

## BULLETIN No 41

**March 2002**

### **THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

**It was decided at the Annual General Meeting last November that the 2001 Report then presented be reproduced in this Bulletin - so here it is:**

“As in last years Annual Report we take this opportunity to comment on activities and events since the last AGM in November 2000. While some items might have been referred to in one of the four subsequent issues of the *Bulletin*, they deserve additional comment here.

Last November we welcomed Meg Probyn to the Committee and her participation has been valuable, especially as Ian Swann was granted leave late last year and again mid 2001 when he was absent on rehabilitation work in East Timor. David Morrison has again been acting Chairman but only in addition to his role as Treasurer and we are hopeful that this situation can be improved.

For the second year running we held our annual dinner at *La Promenade Blackburn* in mid November and were pleased to welcome Mr David Wilms, a member of SOS as guest speaker. We intend to retain this social event in our calendar but this year at a venue more appropriate to this type of function. Since then your Committee has met formally five times and informally on other occasions ( and frequently corresponded by letter, phone and e-mail, prompting us to consider having a dedicated e-mail address).

Committee members have represented the BVRG at various events. The first being last December for the launch of the new State Planning Agenda by the Minister of Planning, where he announced the introduction of a number of changes - particularly the revision and combination of the Good Design Guide and VicCode 1 into a single code - later ResCode 2000. We had made representations on this to our local member and to the Asst. Minister Planning, attended a Neighbourhood Character Workshop and made submissions on an Options paper, attended information sessions and also made a formal submission to the ResCode Advisory Committee.

At Council level we have consistently reminded Councillors, especially the two Councillors for the Central ward, Cr's. P. Allan and J. McCallum, of our concerns about the retention of Blackburn's character. We have followed this up, formally and informally with the Administration, including an interview with Noeline Duff, appointed CEO last year. We have urged completion of various tasks arising from the new format Planning Scheme, e.g. Heritage Amendments, Special Character Area Study, Streetscape Strategy, etc. all with partial if not always total success, and sought continuing improvements in council's accountability through more meaningful indicators of progress in the Corporate Plan.

We made a detailed submission on the long awaited Guidelines for Areas of Special Significance - a brochure now available from council which we have distributed to members. We also made written and oral submissions on the proposed redevelopment on the former Caltex Service Station site, a process which is continuing. We also have a representative (with alternate) on the Steering Committee that is

conducting a special character review of the Study Area surrounding the Significant Landscape Overlay in Blackburn.

We have continued to liaise with kindred groups such as the Laburnum Residents Association and Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society and given advice and assistance to other groups and individuals. The BVRG remains an active supporter of SOS - the umbrella group for all resident organisations and individuals interested in planning issues, acknowledging their lead in obtaining bipartisan support for many of the recently introduced planning system changes.

Finally, and partly because we find it difficult to maintain this level of activity, we repeated our annual appeal to enrol more recently arrived Blackburn residents and to encourage participation if not on the committee then in some supporting role which relieves or assists committee members. In that regard we are grateful to Ray Summers and Ian Rea for representing the BVRG, the former at a Traffic Safety Forum and the latter at a Stormwater Management Meeting. No doubt we shall need the help of others at times and it might be helpful to know more about members fields of expertise or access to services. As ever we are grateful for the services of those who have supported us in the somewhat pedestrian but vital task of *Bulletin* distribution.”

## **UPDATE**

We are pleased to report that later in the meeting David Morrison was elected BVRG Chairman while agreeing to remain as Treasurer for the immediate future. We continue to seek out assistance on or to the committee in order to spread the workload.

And that Steering Committee meetings will resume on the **Study of Special Character areas in Blackburn** As mentioned previously the BVRG is represented on that Committee but proceedings remain confidential to that Committee.

We comment below on progress (or otherwise) with several of the other matters raised in the report.

## **FORMER CALTEX SERVICE STATION**

The application to redevelop this site, despite a recommendation for approval by council officers, was unanimously rejected by council on 19 November 2001. It was rejected mainly on the grounds that it would be an overdevelopment of the site that failed to comply with the Municipal Strategic Statement and failed to provide sufficient car parking. In December the applicant, Alma Residential Developments Pty. Ltd.\* requested the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to review that decision and the BVRG, having previously expressed objections to the plans, sought to appear.

Early in January VCAT set the Hearing for 20 March but on 18 February we received advice that the applicant had applied to VCAT to amend the plans. The amended plans in essence proposed to redevelop the site without including the section of council owned land but increased the overall floor area to provide for more office space but less retail. While reiterating our main objections, we sought an adjournment of the Hearing in order to have time to consider these new plans. Council (and other parties) also sought an adjournment and a third consultation forum was convened, on 5 March, at which the BVRG was again represented. On the next day the applicant agreed to an adjournment. VCAT have rescheduled the hearing for 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May. We now await advice of the next step in this unnecessarily prolonged exercise.

\* You should not be confused by the change of name to Blackburn Commercial, as quoted in the *Whitehorse Leader* of 14 November 2001.

## **STREETSCAPE POLICY AND STRATEGY - Adopted by Council 4<sup>th</sup> February 2002.**

The policy sets out as its purpose and objectives to:

- Maximise native/indigenous plantings in municipality streets.
- Link bushland areas.
- Provide species selection guidance for areas with different characters including exotic.
- Provide direction to the style of planting.
- Provide guidance and information in relation to tree species.

The document divides the municipality into precincts. Precincts numbered 12 & 13 in the Strategy are the ones of relevance to most BVRG members. Street Species are summarised as 70% Native 30% Exotic and opportunities are flagged to maintain the existing character while increasing indigenous plantings, especially in streets which form part of the natural linkage of Gardiners Creek.

The document includes an extensive list of suitable species with a detailed description of each.

### **BUS STOP OVERKILL.**

Vigilance and prompt action, virtually at the last minute, stopped concrete pours at Main Street bus stops which would have set a precedent for hard cover treatment of roadside reserves throughout the municipality as part of the *Smart Bus* Program

At the end of October, at a time when the Streetscape Strategy was being formulated to improve roadside amenity, Main Street residents were alarmed to find eight-metre stretches of the nature strips being dug up by Vic Roads adjacent to bus stops. Although everyone is supportive of the proposed *Smart Bus* project, which is to give better access for disabled persons to public transport, residents were horrified at the destruction as the sites were prepared for the proposed cement blocks. After many phone-calls by BVRG committee members to Vic Roads, City of Whitehorse, the Department of Infrastructure and State and Federal politicians, all work ceased. A Vic Roads staff member was sent to view the damage to the trees and the streetscape. What disappointed the BVRG committee was the lack of consultation in the whole process. Only householders immediately adjacent to the bus stops had been informed of the proposed work and a letter to them from Vic Roads implied that the situation was a *fait accompli*. The Council blamed Vic Roads for the lack of consultation and Vic Roads blamed Council.

The eight-metre concrete stands have been set by Australian Standards and laid down in the proposed *Disability Discrimination Act* (not yet approved by Federal Parliament). These blocks would enable two wheelchairs to get on or off a bus from front and rear doors. We pointed out that very few passengers used the bus stops between the two end points and indeed their own research confirmed our comments. A compromise solution was finally reached whereby the concrete slabs were reduced to 2.7m long and 1.8m wide at bus sites where fewer than 20 passengers per day use the stops. This still allows public transport access for the disabled. The smaller concrete slabs were completed in Main Street and the nature strips re-seeded. We note with interest that at the time of writing the bus stops along Blackburn Road north of Canterbury Road have yet to be completed and are hopeful that our intervention will mean more considered approach is taken to bus stop works elsewhere.

**NEIGHBOURS INTERESTED**

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