



## RECONNECTION OF WILLSMERE TO MAIN DRIVE

AN INFORMATION PAPER PREPARED BY THE WILLSMERE BUILDINGS AND ACCESS SUBCOMMITTEE

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*Artist's impression of a new connection from Main Drive, with the original Willsmere entrance gates installed. [Adam Dean]*

Should Willsmere have a more than a pedestrian connection to Main Drive? The Willsmere Committee of Management wishes to foster debate on this important matter. This paper provides background information, details the proposal, and discusses the issues that have been raised. We have prepared this to assist people to come to a view and to inform community debate.

## IN A NUTSHELL

1. Main Drive was the original entry route to Willsmere.
2. A new vehicle route could be created between Main Drive and Willsmere by building a short piece of roadway across the ground currently occupied by the basketball court.
3. Access could be controlled by gates or booms, in one or more locations. This could be in association with an intercom system to allow residents to buzz visitors in.
4. The connection would provide a grand entrance, a better connection to Kew, and easier access for visitors, tradespeople and emergency services.
5. A basketball court could be rebuilt elsewhere, or funds used for other recreational facilities.
6. A very rough estimate of costs is \$250,000. Savings are estimated as at least \$100,000 per year.
7. The Willsmere Committee of Management will most likely conduct a formal poll of property owners to determine the amount of in-principle support for the idea. If it is supported, the committee will obtain a detailed design and costing. Property owners will then be asked via a special resolution to vote on a detailed proposal.

## BACKGROUND

When Willsmere was created in the 1870's, the main access way to the front door of the main building was the long and grand driveway from Princess Street. Accordingly, this route was called Main Drive. Entrance gates were sited on Main Drive at Princess Street. These stone gates were relocated to Victoria Park in Kew when Princess Street was straightened in the middle of last century.

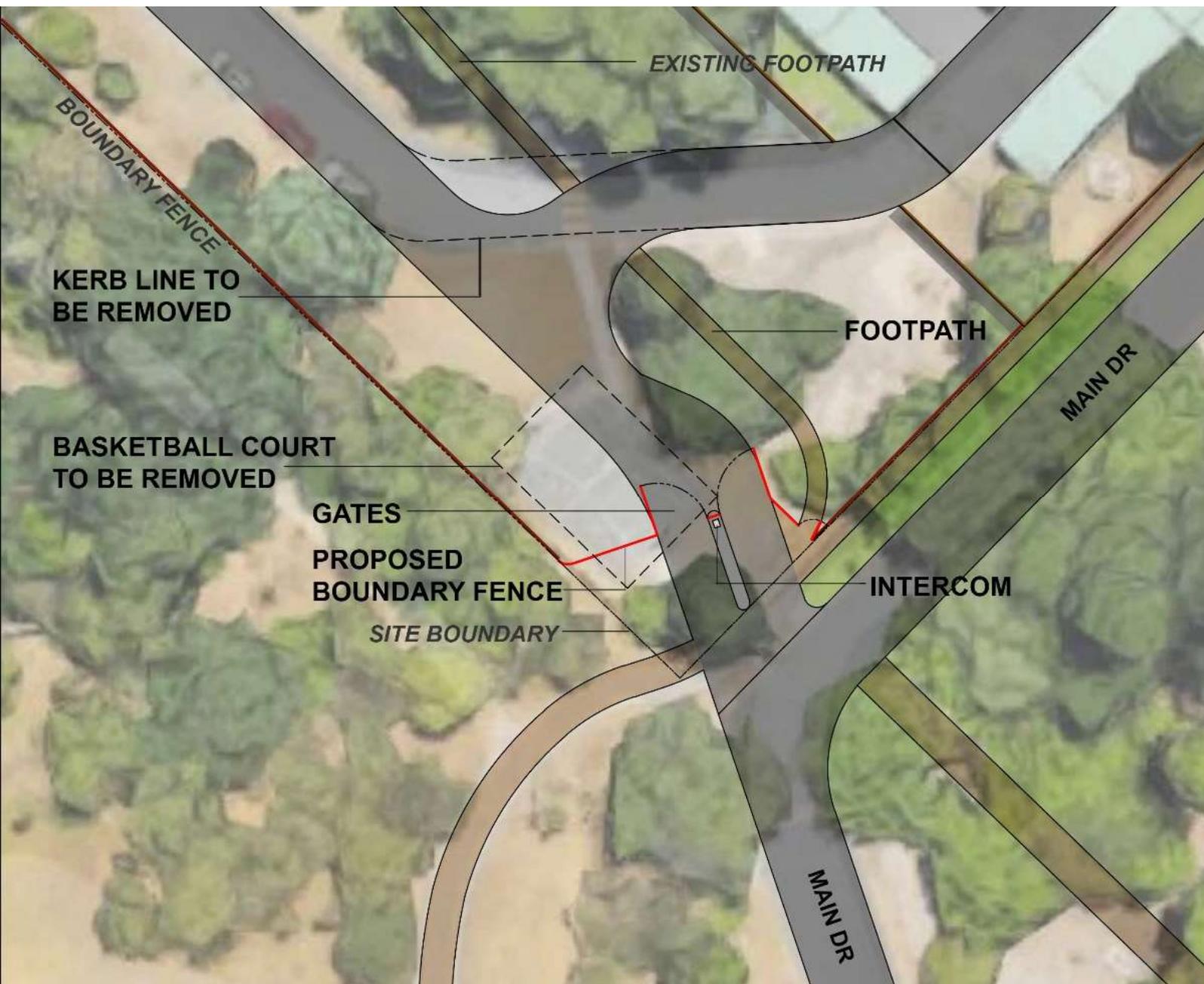


*Willsmere's entrance gates originally stood on Main Drive by Princess Street. They now form the entrance to Victoria Park, Kew.*

When Willsmere was converted to a residential estate in the early 1990's, it was disconnected from Main Drive and connected to the Boulevard and Hutchinson Drive. At the time, Kew Cottages was still operating as a home for intellectually disabled children. Accessing Willsmere through Main Drive may have been difficult for practical reasons while Kew Cottages still operated. It is also likely that the developer of Willsmere regarded that sales and sale prices would suffer if potential buyers first came past Kew Cottages.

It has been asserted that the Hutchinson Drive entrances to Willsmere were at this time intended to be used only in emergencies.

Willsmere contains over 250 apartments and townhouses. Typically, this number of dwellings would be serviced by at least four vehicle access routes. Willsmere currently has two.



*An indicative concept design for the link to Main Drive, with gates. [Alexander Urbanism]*

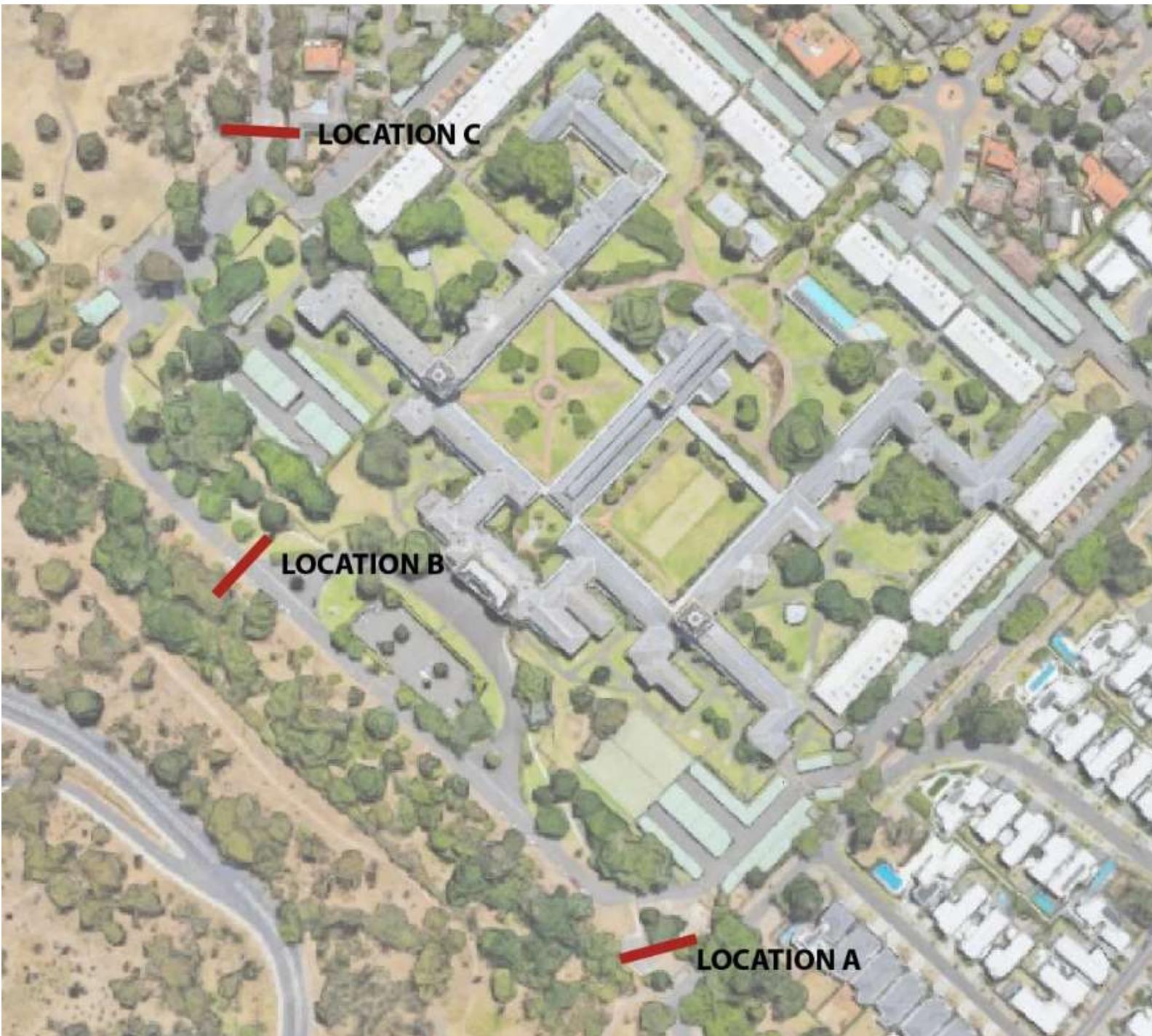
## **THE PROPOSAL**

In front of the heritage building's front entrance is a long straight two-way roadway. To link this with Main Drive requires only a short extension across what is currently the basketball court. With this new connection, Willsmere's traffic load would be redistributed. It is estimated that an extra 440 vehicle per day would use Main Drive, Willsmere vehicles on Hutchinson Drive would half, and Willsmere's use of the Boulevard would reduce by more than 60%.

In addition to the creation of a roadway link, one or more gates could be used to control vehicle access into Willsmere and to prevent through traffic between Princess Street and the Boulevard.

Possible locations for gates are:

- Location A, on the southern corner, adjacent to Main Drive.
- Location B, just west of the western palm tree island in front of the main building.
- Location C, at the brick pillars just north of Gate 1 and the visitor parking area.



*Potential gate locations*

At some time in the future, if the City of Boroondara is willing, the original entry gates could be relocated from Victoria Park to the new entrance. The photo-montage on the front page provides an indication of how this might look. This may be possible in the future, but is not part of the work being considered now.

## **THE ISSUES**

### **The entrance experience**

Visitors currently enter Willsmere via the Boulevard. This provides a 'bush' experience, and also emphasises Willsmere's remoteness and lack of connection to urban facilities. Visitors pass by the maintenance shed and the hard rubbish area prior to seeing the main entrance. If visitors came via Main Drive, they would come through built-up parts of Kew, then along Main Drive - a grand and beautiful route – directly to the front entrance.

### **Accessibility**

The new connection would provide another choice of ingress and egress for Willsmere residents. All current road connections would be maintained, including the connection to the Boulevard. Main Drive would provide easy access for visitors, tradespeople, emergency services, and potential buyers and renters. It would provide a route into Willsmere that is much easier to describe and understand, so first time visitors would be much less likely to become lost. When heading to and from the south and east, this route would be more convenient, and would reduce the distance travelled. The Willsmere bus would have a quicker journey, saving time and fuel. Because of the new more direct route to Kew and beyond, there would be less traffic on internal streets within Willsmere's 'inner square'. These streets would become quieter and safer. Willsmere residents' use of Main Drive to bypass a clogged Princess Street is likely to lessen, meaning less traffic for the part of Main Drive that has houses fronting onto it.

### **Access control**

Willsmere has an 'Inner Square' that is blocked from public access by the heritage brick wall and Gates 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6. By itself, a connection with Main Drive would provide easier access to Willsmere for the general public, and so potentially lead to more security issues. The area of Wiltshire Drive outside the main Willsmere compound is already accessible to the general public from the Boulevard end. A Main Drive connection would make it easier for people intending to do wrong, and also for everyone else. The area in front of the main building would be more heavily used, and so may be safer. If there are security issues, these should be dealt with regardless of the access arrangements.

A gate or boom could be installed at any or all of the three locations given above. Any new gates could be openable by remote controls, and possible include an intercom system so visitors can ask for residents or the facility manager to open the gate. If there is no access control, such as a gate or other barrier, motorists will use the route as a short-cut between the Boulevard the Princes Street. Options for access control are discussed in detail further below.

### **Heritage**

A Main Drive connection would create an entrance route very similar to the original. Heritage Victoria have agreed in principal to the concept. The current entrance route from the Boulevard is not part of Willsmere's original design.

## **The basketball court**

Creation of the connection requires the demolition of the existing basketball court. A new basketball court could be built near the maintenance shed. It could be bigger than the current one, and line-marked to be suitable for a wider variety of ball games. Alternatively, the community could decide it wanted a court elsewhere, or one or more other recreational facilities instead.

## **Use of Main Drive**

Main Drive currently takes approximately 1660 vehicles per day. The estimated extra traffic on the section between Willsmere and Princess Street is 440 vehicles per day, or thirty vehicles per hour in the peak periods. This is well within the capacity of the street and would be barely noticeable. Residents on that section of Main Drive back onto it. The section of Main Drive between the new connection and Hutchinson Drive, and Hutchinson Drive itself, would have less traffic. Residents living along these streets are likely to support the proposal. The impact on the Princess Street roundabout would be insignificant, according to the traffic engineer we have consulted.

## **Emergencies**

In case of emergency, ambulances and fire trucks would arrive at Willsmere more quickly via Main Drive rather than via the Boulevard. In case of bushfire, residents would have a third emergency exit route. If at any time a nearby street was blocked, residents would have more choice of an alternative route.

## **Financial implications**

The financial benefits include fuel savings, vehicle wear and tear savings, travel time savings, an enhanced entrance experience, and greater accessibility. These savings are mostly impossible to quantify. However TTM, traffic engineers, have estimated that the reduction in distances travelled by car by Willsmere residents would save at least \$100,000 per year in fuel and wear and tear. Collectively these benefits would translate into higher prices for Willsmere property. Assuming a conservative 5% increase in the value of property, the new connection would add almost \$9,000,000 in value.

To date, the only cost estimate is a rough approximation from TTM, suggesting costs up to \$250,000. If the community approves this concept in principle, a detailed design will be prepared and then a quantity surveyor will prepare a detailed costing. Only then will we have an estimate likely to be close to the cost of construction.

Assuming a benefit of \$9,000,000 and a cost of \$250,000, the benefit/cost ratio is 36 to 1. In other words, every dollar invested would return 36 dollars.

## **Funding**

The Committee of Management has not yet considered how any work might be funded. Work may be able to be funded from the existing levy contributions, over say two financial years. It might need a special levy. If the works cost \$250,000, that would average out to about \$1,000 per lot. It might be able to be funded by a loan, paid off over a number of years. Deciding to fund this project would not prevent the community funding of other projects it might want to do, but it might mean other projects are deferred.

## **OPTIONS FOR ACCESS CONTROL**

Willsmere currently has six gates giving vehicle access through the heritage brick wall into the 'Inner Square'. The 'Outer Strip' runs from the visitor parking area outside Gate 1 to the basketball court near Gate 4. This is unrestricted to the public entering from the Boulevard. If a new roadway is built between the front of Willsmere and Main Drive, different levels of access control are possible for the Inner Square and Outer Strip. The options are described below. The roadway loop by the front door is currently blocked to general vehicle use by bollards. In Options 2 and 3, this loop would need to be open for vehicle use. In the other options, the loop wouldn't need to be opened, but could be.

### **Option 1 – Outer Strip open to the public**

The new connection could be unrestricted, making the Outer Strip accessible to the public from both ends. The loop by the front door could be opened to vehicles. Gates 1 to 6 would be retained. Everyone could drive or walk to the front entrance to see the grand façade. This would make visitor, tradesperson and emergency services access easy. It would also be excellent for marketing Willsmere to potential buyers. Visitor parking could remain as is. The public are likely to use this connection to travel between Princess Street and the Boulevard, especially during peak periods.

### **Option 2 – One control point to discourage through traffic**

Through traffic could be discouraged with a gate or boom. The best location for that would probably be Location B. The loop by the front door would need to be re-opened. This would allow the public to come to the front door, but would stop through traffic. Tail-gating by members of the public following an authorised person through the gate may be a problem.

### **Option 3 – Inner Square and Western Corner secured**

Gates could be located at Locations B and C, to prevent unauthorised vehicle entry. This would make the route very difficult for through traffic. The loop by the front door would need to be re-opened so motorists not travelling through a gate at Location B could turn around. If high fencing was installed at Location B, pedestrian entry past this point would be controlled as well. The maintenance shed, hard rubbish area and the current visitor parking area would be in a secure zone. If a new basketball court was constructed near the maintenance shed, it would also be in the secure zone. Other possible future facilities, such as a playground or function room, might also be located there. Gates 1 and 2 would no longer be needed, and could be removed.

### **Option 4 – Outer Strip fully secured**

If gates were placed at Locations A and C, the entire Outer Strip would be secured. The loop by the front door could be opened to vehicles. Gates 1, 2, 3 and 4 would no longer be needed, and could be removed. Visitors would need to wait at a gate and ask via an intercom for entry.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Willsmere Committee of Management encourages a full and well-informed discussion at the community meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September.

The Committee of Management will most likely then conduct a formal poll of property owners to determine the amount of in-principle support for the idea. If it is not supported in principle, the committee will cease working on this idea. If it is supported, the committee will decide which option to progress, obtain a detailed design and obtain a detailed costing. The property owners will then be asked via a special resolution to vote on a detailed proposal.