



## **BLACKBURN VILLAGE RESIDENTS GROUP**

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### **BULLETIN No 50**

**August 2004**

#### **TRENDS**

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While the BVRG cannot take issue with every offending proposal we occasionally lodge an objection, especially where it blatantly ignores the local scene and, if unchecked, will set an undesirable pattern. One recent instance was where a developer sought excessive development of a site where long standing SLO conditions supported the retention of trees and limited the area of buildings and hard cover.

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When the VCAT Hearing took place some weeks later, twelve submitters, including the BVRG, made presentations in support of Council's decision and the Tribunal subsequently directed that no permit be granted.

The whole exercise included features which are all too frequently associated with planning permits; the applicant had purchased the property and submitted plans in the full knowledge of the conditions which applied to the site, yet prior to the Hearing made no suggestion that these plans might be modified in any way. It may serve as a case study typical of many other proposals, though not all reach the same satisfactory conclusion.

Another trend becoming increasingly obvious in central Blackburn is office development. Although the average office workspace provided for individuals is shrinking, the pressure is for buildings to go higher and to crowd the footpath so as to utilise all possible space. Needless to say, applications invariably include a request for dispensation on provision of parking space while some explore expectations of a revival of interest in upper floor residential units; ideal for many younger working singles and couples, but not for families with children or for the elderly.

One example of the few instances when the BVRG has lodged an objection to an individual applications, was in August 2002, when the first three storey development was proposed in Railway Road north of the railway station, mainly on the grounds that it would (as is now evident) be blocking the characteristic north - south vistas '*...and set a dangerous precedent for incremental development on a similar scale*'. Of course this is exactly what has happened following its approval by Council, prompting us to lodge further objections.

## TRENDS (Cont.)

We also put community concerns about height to the C40 Panel who, although they did not object to three storey development per se, recommended metric height limits for new buildings south of the railway and that Business Zone 2 and 3 properties along Railway Road be included in the Queen and Albert Street Policy Area which, as well as having limits on height, has design and set-back provisions, especially where developments share a boundary with residential properties. As soon as those recommendations are realised in the form of Planning Scheme ordinances it will bring back some sanity to the shape and form of commercial development in Blackburn.

## TALKING POINT - MELBOURNE 2030

Late last month BVRG representatives attended a meeting organised by Save our Suburbs (SOS) for Municipal Representatives and local groups such as ours. As might be expected from the recent media coverage of Melbourne 2030 (M2030) the well attended gathering attracted comment on a wide range of concerns arising from the dilution of commendable planning objectives by using 'top-down' methods of implementation and failing to commit adequate resources.

As mentioned previously, your Committee has made representations to State Government and to the City of Whitehorse regarding the potential impact of M2030 on Blackburn, initially viewed by Council as part of the Nunawading/MegaMile Major Activity Centre (NUN/MM). Our more general concern, and one highlighted at the SOS meeting, is that uncertainty will prevail unless the advancement of Principal and Major Activity Centres goes hand in hand with more effective measures for controlling development outside those areas of intensive activity, especially in established residential neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile tenders, closing on August 11, have been called for Stage 1 of the NUN/MM Structure Plan. This initial Study Area comprises three precincts, Nunawading, Mitcham (Neighbourhood Activity Centre) and that section of the Mega Mile between the two, *'It is envisaged that the area of the MegaMile to the west of the properties on the western side of Varman Court will be investigated in detail at a later date, subject to further funding.'*

It is expected that during the next few months there will be notice of public meetings to explain the project in more detail. We again urge residents not only to participate in such meetings but to consider nominating for working groups appointed to oversee the Plan. We invite interested members to also contact us.

## LOT SIZE TRIGGER - SLOW ON THE DRAW ?

Last year the BVRG lobbied for an Amendment requiring a planning permit for development on lots between 300m<sup>2</sup> and 500m<sup>2</sup> and in September, against the recommendation of Council Officers, that move was approved by Council. It was later decided that it be combined with a possible change to modify requirements for removal of 'weed' species in SLO areas.

That all seemed quite acceptable - the problem is that there has not (up to 9 August) been a report to Council on these matters and an Amendment is not expected to be exhibited before October, over a year after the date of Council's original decision. Not having sufficient planning staff doesn't help and we can only hope that this is a case where the race is not to the swift.

By contrast, one of the Major Activity Centre Structure Plans, Burwood Heights, is scheduled to have reached the Amendment stage within a year and NUN/MM within two. Hopefully, reaching such relatively early targets for gargantuan tasks will not be achieved by diverting Council officers from less dramatic planning assignments.

## THE WAY FORWARD

One of the more pragmatic features of Melbourne 2030 has been the review, under the heading of *Better Decisions Faster*, of processes which slow down the planning application system. We reported earlier this year that our submission was critical of the presumption that residents, as objectors, were the cause of many of the delays and were in danger of being unfairly disadvantaged by some of the options proposed. A summary of the responses following consideration of the submissions is now available in a publication sub-titled *The Way Forward*.

Many of the proposals have been taken a stage further and one, pre-lodgement certification, aims to reduce processing delays by allowing a council to appoint private certifiers to assess an application in advance and advise council of its suitability. While there are obvious time-saving benefits it would seem that this might raise criticism similar to that levelled at the ability of private surveyors to approve applications for single dwellings. Might it also encourage even more urban planners to leave councils and go to work in private firms?

Without knowing all the relevant details of Whitehorse Council's reaction to the idea we can only wait and see. Meanwhile they have introduced more stringent requirements for applications as well as a new submission/objection form - also on Council website: [www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au](http://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au)

## BLACKBURN SHOPPING CENTRE - COUNCIL RESPONDS TO PANEL

The Panel went out of its way to suggest how Council could resolve the many ambiguities in Amendment C40 (summarised in the last *Bulletin*) and the Officer's response subsequently supported adoption of most of the Panel's recommendations. These included replacement of the proposed Parking Precinct Plan and Schedule by making substantive changes to the new Local Planning Policy and modifying the references to built form and height in the Business Plan policy. All these were adopted by Council on 28 June and submitted to the Minister for approval.

During the course of the Council debate it was gratifying to hear Cr. Allan say that the BVRG's submission included the best available summary of all the issues involved. Certainly, had not specific objections been raised by the BVRG and others, the Amendment as originally proposed could well have given rise to numerous future problems.

## MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC STATEMENT (MSS) ON EXHIBITION 12 AUGUST

Proposed revisions to the MSS, incorporating a number of important planning policy changes, are on exhibition in the form of Amendment C50. Some of these reflect Council's responses to recommendations of the Blackburn Lake Surrounds (C46) Panel and the Blackburn Shopping Centre (C40) Panel, for both of which the Minister's approval is awaited at the time of writing.

Of particular interest is the long awaited new local policy on Residential Development which draws on the city wide Housing and Neighbourhood Character Studies. If the MSS is adopted as exhibited it will provide strategic justification for the identification of those residential areas preferred for higher density, incremental (disarmingly termed 'natural') and minimal change.

Available at Council Offices and Libraries and on [www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/what-docs.asp](http://www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/what-docs.asp) the Amendment is a long and detailed document, but it goes to the heart of many of the amenity concerns of residents. You are therefore urged to study it, raise any queries with Council, and send your submission (of which we would appreciate a copy) to reach Mr Gerard Gilfedder by 13 September



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