



BLACKBURN VILLAGE RESIDENTS GROUP

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BULLETIN No 28

JULY 1998

BLACKBURN ... STUNNINGLY LAID OUT, WELL DEFINED...

... and one of those quiet, leafy suburbs which warrant preservation - according to RMIT's Professor van Schaik - as reported in *The Age* of 7 June. This was also the message the BVRG endeavoured to convey to the Panel during the Public Hearing on the new Whitehorse Planning Scheme the previous week.

PANEL HEARING: COUNCIL THROWS DOWN THE GAUNTLET

Ian Pitt of Best Hooper led Council's submission, strongly defending Council's position on the preferred 1: 400 ratio for Medium Density Housing, stating that Whitehorse only required an increase of some 200 dwellings a year to meet predicted requirements (far less than the average annual increase of 996 dwellings since 1991). He added that Council's policy reflected the wishes of the community and if this stance was seen as a challenge to State government policy, then so be it. He made further pertinent comments on urban planning, which he said was all about change, should be transparent, but could never guarantee expectations.

While planning advocates of Ian Pitt's calibre are not thick on the ground, it is regrettable that a municipality of this size and importance does not employ a senior planner who would have been similarly capable of representing the city in such a forum.

The Hearing commenced on 3 June, continuing for seven days - spread over several weeks. The BVRG, the Blackburn & District Tree Society and Blackburn Residents Association all made their submissions on Friday 5 June. Representatives of the three organisations had previously joined in the Tree Society's 'Planning Issues' workshop, on 23 May.

The BVRG's submission, while wide ranging, was generally in support of Council's residential policies, but questioned their effective implementation. We suggested that in many cases Council might not have selected the best tools for the job - that they might not be capable of achieving desired outcomes. We now await the Panel Report to find out to what extent these claims are acknowledged, and subsequently taken on board by Council.

We have asked for two copies of the BVRG submission to be available to you through the reference section of the Blackburn Branch Library.

The presentation team is grateful to those supporters who also consumed some of the midnight oil - and without whose expert and willing assistance the submission would only have been a shadow of its ultimate form.

IS COUNCIL NOW FULLY COMMITTED ?

Council is to be commended for making a stand on housing density and for introducing other measures designed to enhance residential amenity. How effectively these policies are translated into practice depends in large part on the response of our municipal beauracracy.

Hopefully the administration will now show a commitment to reinforcing planning expertise within the organisation; an organisation in which there should be less room for management by exception - calling in more consultants or contractors to provide quick fix solutions; no place for the attitude implicit in last year's advertisement for Whitehorse town planners, where under the somewhat crass heading '*Business is booming*', it explained that staff were needed to '*...meet the continuing demand for development approvals*'.

NEW PLANNING 'INITIATIVES'

On 25 February the Minister announced new 'initiatives' for Medium Density Housing and Residential Development "... to give local councils more accountability for planning decisions..." and greater community input into design respectful of neighbourhood character. These five initiatives are now set out in a publication called *Medium-density housing and residential development Action Plan* (*Action Plan* for short). In brief they are:-

1. **Improved design to complement neighbourhoods:** Educational campaigns; awards for council projects which improve urban design; an Amendment to the Good Design Guide obliging applicants to prepare a detailed, design responsive site analysis and requiring that councils (from 30 April) certify that it is satisfactory.
2. **Improved Environmental Care - Vegetation Controls:** Encouragement for councils to seek Heritage and Landscape protection for trees and landscape features.
3. **Neighbourhood Agreements:** Provision for groups of neighbouring residents, with council endorsement, to have development controls registered on their titles.
4. **Caring for Character - Local Variations:** Encouragement of councils to actively study the need for Local Variations to the Good Design Guide so as to protect neighbourhood character and amenity.
5. **Review of Overlooking and Overshadowing :** Surveys and other studies to be conducted to establish whether more effective measures are required to limit overshadowing and overlooking both in medium density and single dwelling development.

These five ' initiatives' are yet to be proven and certainly won't be effective without decisive leadership by the Department and Councils. However, we urge you to consider them in more detail * and if the opportunity arises, to respond to any related surveys or invitations to comment.

Certainly, if it appears that anything in this Action Plan might help preserve your quality of life - don't hesitate to initiate action appropriate to your situation.

* Council and the Department of Infrastructure (Freecall 1800 180 181) have free brochures on the *Action Plan* and *Neighbourhood Agreements* and another, *Your Street Your Say*, which helps takes some of the confusion out of the planning permit process.

DIARY NOTE: BVRG DINNER - FRIDAY 20 NOVEMBER - DETAILS FOLLOW

USER PAYS

We had to obtain many documents and research numerous sources of information to prepare for the Planning Scheme Hearing. No longer is much of this sort of material provided free of charge and we have had to dip deeply into our coffers over the last year.

Therefore, with accounts appropriately audited, our Treasurer now needs you to gladden his heart with prompt and generous contributions towards our ongoing aim of representing your interests - as residents - in all planning issues affecting Blackburn.

Please complete and return the form below as soon as possible ! Thank you.

**TO: HON. TREASURER, BLACKBURN VILLAGE RESIDENTS GROUP
49 GLEN EBOR AVENUE, BLACKBURN 3130**

✓ for receipt

I/we attach our 1998/9 contribution: (block capitals or type please)

Name/s.....Address.....

.....Postcode..... Phone (H).....(W).....

Please attach cheque (single or family \$10/concession \$5) made payable to BVRG and crossed "Not Negotiable" and post/deliver to above address.

Please ✓ if we may add your name to those willing to assist us: (indicating how overleaf) - if you wish us to contact you with further information on the Group or local planning issues: - know of friends who would be interested in receiving a copy of this Bulletin: (name/s & address/es overleaf please). Thank you.