

## **GIRALANG SHOPS - WHY DO WE HOLD THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABLE?**

It has been over 10 years since the original Giralang shops closed. Since that time the Giralang Residents Action Group (GRAG) has been fighting to achieve a clear, simple and very reasonable objective: "a quality local shopping centre for Giralang".

Access to local shops is a basic need of all Canberra residents. Town planning is key responsibility of the ACT Government. Despite promises, the Government's town planning has completely failed to provide residents of Giralang with the access to shops they need. No-one but the Government can fix our problem. We therefore hold the Government accountable.

The Giralang shops have been the subject of relentless litigation and procedural obstructionism by commercial opponents to delay construction. One aspect of the case was even taken as far as the High Court of Australia. The most recent legal case was an appeal heard by the ACT Supreme Court on 30 July 2015. After ten months no decision has been announced. This is partly as a result of a lack of resources in the Supreme Court. The ACT Government is responsible for providing the Court with sufficient resources to do its job. It has not done so. We therefore hold the Government accountable.

It has been reported that the Minister responsible for town planning, Mick Gentleman, has unilaterally decided - without asking residents - to sponsor negotiations towards a 'compromise' between the commercial opponents of the shops, and the developer. Under such a compromise the commercial opponents might undertake to stop their litigation, the developer might agree to reduce the size of the shops development, and the Government might agree to approve a significant number of apartments above the shops to offset the developer's losses from the smaller supermarket. Everyone would seem to win - except the residents (who would lose their approved 1500m2 supermarket and whose hard-fought-for shopping centre would suddenly become primarily a housing development rather than the focus of our community we have wanted for so long. If that is the outcome that emerges from the Minister's secret negotiations, we will hold the Government accountable.

But the longer term outcome could even be worse. From June 2016, the smaller Giralang supermarket (1000m2) will have to compete with a new 1850m2 Coles supermarket opening 1.5km away in Kaleen. Giralang's smaller supermarket will have difficulty competing with a much larger Coles supermarket so close by. Any other shops in the Giralang shopping centre will struggle to attract foot traffic from the larger Kaleen Village Centre. Giralang would be back in the position it was in ten years ago when its shops failed under pressure from Kaleen. Because it is the Government that is forcing a smaller (uncompetitive) supermarket on Giralang, we hold the Government accountable.

Residents are distressed about the high handed way they have been treated in this matter. Residents were neither asked, nor informed about the Government-sponsored negotiations to develop a so-called 'compromise'. Despite their obvious interests, they have certainly not been included in the discussions. Government ministers will not agree to meet to discuss the issue. Indeed, when GRAG called a community meeting to share what it could about the Government's negotiations, both the developer and Minister Gentleman's Office said it was "premature" to have such a meeting and GRAG was threatened with legal action which caused the meeting to be cancelled. Many residents were outraged and hold the Government accountable.

The ACT Assembly elections are on 15 October 2016. Giralang residents are so frustrated and angry about the Government's complete failure in the Giralang Shops saga that we will be vigorously campaigning on the shops issue and holding the Government to account in every way we can.

**More information:** [giralangresidents.weebly.com](http://giralangresidents.weebly.com); Twitter: #GiralangShops ; Facebook: Giralang Residents Action Group