

Planning for Lee Point, Darwin NT

A comprehensive Area Plan for the whole of Lee Point needs to be developed before any significant development should be allowed.

1.0 Background

There are very few cities in the world that have a reserve like Lee Point on their doorstep. It makes Darwin a special place.

Lee Point is enjoyed by families, nature lovers, mountain bike riders, birdwatchers, fishermen, campers, bush walkers and tourists. It offers unique recreation and tourism opportunities to promote Darwin and is one of Darwin's most important natural assets.



Lee Point March 2021, photo by Teresa Laird

Lee Point is located 17 km from Darwin's CBD on a five square kilometre peninsular which has helped conserve its natural beauty and biodiversity.

2.0 What makes Lee Point special is:

- **High value to locals and visitors** - it contains over half of Casuarina Coastal Reserve (CCR). CCR attracts over one million visits each year (**Appendix - Ref 1**) and is the most visited park/reserve in the NT because of its natural beauty, biodiversity and accessibility.
- **Biodiversity** – habitats range from beach, mangrove, open eucalypt forests, paperbark forests, rainforest, and include internationally significant migratory shorebird sites. It is home to a number of threatened species and attracts about 80% of the bird species found in Kakadu (which is 4000 times larger in area).

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- **Cultural and heritage aspects** - it contains a very important cultural site for the Larrakia people – Dariba Nungalinya (Old Man Rock). Lee Point played a significant role in the defence of Darwin and has historical defence relics.
- **Tourism potential** – it could provide valuable employment opportunities for local indigenous people through ecotourism – the fastest growing sector of the world tourism market. About 50% of Lee Point can be used by the public at present but this could be expanded to 90%.

Note: Lee Point is on Larrakia land and as such people need to protect, manage and respect the land and surrounding sea. The Australian and NT Government own 90% of Lee Point and 10% is privately owned and operated as a commercial resort/caravan park.

3.0 Defence housing at Berrimah vs Lee Point

Below are the expected benefits of housing defence personnel at one alternative location, the old Berrimah Farm, instead of Lee Point. This is based on information from; Prelim Cost Benefit Lee Point paper (**Ref 2**), NT EPA website (**Ref 3**), and recent information.

In summary, there is no net long-term social, environmental or economic benefit from housing people at Lee Point compared to Berrimah, **in short there is no public benefit.**

SOCIAL BENEFITS (from housing people at Berrimah)

Families and visitors will be able to continue to enjoy the natural beauty and biodiversity of Lee Point.

Travel – Defence personnel would save about 40 minutes each week driving to work from Berrimah instead of from Lee Point and would find it much easier to cycle to work (a healthier lifestyle) or use public transport. It would avoid time spent at the Vanderlin/Lee Point intersection (already a congested traffic area).

Health issues – it avoids problems with biting insects from tidal areas and offensive odours from the Leanyer sewage treatment ponds.

Services and entertainment – there are a greater choice of established services and entertainment from the nearby CBDs of Darwin and Palmerston. A future benefit could be more vibrant CBDs through their greater use.

Cultural and heritage – it protects the cultural and heritage aspects of Lee Point for future generations and in turn could be used to promote ecotourism and interest in Darwin.

The above social benefits will help attract and retain defence service personnel and their families to Darwin.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS (from housing people at Berrimah)

Habitat Loss and land use – housing people at Berrimah avoids clearing one square km of habitat, part of which is pristine open forest, loss of wildlife, and considerable impact on Lee Point (from thousands of people living there).

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Impact on Casuarina Coastal Reserve – housing people at Berrimah will not cause any additional impact on internationally significant migratory shorebird sites, turtle nesting sites or introduce more cats (resulting in further loss of wildlife) at Lee Point.

CO2 emissions – work related car emissions are reduced by 50% at Berrimah. This is due to more people cycling or using public transport and people driving over shorter distances.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Increased income (from housing people at Berrimah and promoting tourism)

Increased revenue will flow from developing tourism activities at Lee Point and having people stay longer in Darwin.

Decreased expenditure (from housing people at Berrimah)

- Transport cost – it provides a better return on investment for public transport systems and road infrastructure. The traffic problems associated with an urban sprawl are avoided saving money for the taxpayer.
- Water and electricity costs – these are reduced as most of the infrastructure is already established at Berrimah. It also has lower operating costs due to a smaller water and electricity grid (asset size). Berrimah is closer to water and electricity sources which will reduce pumping and transmission costs.
- Environmental costs – these are negligible at the old Berrimah Farm compared to Lee Point. At Lee Point cats and dogs need to be effectively managed to protect wildlife.

Note: The only (short term) economic benefit of housing at Lee Point is that it defers infrastructure investment at Weddell by 1-2 years. However, this in no way offsets the long-term economic benefits listed above.

3.1 Urban Planning

The section below looks at why housing people at Berrimah instead of Lee Point is a much better outcome from an international, government and public perspective.

International – it aligns the housing development with recent United Nations policy on limiting global warming (by reducing CO2 emissions) and loss of biodiversity (**Ref 4**)

Australian Government – it aligns the housing development with the 2016 Smart Cities Plan which encourages housing to be located near jobs and transport (**Ref 5**) and Infrastructure Australia (an independent statutory body) sustainability principles (**Ref 6**).

NT Government –

A) it supports the NT Government's stated climate change commitment:

"The Territory Government is committed to taking action on climate change to maximise the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Territorians" – Northern Territory Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 – June 2020 (**Ref 7**)

Note: Locating housing at Lee Point is estimated to double work-related car emissions (as compared to locating housing at Berrimah).

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B) it aligns with the current (12) NT Planning Act objectives (**Ref 8**), in particular:

- Objective (b) to ensure that strategic decisions reflect the wishes and needs of the community;
- Objective (e) to promote the sustainable development of land; and
- Objective (h) to protect the quality of life of future generations.

Note: Locating housing at Lee Point does not align with the current NT Planning Act, Smart Cities Plan or Infrastructure Australia sustainability principles.

C) it supports implementing Area Plans by the NT Planning Commission (**Commission**). The Commission has been involved in all the Area Plans (including Berrimah) in the Darwin and Palmerston region with the exception of the 2015 Lee Point Area Plan. It was established by the NT Parliament in 2012 to consult and develop strategic plans for the NT (**Ref 9**).

Local Government – it supports City of Darwin’s Climate Emergency Response. This response supports the Darwin community to achieve net zero emissions by 2040.

Public – it addresses public concerns around the lack of planning for Lee Point and potential harm to Lee Point and Darwin. These concerns are reflected in the Save Lee Point petition (over 1500 signatures), many letters to the NT News, and the concerns are growing. Prior to 2020, only 12.7% of people in the Darwin northern suburbs (based on a FLP on-line survey of 370 people) were aware that thousands of people were going to be housed at Lee Point.

4.0 Future planning for Lee Point

There is no comprehensive Area Plan for the whole of Lee Point. The 2015 Lee Point Area Plan focusses on the disused defence land or about one quarter of Lee Point (**Ref 10**).

To date, there has only been a relatively minor financial investment in the proposed Lee Point development (future investment would exceed \$500M) and no environmental harm. The developer (Defence Housing Australia) is wholly owned by the Australian Government (**Ref 11**). As such, the issue of having no public benefit for the proposed Lee Point development compared to other locations needs to be resolved between levels of government as a matter of priority. The key to addressing this public benefit issue (and the Lee Point Area Plan) is appropriate planning work.

The most appropriate organisation that is best able to assess and report on public benefit of developing land at Lee Point is the Commission. This is the reason why it was established by the NT Parliament and it reports to parliament each year.

5.0 Summary

Lee Point is part of what makes Darwin special and is an irreplaceable asset. As such, no significant development should take place at Lee Point until the NT Planning Commission has developed a comprehensive Area Plan for the whole of Lee Point.

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APPENDIX

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