Shaping the future of 91A Wakefield Gardens, Ainslie

Report on what we heard

This well-known site has a long history of supporting community health services, including use by the Canberra Mothercraft Society (1920s–1990s), Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Services (1998–2005), and as a Child Health Clinic in the 1950s and 60s.

Following a recent fire at the site which resulted in significant damage to the now-vacant property, the ACT Government has taken steps to make the site safe. Although the destroyed structure was not heritage listed, the gardens are, and due care and consideration will be taken to preserve this heritage status. The remaining structure will be demolished, creating an opportunity to reimagine how this space could best serve the community in the future.

It is important to note there are several site constraints that will guide what can practically be considered for the future use of the site. These include the heritage-listed gardens, including mature trees with large canopies, the size of the block, and the heritage requirements for the precinct.

During September – October 2025 community members were invited to have their say on the future of the site and provide input into how the site could be repurposed to best meet local needs.

The conversation

Community members were invited to participate through an online survey hosted on the YourSay Conversations website and participate in engagement activities both online and in person. Pop-up sessions were held at the Ainslie Shops, providing an opportunity for residents to speak directly with representatives from Infrastructure Canberra, ask questions, and share their ideas.

A series of pop-up sessions were held on the following dates:

- **Tuesday 23 September** – 7:30am to 9:30am
- **Thursday 25 September** – 2:30pm to 4:30pm
- **Saturday 27 September** – 10:00am to 12:00pm
- **Saturday 4 October** – 9:30am to 11:30am
- **Tuesday 14 October** – 10:00am to 12:00pm
- **Wednesday 15 October** – 2:30pm to 4:30pm

The overall engagement period ran from **Monday 22 September to Friday 7 November 2025**.

Who we engaged

This engagement was designed to reach the local community and ensure broad awareness of the project. A letterbox drop was conducted across the suburb of Ainslie, providing details on the consultation process and ways to participate. Flyers were prominently displayed at local shops to promote the pop-up sessions, including dates and times. In addition, the project team delivered presentations to key stakeholder groups, including the North Canberra Community Council and the ACT Heritage Council, to share information and invite feedback.

Key Insights

Key insights from the community

Heritage preservation and respect for history

Many respondents emphasised the historical significance of 91A Wakefield Gardens and its role in Ainslie's community life, including its use as a baby health centre and health service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is strong sentiment toward preserving the heritage character of the site and surrounding gardens.

- *The heritage of the site is important and should be respected in any future development.*
- *Maintain the historic character of Wakefield Gardens while making it more usable for the community.*
- *Heritage is a key consideration – the gardens and building are part of Ainslie's story.*
- *Any changes should complement the heritage values of the precinct.*

Community space and multi-use facility

A dominant theme was the desire for a community centre that is inclusive, accessible, and affordable. Respondents envisioned a space for playgroups, workshops, events, and services that cater to all age groups and backgrounds.

- *A community building that can be hired by groups with toilets and a kitchen. Similar to Corroboree Park but updated.*
- *Ainslie and surrounds could use a versatile community space that combines a meeting space for the elderly… and a wet weather venue for playgroups.*
- *The community needs a space, a space that allows cross-pollination of ideas and skills.*
- *This is a part of Old Ainslie which is valuable because of its location in Wakefield Gardens and proximity to the shops. Rebuilding as a community centre including the children's playground, and using it for a quiet area for mothers and children, or anyone who needs a relaxing location would be ideal.*

Many respondents expressed interest in using the site for artistic and cultural activities. Suggestions included spaces for performances, art exhibitions, music, dance, and creative workshops.

- *Outdoor event space for small local productions to have somewhere to perform.*

Key insights from the community

- *A cultural centre for community learning.*
- *Include artists to adorn the community space—mosaic, ceramic, mural, Indigenous artists, teen graffiti etc.*
- *A community centre is definitely what Ainslie needs. A place for community arts, workshops, children's groups…*

Affordability was a practical concern. Respondents wanted the space to be available for community use at low or no cost, with flexible booking options.

- *Affordability – make the use of the space affordable to community groups, with a minimum fee.*
- *Community groups cannot afford $80/hour hire fees.*

A specific example presented for a multi-use facility was that of a Neighbourhood House as utilised in Victoria. Neighbourhood Houses are run locally to provide a welcoming space for social, educational, and recreational activities that meet the specific needs of their local community.

Sustainability and community garden

Sustainability was a key concern, with calls for energy-efficient buildings, water-saving gardens, and climate-adaptive design. The idea of a community garden is strongly tied to sustainability and green space themes. Community gardens were frequently mentioned in the context of preserving and enhancing the natural environment, integrating with existing parkland, and creating spaces for relaxation and connection with nature. They are seen as a way to activate underutilised land, foster community engagement, and honour heritage. While most responses were supportive, a few noted that community gardens already exist nearby, suggesting the need for clear differentiation or added value.

- *Using the space to expand the adjacent park would be good. Potentially creating a community garden would preserve the heritage gardens on the site while benefiting the community by allowing members to interact with one another and work together a common goal what benefits everyone.*
- *I support the proposal by the Wakefield Gardens Working Group for a comprehensive vision that includes community gardens and an urban farm, nature play, shaded seating areas to encourage greater use of the available green space.*
- *I support a community garden or native plantings for the area that connect community and nurture the environment.*

Accessibility and inclusivity

Accessibility was repeatedly mentioned as a priority, both in terms of physical access and affordability. Respondents stressed the importance of designing a space that welcomes people of all abilities, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Key insights from the community

- *Accessibility is the number one priority for any facility. An accessible space enables inclusion from the start.*
- *Inclusivity including benefits for the poorest in our community – supporting them with community gardens and a social and artistic space.*
- *Accessibility and inclusiveness. Our family has loved attending the Paint & Play playgroup in the green space.*

Green space and integration with surrounding area

The value of the surrounding green space was a recurring theme. Many respondents advocated for maintaining and enhancing the gardens, adding shaded seating, nature play areas, and native plantings. There was also significant commentary about wanting to improve the connection between the green space of the gardens through to the commercial shopping precinct.

- *Encourage and support local flora and fauna. Native bird and insect attracting gardens. Indigenous bush tucker plants.*
- *The green space is a breath of fresh air in busy shopping space.*
- *Green space and accessibility from the shopping centre.*
- *The connection of the site to the shops and community as a walk-through area with mature trees and views of the Wakefield's Garden Precinct.*
- *Please think beyond the bounds of 91A and consider its relationship with the adjoining green space.*
- *Improve connection between shops/laneway*

Children and family-friendly facilities

There was strong support for improving the playground and creating spaces that cater to young families. Many felt the current playground was inadequate and unsafe.

- *We need more younger children's outdoor and indoor play spaces in the inner north.*
- *The existing playground has irked me for years… It would be wonderful to see children and young families able to use the park.*
- *A playground with enough shade, with natural and other materials that can withstand wear and tear.*
- *This space desperately needs a more usable play area. There are so many young families in the area and the 'playground' is barely useable.*
- *The playground is looking old, and not particularly useable. Nature play area, or a more traditional slide/climbing fort/monkey bars etc would be great.*

Indigenous recognition and cultural inclusion

Several responses highlighted the importance of acknowledging and integrating the heritage and culture of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the site's future use.

Key insights from the community

- *It has a strong links to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and holds cultural importance.*
- *Inclusion of Indigenous heritage and culture.*
- *First Nations community leaders and members are an integral stakeholder in what happens on this site.*

Community-led design and stewardship

There was strong support for a community-led approach to planning and managing the site, with emphasis on co-design, stewardship, and ongoing engagement.

- *This proposal shows what is possible when community members work constructively with government.*
- *The design process can be community building in itself.*
- *Let's forge ahead. Ainslie community is strong and will provide skills, art, labour and materials.*

Top 10 themes from local popups at Ainslie shops:

1. **Community garden** - consistently suggested across multiple sessions, often paired with ideas like seating areas, native or edible plants, and integration with sustainability initiatives
2. **Community space /Multi-Use centre** - strong support for a flexible, multi-purpose space for community activities, meetings, workshops, and events.
3. **Playground improvements** - frequent calls for upgrading the existing playground, adding shade, accessible features, and nature play elements.
4. **Heritage preservation** - emphasis on respecting the heritage character of the site and integrating historical elements into any redevelopment.
5. **Spaces for families and children** - requests for areas catering to mothers' groups, playgroups, and intergenerational activities.
6. **Affordable and accessible hire** - strong sentiment that any community facility should be low-cost and easy to book for local groups.
7. **Sustainability and Green Features** - suggestions included composting, native gardens, greenhouses, and climate-responsive design.
8. **Connectivity to shops and laneway** - calls to improve physical and visual connection between the site, the shops, and surrounding parkland.
9. **Spaces for arts and culture** - ideas for art workshops, galleries, music spaces, and cultural events.
10. **Recreational and social amenities** - suggestions for pickleball courts, dog parks, outdoor exercise gyms, and amphitheatre spaces.

Other insights from the community

Infrastructure Canberra received a written submission as part of this engagement prepared by the Wakefield Gardens Working Group – *Reimagining Wakefield Gardens – A community-led proposal for the revitalisation of Wakefield Gardens*. This proposal was based on ongoing community engagement that had been occurring throughout 2025. The common themes outlined in the report closely align with what we heard during our own engagement, with many residents referencing this work during the community pop-up sessions - First Nations leadership, learning and culture, seating and lingering, inclusion and safety, fundraising as activation, care and governance and connection and activation.

'Wakefield Gardens is valued by residents for its heritage identity and role as a local meeting place. Our community does not want to see that character erased; instead, this project is about adding layers of education, culture, connection, play and volunteer-led activation that respect the existing open green space and increase amenity for all.'

The proposal is broken down into three key phases – the second phase focusing on 'the renovation of the building at 91A Wakefield Gardens to create a community space with a focus on First Nations Priorities, sustainable living and shared community spaces'. The other two phases focus on a 'community garden and urban farm' and 'redeveloped play space'.

A second written submission was received by one of the local business owners. This submission was heavily focused on the need for additional parking in the area.

What's next?

The ACT Government is currently reviewing all feedback received through the community consultation to identify feasible options for the future use of 91A Wakefield Gardens. This process will consider community priorities alongside heritage considerations and site constraints. In the interim, the existing structure on the site will be demolished due to safety concerns, ensuring the area remains secure while planning continues.

Key timings
Community consultation – September – November 2025
Listening report published – December 2025 We are here
Review – The ACT Government considers feedback to identify feasible options for the future use of 91A Wakefield Gardens. This will continue throughout 2026.
Demolition of existing structure – 2026

Thank you for your feedback

960 We reached 960 people via YourSay, and had 1,628 views to the page	**187** We heard from 187 people who completed the online survey	**191** We spoke to 191 people across 6 pop-ups held at the Ainslie local shops	**2** We presented to the North Canberra Community Council and the ACT Heritage Council
2,300 We delivered 2,300 letters to the local residents in Ainslie	**5100** We reached a social media audience of approx. 5100 people	**2** We received 2 items of written feedback	