

# The Liberal Government's Secret Deal with UTAS

## A Betrayal of Tasmania and the Sandy Bay/Mt Nelson Community

The Tasmanian government's Sandy Bay campus election promise was based on a simple concept. Because the campus land was effectively gifted to UTAS for higher education, the government would legislate to require transparency and parliamentary approval before any land could be sold or leased.

Minister Ogilvie said on ABC radio, 'If we have a compelling business case that makes sense then I think that will resonate with people. Consultation and the building of a social licence will be incredibly important'.

Instead the community and parliament have been hoodwinked. No business case has been disclosed and the government negotiated in secret with UTAS. The bill instead rezones and approves for sale substantial campus land including important STEM facilities.



Liberal Government secret deal with UTAS means the land shaded in grey will be approved for sale. ( photo: ABC News)



Google earth photos of the two areas approved in the bill for sale.

**Outrage in Sandy Bay/Mt Nelson at the Liberal Government's Proposed Dwelling Explosion.**

# The Secret Deal Explained

## What did the Liberals promise Tasmanian voters at the 2024 March election?

In February 2024 the Liberals made a big election promise. Minister Madeleine Ogilvie said there would have to be “a compelling business case ...that will resonate with people ...consultation and that building of a social licence will be incredibly important”. (Tasmanian Times, February 28, 2024)

## What happened next?

In June 2024 the government tabled the bill in parliament. This bill largely protected the campus, and it was listed for debate in November 2024. But in August 2024 the Premier and Ministers held secret discussions with UTAS and they agreed to a secret deal.

## What was the secret deal?

It was agreed a large piece of important campus land would be radically rezoned and then sold off. The Liberal government and UTAS agreed this would be done by a last-minute amendment to the bill. The amendment would be kept a closely guarded secret until a few days before the bill was to be debated in the House of Assembly, so there was no time for the public or the parliament to scrutinise the deal or complain about the lack of a business case. Every Tasmanian and most MPs would be kept in the dark.

## Did the government's secret plan work?

Yes. The parliament was ambushed and, with support from Labor, the amended bill was passed in November. At the request of UTAS the government had turned a bill to protect the campus into a bill to sell campus land including essential STEM facilities. The amended bill even rezoned Mt Nelson hillside “inner residential”, as though it was vacant city land, ready for the building of hundreds of apartment blocks.

One of the 15 UTAS Plant Science glasshouses the government's secret deal approves for sale.



## Why did the government need to keep the deal secret?

The strict secrecy was intended to avoid public and parliamentary scrutiny. UTAS had no business case and the radical rezoning was not supported by any strategic planning. If the government was to avoid public debate about its deal, it had to ambush both the parliament and the people.

## What happens now?

In March 2025 the amended bill will come before the Legislative Council (the upper house) where Labor and Liberals will again support it. Fortunately The Greens and the independent members hold the balance of power, so it may not succeed.

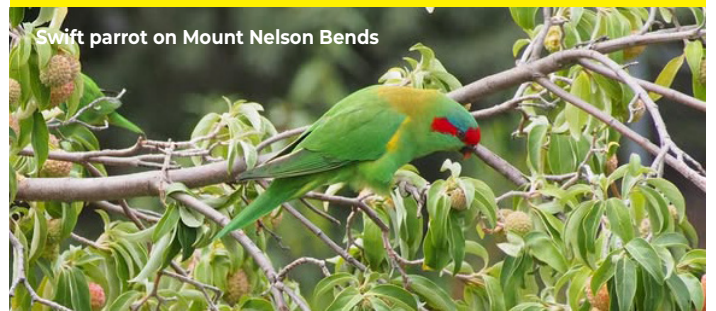
## Does the bill protect the remaining campus from sale?

**No.** The bill does not prevent a repeat of the land sale approval process used by the government, where there was a secret deal between the government and UTAS, with no business plan and sprung on parliament and the community to avoid scrutiny.

Another defect of the bill is that at the request of UTAS the bill doesn't stop the disposal of the campus by sale of 99 year leases. This was UTAS's preferred land sale mechanism used in their 2021 Masterplan.

## Does the bill protect existing STEM facilities?

**No.** The bill approves for sale essential and valuable STEM facilities above Churchill Avenue such as the Life Science building and the 15 Plant Science greenhouses. The glasshouses are integral to Plant Science's world leading research.



## Does the rezoning protect the environment?

**No.** There is no strategy or proper planning behind the government's secret deal with UTAS. Environmental considerations have been ignored. A large area of native vegetation will be removed and native animals like swift parrots, which use the *eucalyptus globulus* trees, will be threatened by the proliferation of large apartment blocks.

# How the Liberal Government Abandoned the Sandy Bay/Mount Nelson Community

## Does the government care about the Sandy Bay Mt Nelson community?

**No.** The bill treats the community with contempt, imposing radical rezoning in place of the community engagement process the Hobart City Council had commenced. This process would have led to a carefully crafted Mt Nelson Sandy Bay Neighbourhood Plan which would have guided long term development for the area.

## Why is 'inner residential' zoning so unsuitable for the Mount Nelson hillside?

The government's University of Tasmania (Protection of Land) Bill rezones the UTAS Campus above Churchill Avenue to 'inner residential', permitting high density development. This area reaches up the slope of Mount Nelson to Bend 5. Rezoning means there will be no opportunity for community consultation or comment, eliminating planning processes. It enables the construction of hundreds of apartments in multi storey blocks.

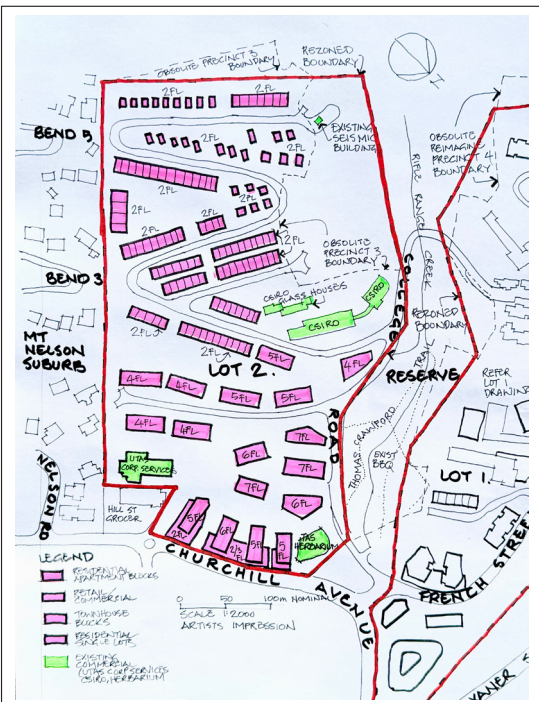


Limitations of stormwater/sewage services and the road access are ignored. Road access is mainly limited to two roads, Regent Street and Sandy Bay Road, neither of which have capacity to absorb hundreds of additional users.

## What sort of development would rezoning permit?

Image below shows the number of dwellings that UTAS said could be built on the land the Bill rezones 'inner residential', a total of 1230 dwellings of up to 7 stories.

Such a development will effectively double the population of Mount Nelson.



A preview of the intense development that the rezoning will permit can be seen in this artist's interpretation of how UTAS planned to use this land in its 2021 Masterplan. Note the borders of the land now include the Student Union building and surrounding land. Green is existing buildings and purple new build.



# How UTAS Conned the Government

## Does UTAS's financial position require urgent land sale?

**No.** UTAS is in a sound financial position. It owns 7 valuable central city properties with no identified future use and, together with the extravagant Forestry building (which no UTAS faculty wants to occupy), these properties have a combined value of hundreds of millions of dollars which could fund STEM refurbishment at Sandy Bay.



The 7933 square metre Websters site in Argyle St was purchased in 2016 and has sat idle for 8 years. This is a prime site for housing which is sorely needed in the CBD. At least 150 apartments could be built on this site. Utas has no plans for this multi-million-dollar site. Why aren't they selling it to fund STEM in Sandy Bay?

**UTAS's vacant Websters site, shovel-ready for 150 apartments but lies empty.**

### Has UTAS produced a business case that supports their plan?

**No.** Minister Ogilvie (who had responsibility for the bill in the House) said on ABC radio, "We would need to see the plan", but she admits she still has never seen one. She says the university advised her that a business case would not be considered by UTAS Council until 6 December 2024, weeks after the House of Assembly had passed the bill. UTAS has still not produced a business case.

## What can you do?

The Bill still has to pass the Legislative Council to become law. Liberal and Labor positions are the same; they will all vote in favour. The independents and the Greens hold the balance of power but they must all vote against it. The Bill will be voted on at the next sitting in early March.



**Please email all Legislative Council independent members** and let them know that this Bill takes away the rights of the community to have input and it's not based on any business case.

**Scan the QR code** for a link to the independents email addresses and for a sample letter.

# SAVE UTAS

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