



BLACKBURN VILLAGE RESIDENTS GROUP

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NEW PLANS FOR OLD CALTEX SITE

In May we were formerly advised that a third proposal had been lodged for redevelopment of this site. This third version did not include offices, one of the elements of the two earlier proposals opposed by the BVRG, but instead featured residential units above the ground floor shops.

While dispensation for parking remained the major concern of the BVRG and others the plans were a considerable improvement on those in previous applications. It was argued that they should have provided for better integration with the existing centre and nearby dwellings in terms of design and landscaping but, as in the majority of such cases, compromises were accepted by proponents and opponents. Council subsequently approved the application on 29 July although, in doing so, departed from the plans presented at the forum and at the expense of a landscaped frontage. Instead public land was given up to provide inset parking for six cars in front of the site. (We shall be interested to know if Council will institute a courage award for drivers reversing into one of those spaces).

Indications are that the redevelopment, subject only to an environmental audit, will commence later this year and after withdrawal of the previous (second version) which, at the time of writing remains listed for consideration by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). We await completion with interest, hoping that it will revitalise the centre without causing undue inconvenience to existing residents and traders

The whole exercise, lasting well over a year, reinforces our belief that residents must speak out when they learn of plans for inappropriate development. It will often prove a long and difficult exercise - dealing with this site has meant the BVRG spending countless hours since April 2001 studying the series of three proposals, submitting comments and attending forums. Although not always successful in achieving desired outcomes, opposition, as in this case, can block what would have been even more intrusive development.

PARKING AND RESIDENTIAL STREETS

One of the big concerns related to the Caltex site redevelopment was car parking. As with most applications for commercial development exemption from the relevant requirements for car parking spaces was sought, and was granted by Council. One obvious consequence of this practice is that a proportion of any additional vehicles generated by new developments are forced to park elsewhere - usually in nearby residential streets. By some mysterious leap of logic the connection is not recognised by Council's traffic experts.

Admittedly the demand for car parks in central Blackburn has increased over the years because rail commuters and centre workers seek long term parking in nearby streets. All the more reason, we would have thought, for requiring all new development to provide it's full share of parking space.

Since the BVRG first became involved in planning issues it has made frequent representations to reduce the through traffic flow in Blackburn Road. We have long recognised that increased use of Blackburn Road tends to 'cut the community in half' to the detriment of the local businesses and residents. Access to the centre from the east is made more difficult for vehicular and pedestrian traffic as are returns to the east, or visits to services and facilities located on that side. This is in addition to the obvious increases in noise, pollution and traffic hazards.

Despite Council also now having a policy to reduce through traffic in the municipality the Traffic Department recently made further proposals for restrictions in roadside parking to allow peak hour clearways between Central Road and The Avenue. The BVRG view was that this would merely open this short section of road to two lane traffic, causing more congestion and difficulty for pedestrians to cross and vehicles access from the east of Blackburn Road.

It soon became evident that this proposal had its genesis in the Blackburn Parking Precinct Plan, a consultants study which contained recommendations adopted by Council in 1999 but did not form part of Council's policy. It transpired that this 'extensive' parking study, while it obtained input from the local Chamber of Commerce, did not conduct any consultation with residents, other than those who might have belonged to Probus groups then meeting in one of the halls in the centre !

It later still became evident that, following normal practice, the only residents surveyed about the proposed parking restrictions and clearways were those in households immediately adjacent to the subject areas of roadway, this despite acknowledgement in the report which went to Council that residents in nearby streets would be affected by the proposed change. This survey itself - although showing a majority in favour of clearways - was of only sixteen traders and residents. In addition it caused adverse comment, both because it was difficult to comprehend and required a response within a matter of several days. Council accordingly deferred discussion of the proposals and a public meeting was held to which some of those residents and traders affected were invited.

It was made clear at the meeting that the survey methods employed were standard practice but strong representations were made for an extended and more explicit survey which was undertaken during July. This new survey, omitted an explanation to those not previously surveyed of the reasons for and against the various proposals. As it also contained conflicting lodgement dates an administrative decision was made to extend the date and include a copy of the minutes of the public meeting. But this advice and meeting notes were not distributed until several days before the extended closure date and contained no details of arrangements for re-surveying those who might have already responded.

We do not wish to subject members to a full recital of the inept handling of this important matter - suffice it to say that, at the Special meeting of Council on 5 August, we reiterated our strong request for a further deferral and for an urgent review of traffic management processes and practices. By the time of that meeting the Officers had also recommended a deferral, the extended survey having produced no clear preference for any of the proposed options and a speed check on the relevant section of road revealing that, on average, vehicles already travelled at close to the maximum speed, (despite the fact that many would have had a standing start at the crossing).

We support the view that there needs to be more pressure brought by Council on State authorities and transport operators to provide additional commuter parking but Council itself will have to demonstrate that it is serious about implementing overall policy on traffic matters and not countenance repeats of the sort of 'quick fix' attempted in this instance.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

We note that SOS (Save our Suburbs) and various Councils, including Whitehorse, have voiced concerns about developers using VCAT to amend and revise plans in order to circumvent council policies on local planning issues. As now intended for residential development under Rescode, the onus is on the developer/applicant to first establish which features of the areas surrounding a site are regarded as important to local residents and users and to design something respectful of those, preferably in consultation with that community. Developers should only use VCAT as an avenue of appeal against a council decision, not as a means of having alternative plans accepted.

BLACKBURN LAKE ENVIRONS STUDY

After many delays and extensions the (renamed) Study of this area is at last underway. A meeting was held on 22 May to introduce the consultant engaged to head the Study and allow residents to voice their ranking on the features which they saw as important in defining their neighbourhood. It was well attended and, as expected, residents again emphasised their strong attachment to the special features which contribute to the character of their neighbourhood.

The whole exercise was generated by a 1997 BVRG recommendation based on the response to a survey on protective planning controls in central Blackburn conducted by the BVRG earlier that year. We were later instrumental in having the Study area extended to other parts of Blackburn.

While it was after a much longer delay than we had at first hoped - residents at last had an opportunity - five years later - to represent their views on planning controls.

We understand that a report and recommendations will be submitted to Council in the next couple of months and that all those living in the areas potentially affected will be then notified and have an opportunity to respond. Watch out for further advice by Council and ensure you register your views on any proposed planning changes.

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

As with all other residents we get sick, go on holidays, have work and family commitments, or need to walk the dog, but if you have an urgent need to contact us and can't get a response from the address/ phone at the head of this Bulletin, here are all Committee addresses and phone numbers.

David Morrison,	49 Glen Ebor Avenue,	9894 2531
Meg Probyn,	40 Main Street,	9878 7919
Ron Grainger,	25 Main Street,	9877 3348
Bernadette Cahill,	39 Blackburn Road,	9877 7556
Ian Swann,	15 Linum Street	9877 7084

As a number of you will be aware we have subscribed to an email service to enable an alternative means of contact between the committee and those members on the internet who have advised us of their email address. We shall be investigating expanded use of this medium including sending those members the *Bulletin* and any other appropriate information in electronic form. Please note our address now, bvrgvic@hotmail.com - and if you haven't given us your current email address please do so when returning your subscription renewal (enclosed).

NEW ARRIVALS

A recent article in *The Age* was sub-headed '*Looking for a suburb of impending boom? Look no further than Blackburn*'. While we are all aware of the advantages of living here not all newcomers appreciate the fragility of the natural environment which contributes so significantly to it's special character of the suburb. We mail an annual appeal to known recent arrivals to join the BVRG in helping to protect the amenity of the area. You might well know of others who could be interested. If so please pass them a copy of your recent Bulletin - or let us know their name and address when you return your subscription.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Those longer term residents who are members will be aware of the efforts we make to help preserve and enhance the area in which we live and we once again seek your support by completing and returning the attached renewal slip. We have retained the same low fee and ask for your prompt response.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Please note that the AGM has been scheduled for the evening of Thursday 7 November and the BVRG Dinner on Friday 15 November. More details in the next issue.

HOUSING STUDY

Copies of this Study are available at Council offices and the Libraries and may be accessed through Councils website (www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au).

You will note that it proposes that the area from Vine Street to Queen Street be one of thirteen identified for potential residential development consisting of up to three storey housing with a dwelling density of 1:200. This is in excess of the height (two storey) and density (1:240) limits envisaged in the Blackburn Precinct Housing Policy, covering much of the same area and agreed after extensive public consultation with the then Nunawading City Council in 1993.

(Another of the nominated areas is immediately north-east of Laburnum Station).

While the time for public comment has now concluded this does not prevent you putting your views on the Study to councillors and, if Council endorses any proposals which require Amendment to the Whitehorse Planning Scheme, from making a submission when that is exhibited.

NEIGHBOURS INTERESTED

SHARE THIS BULLETIN WITH THEM

ARRANGE FOR US TO CONTACT