



BLACKBURN VILLAGE RESIDENTS GROUP

25 Main Street, Blackburn 3130

Contact: R. Grainger

Phone: 9877 3348

Fax: 9877 3348

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THE NEW PLANNING SCHEME - A CURATE'S EGG ?

It will take some time to find out which parts are good and which bad. There are certainly some positive features in the new Scheme but it is difficult at first glance to assess the impact of all the changes, especially where there has been a variation in advice- such as which Overlays will be appropriate in given situations. In other words, there has been some goal post shifting.

This applies for instance to what was the Special Residential Zone, where a Significant Landscape Overlay is now regarded as the most suitable, an improvement on having two overlays as previously recommended (although it now comes with two schedules). More predictable was the anticipated 'sidelining' of the local medium density guidelines which included Council's preferred unit density of 1:400.

Adopted by Council on 19 April, the new format Planning Scheme for Whitehorse was approved by the Minister on 30 June and finally gazetted on 5 August. The long delay in its release was partly to allow inclusion of the many changes recommended by the Department and, no doubt, by other advisers to the Minister. Copies of the new Scheme* and associated maps are available for inspection at Council or may be downloaded from their Web site, www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au

We held up this Bulletin until approval of the Scheme was formally announced and will comment in the next issue on any items of significance to Blackburn residents.

Under the previous Scheme there were many instances of policies being misinterpreted and ordinances circumvented. We took up some of these cases and are continually reminded of others. At least the policies embodied in the new Scheme should no longer leave planning officers in doubt about the overriding importance Council places on preserving and enhancing neighbourhood character.

In the light of the Minister's rejection of the 1:400m.ratio for medium density housing residents who strongly identify with their neighbourhood should consider its protection by amendment of the new Scheme. Respect for neighbourhood character by single dwelling development also needs to be reinforced and this poses a real challenge - see Housing Study below.

* Obtainable at Department of Infrastructure Bookshop, Upper Plaza, Nauru House, 80 Collins Street, Melbourne (9655 8830) Hard copies @ \$50, CD Rom \$10

HOUSING STUDY

The interminable delays in producing clear interpretations on the various components of the new format Schemes and in giving clear direction as to application mean that the preparation of Amendments will also be a prolonged and tortuous exercise.

Citing delays by the Department in providing relevant practice notes and guidance, Council has postponed the scheduled release of the Housing Study summary and, consequently, the planned information day and individual discussions.

This study is of the utmost importance to residents - it will be used to justify the concept of preferred unit densities since the 1:400 ratio was rejected by Minister Maclellan. It should identify which areas might be developed at various densities and which might require protection to preserve special character. Projections on future population - not we hope the blanket estimates which the Department tends to apply regardless of localities- together with predicted housing needs - are expected to provide one basis for discussions with residents.

For your own benefit make every effort to study the material and to get involved in the discussions when details are announced.

HERITAGE REVIEW

The Review released by Council in May recommended heritage protection for 115 individual buildings and four areas in Mont Albert and Box Hill. The authors acknowledged that their brief, based on previous studies in Box Hill and Nunawading, excluded consideration of many potentially eligible buildings as well as historical features and sites other than buildings. Council has consulted those who would be affected by the introduction of heritage controls on the recommended buildings and sites.

The BVRG has successfully urged a commitment to further surveys which will include buildings and features omitted from this initial review. Access to a comprehensive record of all buildings and features of historical significance, whether or not eligible for a Heritage Overlay, would be of immense value to Council planning officers and to the community generally.

A DINNER DATE

Please make a diary note now on **Friday, 19 November** as the date for our end of year dinner. Details in next Bulletin.

SUPRISED ?

A recent SOS newsletter quotes an RMIT report on an investigation of medium density planning approvals from 1995 to 1998 in Stonnington, Yarra, Port Phillip and Boroondara, which found that the Good Design Guide was '*... not so much concerned with affordability, increased safety, and energy efficiency and other sustainable principles but with developer facilitation*'.

YOUR COMMITTEE

Over the last twelve months your Committee has made detailed submissions to Council on the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS), Vegetation Control Policy and the Heritage Review and will prepare a similar submission on the Housing Study when that is available for comment. **They would welcome copies of any personal submissions or any general observations you might have on the Housing Study - preferably in writing !**

The Committee has commented to Council on the paucity of formal planning commitments in the Business Plan for the ensuing year and has followed up the 1997 recommendations for special planning controls in central Blackburn.

Activity in urban planning has been intense over the last couple of years and without additional assistance at Committee level the BVRG cannot adequately handle a higher level of tasks. Maybe you can help. But even if you can't contribute in person we still need your financial support : **please make use of the enclosed subscription notice.**

EVERYDAY ACCESS ONE DAY ? (2)

Early this year we spoke to Council's Business Development Department, hoping they might convince Caltex to open an *IGA Everyday Supermarket* when they finally decontaminated the Blackburn Road site (hence the heading in the last *Bulletin*, as repeated above). While an *Everyday* store might not be a substitute for the medium sized supermarket once envisioned for Blackburn - a vision which finally evaporated following disputes between promoters - it would meet some of the need for ordinary grocery items no longer available locally.

We note that the Blackburn Centre Coordinator shares the commonly held view that '*Sadly, the days of being able to do all your weekly shopping at the local shopping centre seem to be fast disappearing*' (hastened, she might have added, by the overwhelming influence exerted by the free standing shopping centres). However, we believe that there will one day be a resurgence of interest in smaller convenience centres like Blackburn - and KPMG's half yearly Consumer Behaviour Monitor already reveals a trend in that direction.

Coincidentally, we had a request from a member asking us to reconsider our strategic involvement in promoting retail development. But rather than getting further involved in a field in which the BVRG has little expertise, the Committee has agreed that the best contribution they can make is to continue to urge planning initiatives for improved physical conditions in the area.

For instance, the BVRG has consistently opposed the removal of the dedicated left hand turn into South Parade from Blackburn Road - arguing that two thirds of the natural catchment for the centre lies East of Blackburn Road and that this restriction must reduce patronage from an already modest catchment. Similarly, we have pushed for convenient access to and from the Caltex site via the car park, partly to better integrate the site with the centre and partly to reduce the constant risk of vehicles turning in front of oncoming traffic in Blackburn Road - a practice unfortunately encouraged South of that site. And we support continuing endeavours to improve car parking facilities and pedestrian access.