

HISTORICAL/PLANNING CONTEXT - WODEN TOWN CENTRE, CANBERRA

AUGUST 2022

This document is a research and analysis paper that documents the history of planning and development of the Woden Town Centre specifically under NCDC. It addresses the historical planning context of the Proposed CIT Development Site.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This background paper on historical planning context for Woden Town Centre (Town Centre) has been prepared by SQC Group for Lend Lease to support and guide the design for the CIT Campus proposed at the Town Centre.

Lend Lease have been awarded the Contract to Project Manage the design development and construction of the new multi-level CIT Campus in the Woden Town Centre. The Development will be built on the site of the current Woden Bus Interchange and former Woden Police Station (now demolished).

1.2 Brief

This background paper has been prepared in response to the feedback received from the NCDRP (National Capital Design Review Panel) for the Woden CIT Development design proposal, presented by Lend Lease (Managing Contractor) and Gray Puksand (Architects). NCDRP has requested some additional research to align the design response to the historic planning context of the site. The extract from feedback as below:

- 5.3 The Panel encourages the proponent to explore the historical design intent of Woden Town Centre – to inform design development, and build on the significant characteristics that could and should be regained by the Woden CIT, especially given the location of the development in the east west axis, between the town centre and Woden Town Park. This is highlighted by the Panel as an important historical design feature of Woden. Woden’s historical importance is as the first Town Centre, outside of the city centre and was designed and constructed in 1975 by the NCDC. Significant characteristics of the design intent include public access to community and civic amenities, public/pedestrian access to office buildings (Callam Offices included), open space (Arabanoo Park) and public transport (the bus interchange), plus views to Canberra’s surrounding natural environment (the inner hills). The proponent is encouraged to consider how these aspects can be reflected in the current proposal.

1.2 Methodology and Scope

The study focuses on the Woden Town Centre Area specifically on the immediate built environment and urban landscape surrounding the subject site of the CIT Development. It analyses the development of the site from the initial intent proposed in 1968 by NCDC to the several planning and development moves through the 70’s and 80’s to the modern day. The paper has been synthesised from the information available at the ACT Heritage Library, resources found online and through TROVE. It is based primarily on secondary sources. The concluding section discusses the proposed scheme in reference to the findings of the analysis and any general planning principles seen in the historical plans.

The following documents and publications have been reviewed for this exercise

1. Woden Town Centre, NCDC, Canberra 1968 (ACT Heritage Library)
2. Tomorrow’s Canberra- Planning for Growth and Change, NCDC, ANU Press Canberra, 1970
3. New towns of Canberra, NCDC
4. Woden Town Centre, NCDC, Canberra, 1974
5. Canberra Past Present and Future, Department of Interior, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1972
6. The Future Canberra, NCDC, Angus and Robertson, Canberra 1965
7. Woden Town Centre, Roads, Parking areas, Pedestrian/ Cycle Routes and Landscape Design Subject Plan, GHD, NCDC 1976
8. Woden Town Centre, Master Plan 2004-5, ACT Government

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1.4 Area of study and Location

Fig.1 and 2 locate the area of study and the site. The area enclosed in the red line is the general area of study. The area highlighted in yellow is the core study area.

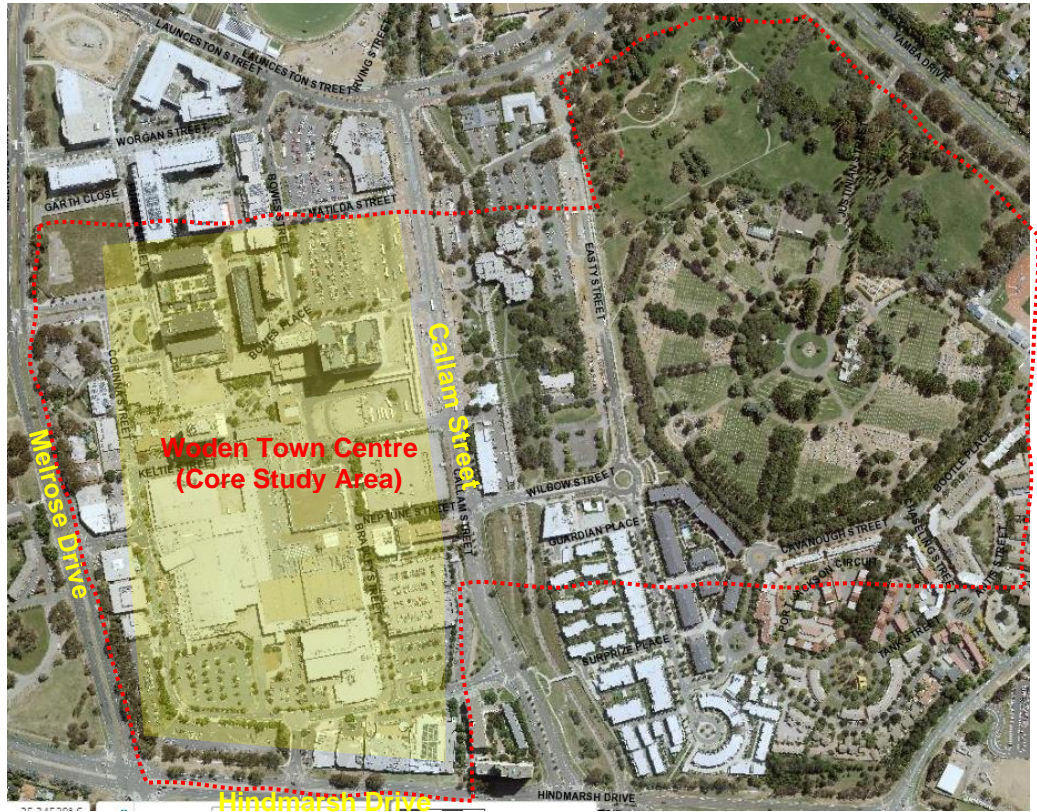


Fig. 1 Woden Town Centre and its Urban Landscape – Area of Study (Source ACTMapi (26.08.22))



Fig. 2 Site for CIT Development (Source ACTMapi (26.08.22))

1.5 Heritage Context

The site itself is not listed to any of the national, commonwealth or state heritage lists. The historical context of the site is that it is in one of the town centres of Canberra which is in Woden urban areas one of the three urban areas in Canberra identified, planned, and developed by the NCDC between 1960-1980. The Woden Town Centre was the first amongst the three to developed outside of the Inner City.

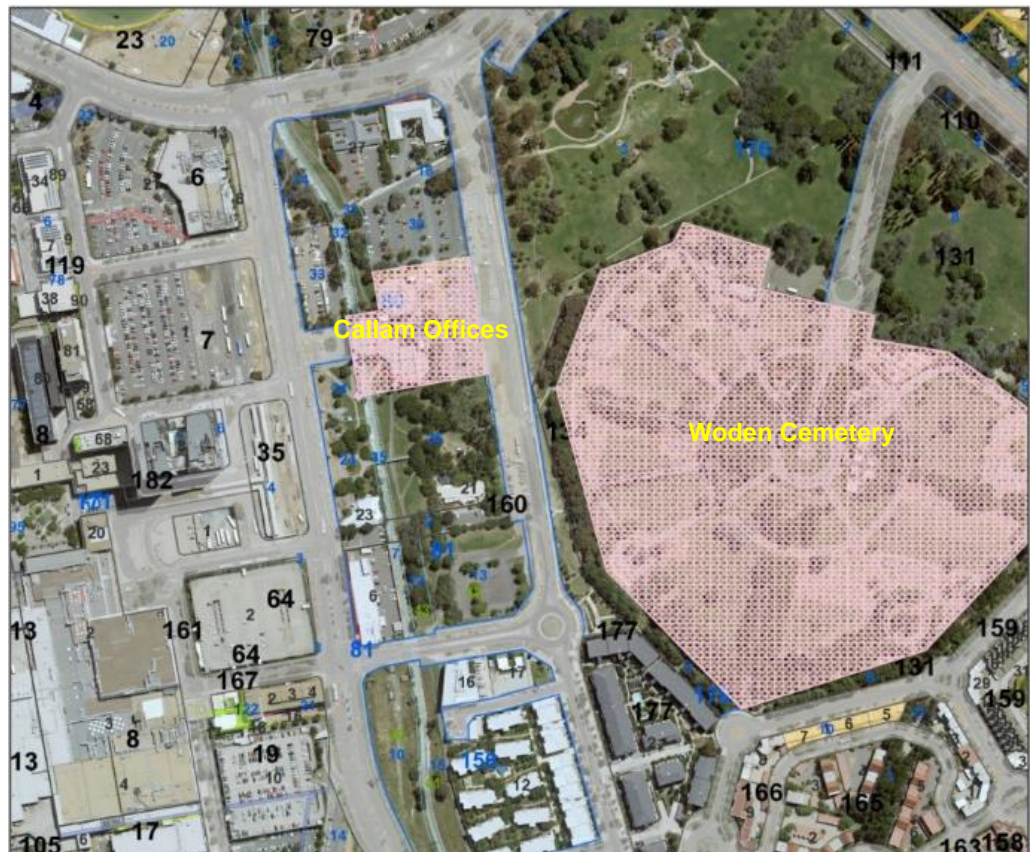


Fig. 3 Woden Town Centre and its statutory heritage context (ACT Mapi (26.08.22))

2.0 THE HISTORICAL PLANNING CONTEXT

This paper specifically analyses the planning context for the Town Centre reviewing the various masterplans and other planning studies undertaken for the Town Centre and its surrounding areas from 1968 – early 2000's with a focus on the NCDC period. The sections below discuss each scheme which could be accessed through the ACT Heritage Library and Archives.

2.1 1968 Woden Town Centre Master Plan – the original intent

The original NCDC 1968 Masterplan divides the town centre into zones with the arterial road network fringing the town centre, a ring of carparks, with central retail activity area in the Plaza, campus style office precinct on the pedestrian spine and the sports and recreation space to the North.

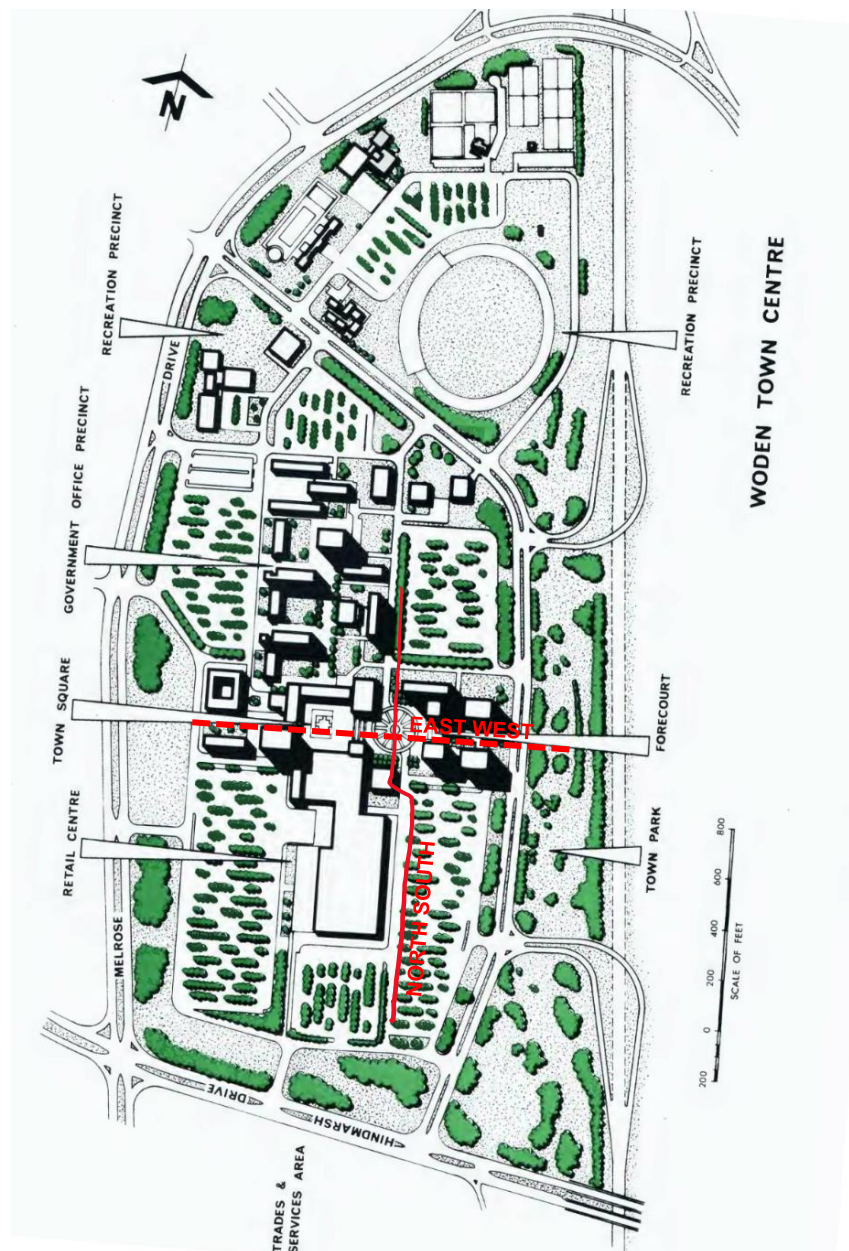


Fig. 4 Woden Town Centre – Proposed Master Plan 1968 as per NCDC

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Some of the highlights of the Town Centre as described by NCDC included office building up to 16 storeys, a town centre built on a cruciform platform surrounded terraced and landscaped parking space. At the time it was anticipated that the development of the centre would only be achieved by 1980.

It also mentioned a large town park to the east of the town centre as seen in Fig.04.

The central urban design and planning principle of the plan seems to be arrangement of the Town Centre around the Town Square & Forecourt (almost like a core); their relationship along what can be loosely called an east - west urban axis and possibly a very notional north - south axis. (Fig. 04) The 1968 NCDC masterplan talks in detail about *the square and the court*.

“The cruciform plan is orientated about a central town square which will provide a suitable focal point for the busy day-time activities. Around the square are the sites for the post office, retail and private enterprise offices and commercial buildings, theatre, and a church centre.”

“To the east of the Town Square at a lower level is the Forecourt. Around the Forecourt are sites for buildings such as the theatre, hotel, library and further government offices.”

The east west axis seems more formalised with the town square and the fore court rather than the north south axis which is more informal. A review of the master plan does not reveal any design or planning intent for connection to the surrounding landscape, views or

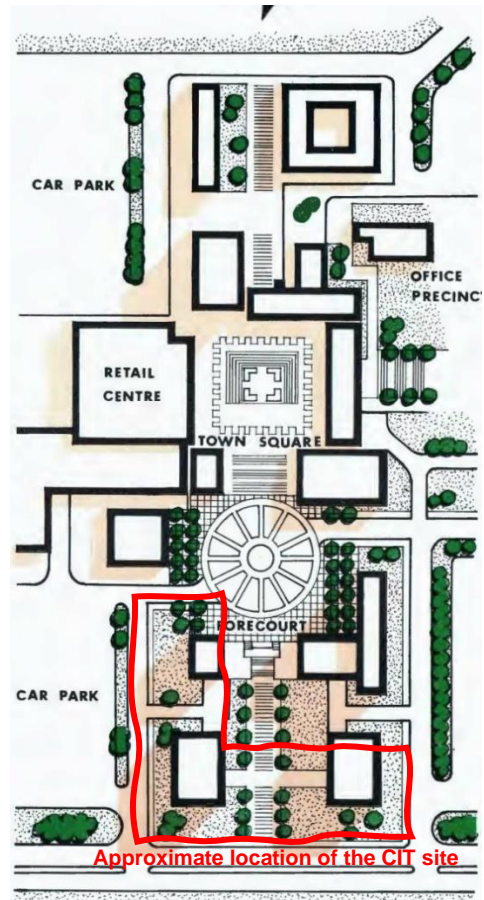


Fig. 5 & 6 Woden Town Centre – Proposed Master Plan 1968 – Site model (left) and Masterplan Detail of the centre of the site (right).

Of most relevance to the CIT development, the subject site, is this section – town square / forecourt - of the Town Centre development and the original design principles associated with its development.

On detailed review of the master plan no reference to views, vistas or visual connection to the Town Park on the east or the Brindabellas in the distance were found. The large arrows do seem to be just pointing to an element of the development. The written discussion of the various elements that would constitute the centre is also very functional and devoid of any design discussion. Extract, below (Fig.07). It seems like an inward-looking development in its conception. This may be due to the fact that at the time the surrounding areas were not very developed, and the landscape was just undeveloped bush and plains providing unhindered 360-degree views.

THE TOWN SQUARE AND FORECOURT

The cruciform plan of the town centre is orientated about a central Town Square which will provide a suitable focal point for the busy day-time activities. Around the Square are sites for the post-office, shopping mall, private enterprise offices and commercial buildings, a theatre and possibly a church centre. Pedestrian walkways lead out from the Town Square linking it with the other elements of the centre. It is expected that most of the Town Square will be completed by 1972.

To the east of the Town Square and at a lower level is the Forecourt. Around the Forecourt, are sites for such buildings as the theatre, hotel, library and further government offices.

Fig. 7 Description of the Town Square and Forecourt as per the 1968 NCDC Woden Town Centre report.

2.2 Subsequent plans and development of the Town Centre through 70's to the present

Subsequent to the original 1968 scheme there were several plans for the town centre prepared by NCDC and successive planning bodies after self-governance for the ACT. Publications, documents, and photographs from 1970, 1974, 1980, 2002, 2004 and 2015 have been found on record at the ACT Heritage Archives and other secondary sources. For the purpose of this report, we have concentrated on the 'core' – town square and the forecourt area - as that seems to anchor the structure of the Town Centre. It also forms the immediate urban context of the subject, proposed CIT development site.

The 1970 NCDC publication '*Tomorrow's Canberra*' stays true to the 1968 Masterplan. (Fig 09 – 10). However, the subsequent figures (10 -16) clearly demonstrate that the original intent of the inked Town Square and Forecourt was lost by the early 70's when the bus terminus was placed on the east west axis from the town square and, the forecourt itself moved south.

In the 1974 Masterplan (Fig 11) the town square is maintained but the forecourt cannot be seen. An east west pedestrian axis is maintained. The north-south axis is completely lost.

Thereafter, the Town Square seems to be the only remnant of the public space 'core' left in the Town Centre from the original 1968 Masterplan.

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The Forecourt is not referred to in any of the subsequent masterplans either. The 2004-5 masterplan shows what could possibly a slightly off-axis Forecourt but refers to it as – New Pocket Park (Fig 17).

A singular characteristic of all the urban planning documents reviewed has been lack of reference to the connections – visual and physical – to the open space / Town Park across the Callam Street. There have only been weak or fleeting references to the spaces across the Callam Street in pedestrian and traffic connection movements and diagrams. (Fig12).

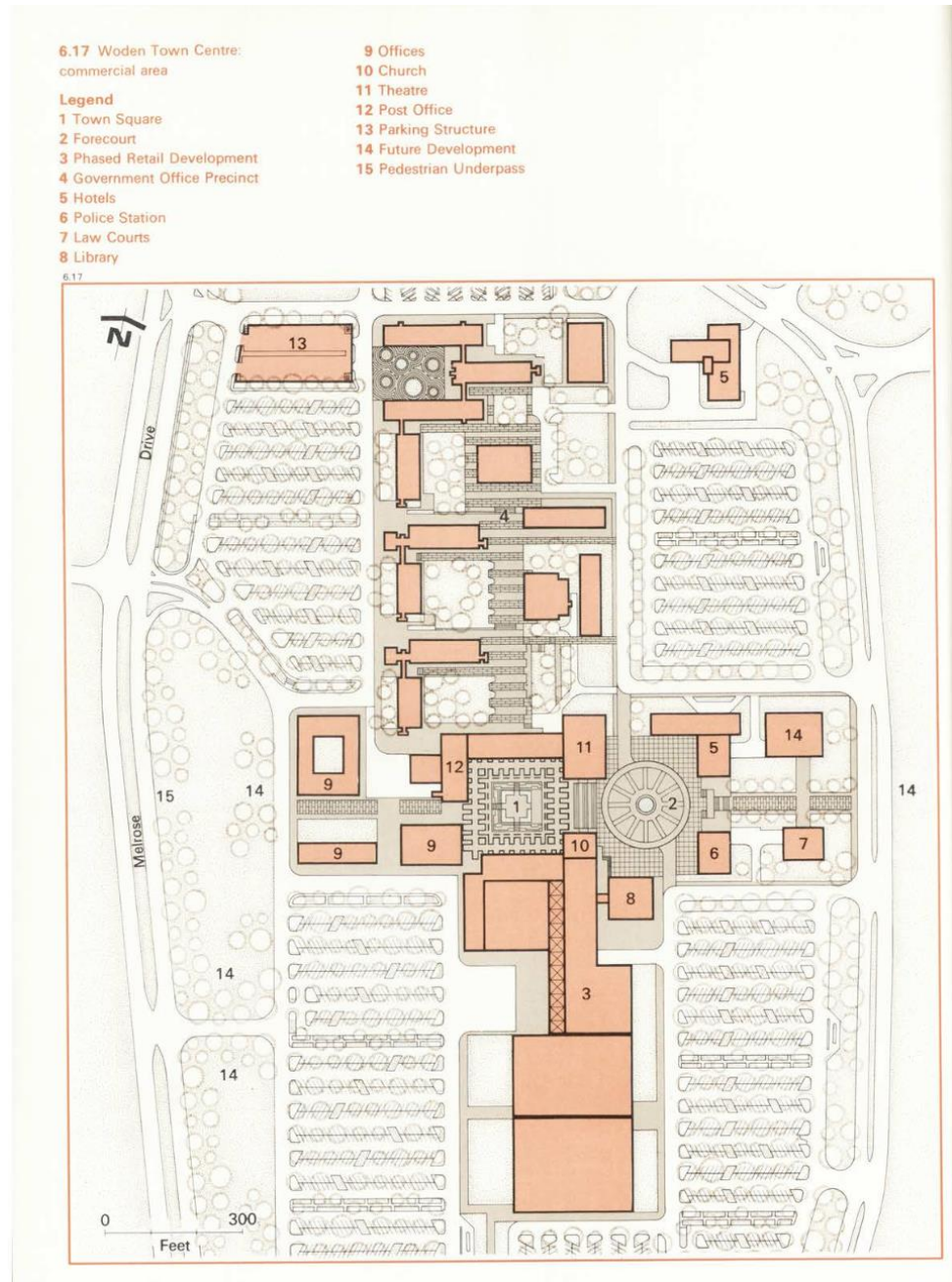


Fig. 8 Woden Town Centre – Proposed Master Plan 1970 (Source: tomorrow's Canberra, NCDC 1970). The original scheme can be seen in entirety.

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Fig. 9 Woden Town Centre – artists impression of the Town Square and Forecourt (Source: Tomorrow's Canberra, NCDC 1970). The original scheme can be seen in entirety.



Fig. 10 Woden Town Centre – Photograph from early 70's. the off centre slightly diminished forecourt can be seen (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/thecanberrapage/posts/woden-town-centre-in-the-1970s-big-w-wasnt-yet-built-later-to-be-built-to-the-le/4020542647986532/>)

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Fig. 11 Woden Town Centre – Photograph from 1974. Act Administration Collection (Image Number 005595)

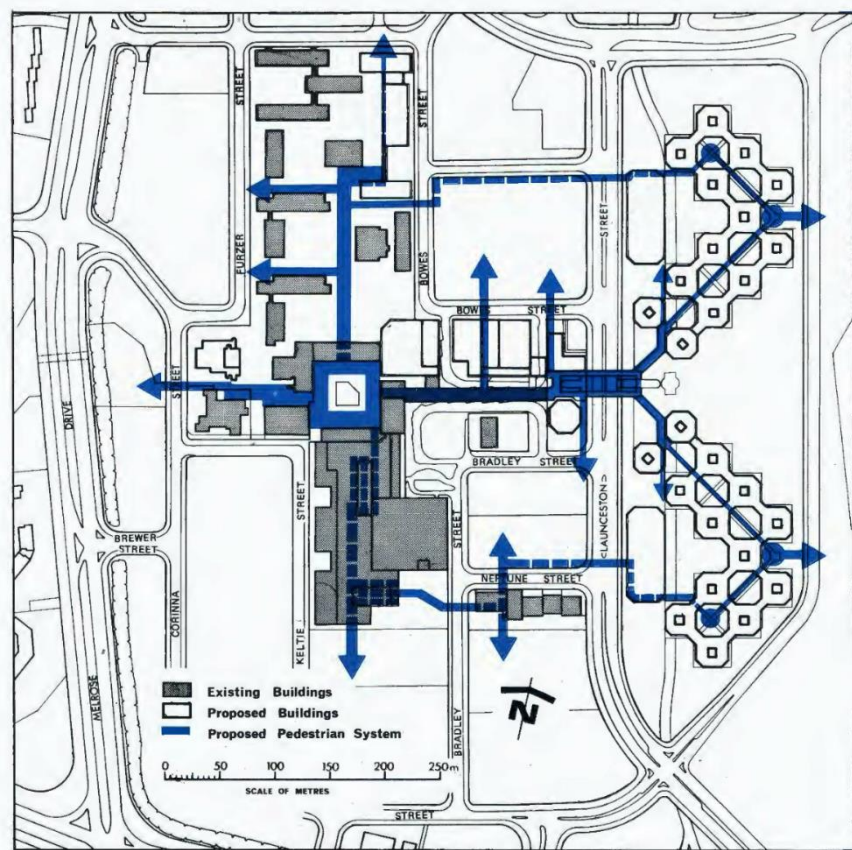


Fig. 12 Woden Town Centre – Proposed pedestrian system from 1974. The concept of the forecourt is not seen. An east west pedestrian axis can be seen through the forecourt

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Fig. 13 Woden Town Centre – Photograph from 1977. The forecourt and the slightly off centre of the forecourt remanent can be seen on the left-hand corner in front of the erstwhile police station. (Source: ACT Heritage Library, Reference #: 005594)

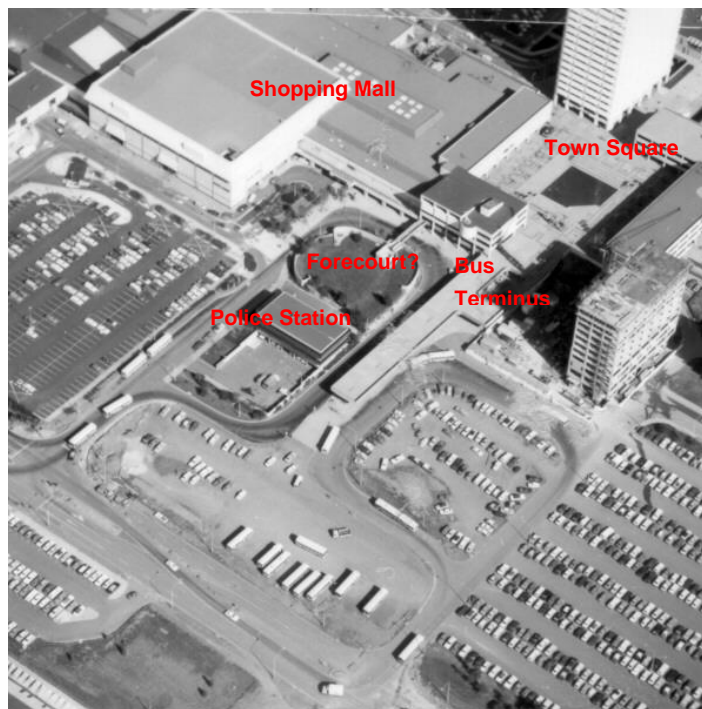


Fig. 14 Woden Town Centre – Photograph from 1978. This picture from the Act Heritage Library clearly shows the loss of east west axis between the Town Square and what may have been the Forecourt. The Forecourt is replaced by the bus terminus. Instead, an open space encircled by a driveway appears behind the police station which has no visual or physical connection to the Town Square. A singular pedestrian bridge leading from the commercial space is seen. To the southern edge of this space towards the car park is the taxi lay by servicing the shopping mall and area in general. (Source: ACT Heritage Library)

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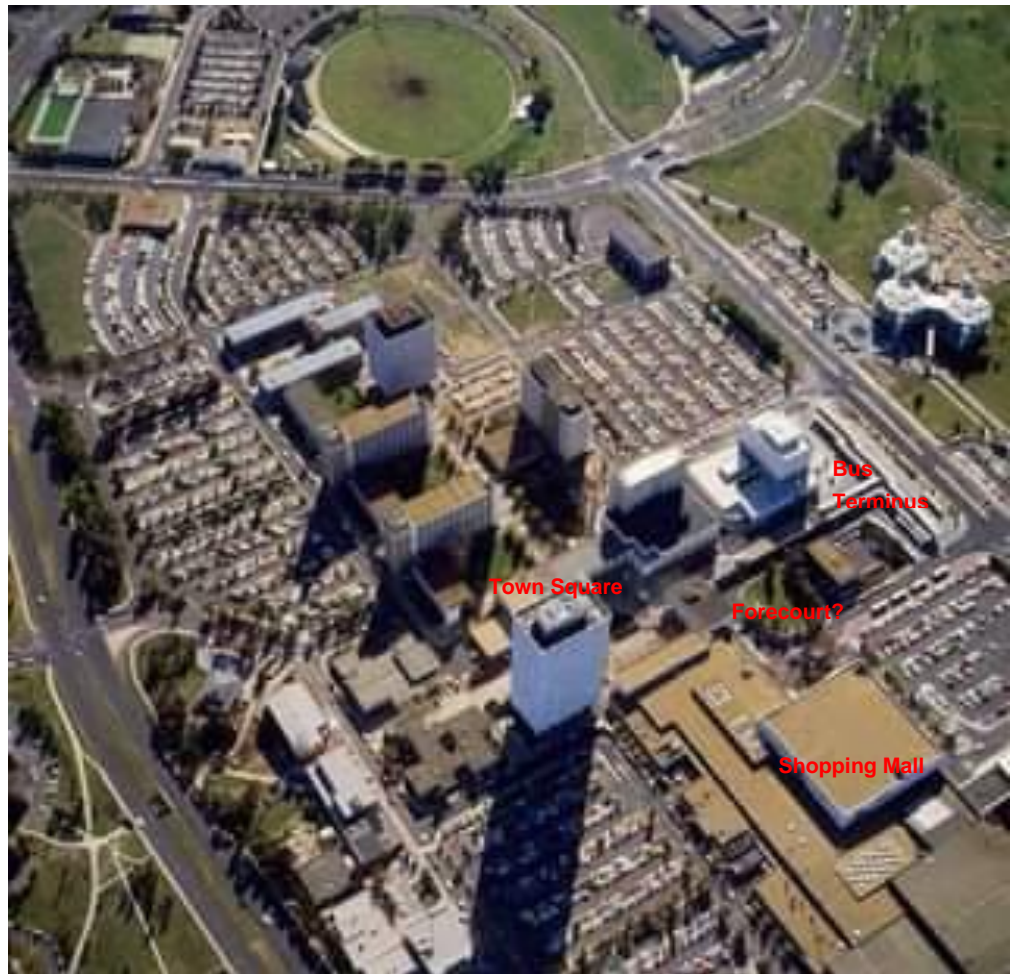


Fig. 15 Woden Town Centre – Photograph from 1985. The structure primarily remains the same with a few more buildings added to the Town Centre. The refurbished and extended bus station can also be seen. (Source: <https://m.facebook.com/thecanberrapage/photos/who-else-remembers-woden-town-centre-looking-like-this-in-1985photo-national-arc/4660686600638797/>)



Fig. 16 Woden Town Centre – Photograph from 2018/2019. The structure primarily remains the same with a few more buildings added to the Town Centre. The old police station is demolished, and the open court can be seen. (Source: <https://i.redd.it/aeam0rijdxk11.jpg> drone footage)

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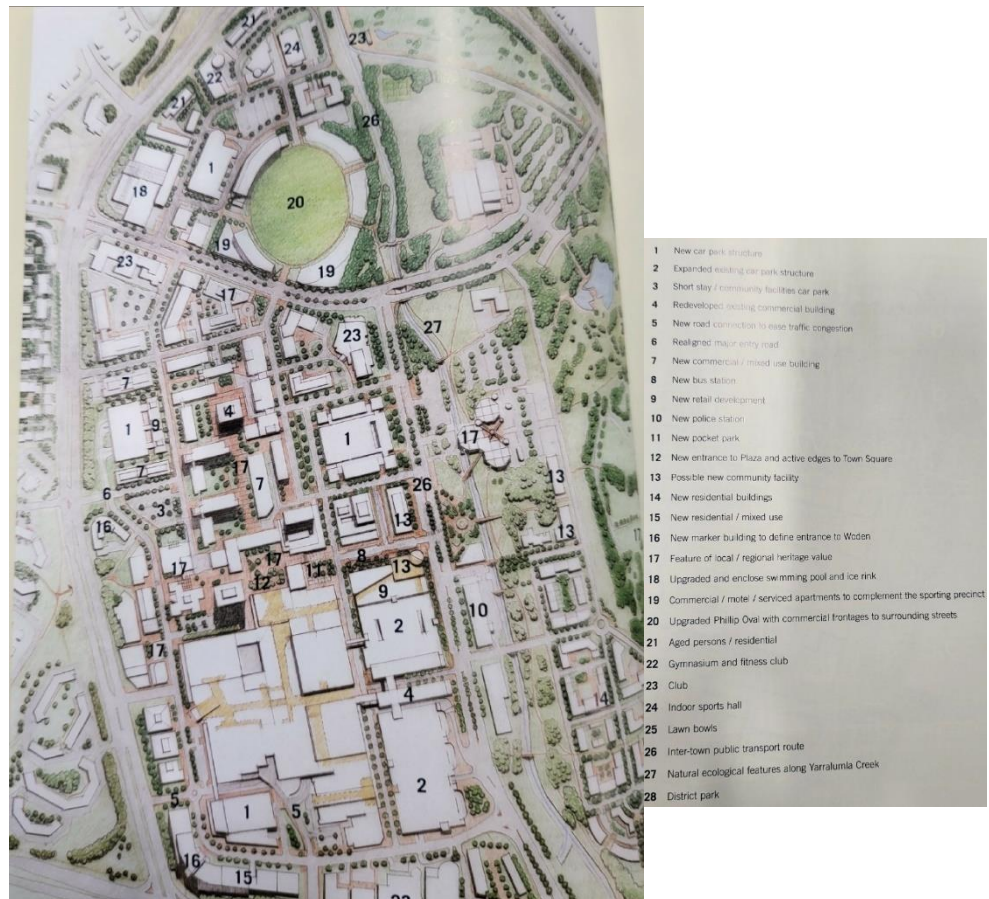


Fig. 17 Woden Town Centre – 2004-2005 Masterplan with the off-axis forecourt? referred to as pocket park and first suggestions of a community facility are seen on the subject site. (Source: ACT Heritage Library)

2.3 Conclusion

From the above analysis the following conclusions are drawn;

1. The original 1968 NDC Masterplan had a public/civic urban space core formed by Town Square and Fore Court, around which the town centre was arranged;
2. There was an east west axis through the Town Square and Forecourt which opened towards the Town Park (now Arabanoo Park) – the open space across the Callam Street;
3. The 'Town Square' sustained the subsequent development of the Town Centre, but the forecourt was lost to the Bus Terminus;
4. The Forecourt reappeared as an off-axis open space but was not a strong enough design element as the one planned in the original scheme. The new element did not contribute to the structure of the Town Centre as intended by the original scheme;
5. The development of the town centre over the years was more organic rather than in a strict structured pattern;
6. The Town Centre over the years has developed as an inward-looking space without much visual or physical connection to spaces on other side of the arterial road perimeter specifically Callam Street. In fact, the original 1968 scheme also does not have any expressly stated objectives to do so.

3.0 THE PROPOSED CIT WODEN DEVELOPMENT

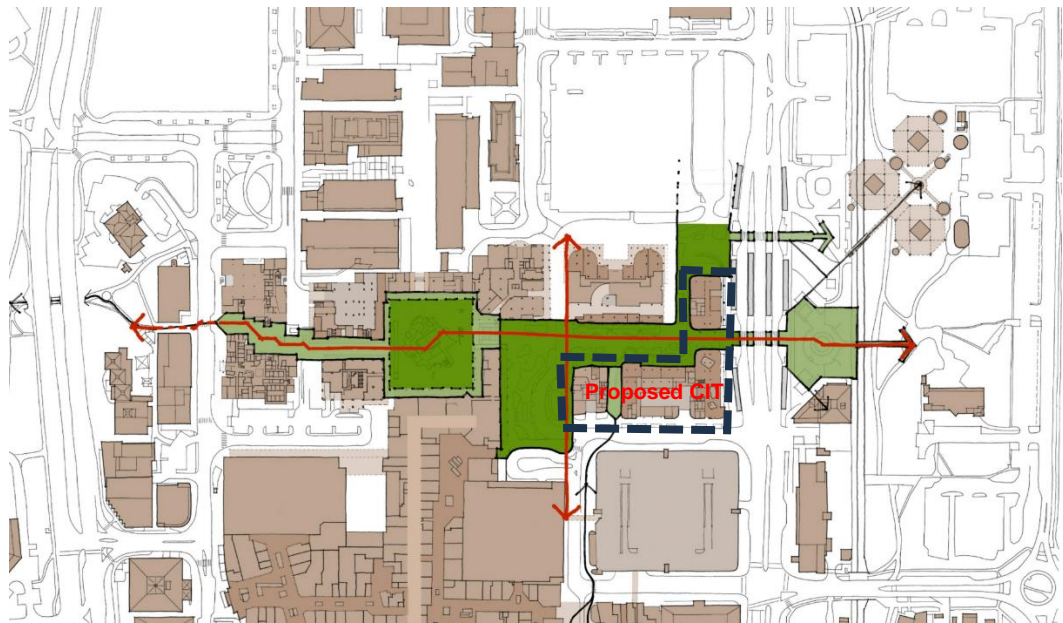


Fig. 18 Woden Town Centre in relation to the proposed CIT Development (Source: Gray Puksand)

As evident from the above diagram the proposed scheme to some extent formalises the east west axis which connect the Town Square to the Town Park. It also recreates the connected public/civic urban space which was intended in the original scheme.

Overall, the proposed scheme will reinstate some of the originally intended structure of the Town Centre. It will re-establish the connection between the Town Square and the Town Park.