



## BLACKBURN VILLAGE RESIDENTS GROUP

25 Main Street, Blackburn 3130

Contact: R. Grainger

Phone: 9877 3348

Fax: 9894 3465

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#### GLASNOST ?

Preparations for the new Planning Scheme seem to have taken for ever - but the requirement that they be open to public scrutiny has given us opportunities to revisit some long term concerns.

One of these was the 'lost rezoning' we reported first in the September 1996 *Bulletin*. This was the 1994 Amendment intended to restore Residential Zoning to the housing at the rear of the South Parade car parks. Despite undertakings by various Council officers it was still absent from the 1997 draft of the new Planning Scheme. Only after the BVRG again raised the matter was the rezoning included in the 1998 version. We look forward to the time when it is once again designated Residential on the new Planning Scheme map.

The preparation process also enabled the BVRG to have Council consult more widely on certain parts of the Scheme's local content before submitting it for Ministerial approval; thus we were able to comment on the important Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) before it was endorsed in February. Other issues of particular relevance to Blackburn residents, such as our overlay proposal, will be reviewed separately in the near future.

**While attention is focused on urban planning it is the ideal time for all of us, as individual residents, to demonstrate how strongly we identify with the special character of Blackburn. Certainly whenever our immediate environment is threatened by some insensitive development, but also when Council invites comment on general planning issues - as they will shortly on the Housing Strategy.**

#### BRICKBATS AND BOUQUETS

Until some more certain measure of control is acknowledged, Council is to be commended for maintaining its local preference for a 1:400 ratio for unit development. It is also to be congratulated for adopting a policy of refusing development permits where trees have been deliberately cleared from a block before an application is lodged. However, your Committee has asked Council to review the practical application of this policy and to determine if it should be more clearly defined.

A frequent criticism of Council has been that, while the conscientious developer or householder must meet the cost and inconvenience of complying with planning conditions, others seem to ignore them with impunity, encouraged by a failure to supervise compliance or impose salutary penalties. That situation might change now that a Planning Enforcement Officer is to be appointed.

### **SAVE OUR SUBURBS (SOS)**

Seven years ago we were writing to the previous government to express dismay *'that the pervasive language of "efficiency", "output", "speed", "performance" and "easing development"'. (in planning system reforms then proposed) would 'reduce opportunities for the effective expression of community concerns...'*

For the ordinary resident very little seems to have changed, especially since the planning function has become more centralised. While the Minister has said that "local government...should have a frontline role in making planning decisions" it is obvious that Council planners, who play a critical role in the interpretation of policy, are especially conscious of their sensitive relationship with State government. In such circumstances, while groups such as ours can exert some influence at local Council level, only a statewide organisation can effectively convey concerns at that level.

At our annual dinner, Philip Warren-Smith, SOS Whitehorse representative, told us of the recognition that body had received during its short existence. And at our February meeting we agreed that the BVRG should join this umbrella organisation - one dedicated to protecting the rights of citizens to decide on the future shape of their suburban environment. We look forward to bringing you news of their endeavours. (See item p.3)

### **EVERYDAY ACCESS ONE DAY ?**

About a year ago we reported on our efforts to ensure that whatever commercial development was proposed for the old Caltex Service Station site in Blackburn Road, that it provide for integration with the rest of the centre by restoring access to and from the shopping centre car park.

We still hope that will eventuate, although the form of any future development must remain uncertain until the present decontamination works are completed.

### **WESTWARD HO!**

Anyone concerned about inappropriate development around Laburnum should get in touch with the recently formed Laburnum Residents Association (LRA), who oppose development detrimental to that neighbourhood. (Marianne Gardner 9877 0353 or Andrew Clark 9877 4792).

The LRA is also affiliated with SOS and we shall continue to liaise with them on matters of common interest. We wish them well in their efforts to improve the quality of residential environment in that area.

## **YOUR COMMITTEE**

**Appreciation:** While we don't usually single out individuals for special mention the retirement from the Committee of Angela Taylor last October was marked at the BVRG dinner with a presentation in recognition of her significant contribution. It was Angela who inspired others to form the BVRG in 1987 and who served in those difficult early years as Secretary. All those interested in retaining the distinctive character of Blackburn are indebted to her.

**Other changes:** Aileen Kelly has more recently had to resign from the Committee - she goes with our sincere thanks for many years of committed service to the Group.

The Committee now consists of:-

Malcolm Anderson (H) 9877 4952 Bernadette Cahill (H) 9877 7556 Ron Grainger [Secretary] (H) 9877 3348 David Morrison [Hon. Treasurer] (H) 9894 2531 Ian Swann (H) 9877 7084 Byron Troy [Chairman] (H) 9894 1156

**Invitation:** You are invited to contact Committee members if you wish to bring planning issues to the notice of the BVRG or to seek advice on others. Not least, we should be glad to hear from anyone who may be able to share in the work of the Committee !

## **WARD REVISION**

Many will welcome the proposal to put Blackburn back in one Ward - if you are one of those you should make sure that Council knows your views when they call for public comment in June.

## **RELAXED POLITICIANS**

It seems that most politicians are remarkably uninformed about, or uninterested in, town planning. Only some 30 out of a total of 132 State members bothered to respond to a recent SOS survey on planning concerns. Our local MLA was one of only 24 of those respondents who completed the questionnaire - and 5 of these used a 'pro-forma' reply prepared by the Minister. No doubt we will hear more from all of them on this subject at election time.

## **HERITAGE STUDY REPORT**

This is listed for presentation to Council in May. We anticipate that it will, unfortunately, include little reference to heritage features other than buildings.