30 am]: I thank the member for her grievance. I acknowledge on the public record that she has reached out to me. When she previously reached out, I sought information. When I first became a minister, I called every member of Parliament, regardless of their political allegiance, and said that I would try to assist, and we do on a range of issues. My commitment is that I am happy to look at this issue again. First, I will say broadly, we are using every tool in the toolkit to get land and housing in the regions. I think we all agree that the new infrastructure fund that we have announced, which includes a \$40 million component for regional workers' accommodation, is well received. My understanding is that there have been around five applications from local governments already. That is about boosting regional workers' accommodation. The regional land booster program is a \$166 billion program that has a huge number of lots across regional Western Australia. We work with individual local governments and my door is always open. For example, we worked with the City of Karratha on workers' accommodation and discounting land. I sincerely say that my office and I try to navigate these huge bureaucracies. I get advice, but I must treat that advice seriously.

Was the member previously the Minister for Lands? I cannot remember.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** No.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Okay, no.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I was previously a parliamentary secretary, but I wasn't for that particular part of the Premier's portfolio.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I could not remember. My apologies.

The use of caveats is quite common. As the Minister for Lands, I use caveats on a range of different projects, and the reason is simple: to protect the state's interests, but also to ensure that outcomes are achieved. I have no qualms with the Avon Community Development Foundation. Everything that the members says, I respectfully believe. There is nothing for me to suggest that this is not a respectable organisation. I am happy to meet directly with the member further on the issue. I do not know whether the member is aware, but a letter was sent on 8 December 2022 with three options canvassed. The letter states —

1. Dissolve Communities' interest, remove caveat permanently.
2. Temporarily remove the caveat and replace behind a mortgage on Lot 500 to facilitate the establishment of Mortlock 2
3. Establish a fixed term agreement for the extension of the caveat after which it is removed, and Communities has no further interest ...

The advice from the agency to me is that letter was sent in December. I asked for further information about the evidence regarding the project and the barriers to lending from the financier. My understanding is that that detail has not been provided. Accordingly, my understanding is that the temporary removal of the caveat has been presented as the option. I want as much workers' accommodation across all of regional Western Australia as possible. Perhaps the member knows different from her communications and engagement, but as a minister, I take advice and I push back, question and scrutinise it. I do that in social housing all the time and create new programs. The clear advice to me is that the agency is still waiting for definitive advice or proof that the financier will not accept the temporary lifting of the caveat as a scenario. I strongly urge them to continue engaging with the agency. I understand the clear need. I am happy to meet with the member separately to see if the advice that I am receiving matches up with hers. I understand the need for workers' accommodation, and my commitment is to meet with the member directly.