

Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

I live in Victory Boulevard, adjacent to Markham Avenue, Ashburton, where it is proposed to redevelop the Markham Estate. I therefore appreciate the opportunity to provide some comments to the Legal and Social Issues Committee regarding this Inquiry.

I will focus on the following terms of reference: -

- the allocation of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units
- the proposed significant increase in density and heights and any local environmental impacts, such as the loss of open space and mature vegetation;
- the removal of planning controls from local councils, and planning implications surrounding communities including existing neighbourhood character, traffic flow and provisions of services
- transparency and genuine community consultation with affected residents, neighbouring communities and the broader Victorian community
- public housing envisaged in Markham Avenue, Ashburton.

Allocation of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units

I suggest a zero allocation. Why not simply replace dilapidated public housing with public housing that complies with the Government's own guidelines for new apartments? And increase the number of public housing dwellings using three-storey blocks?

The need to renew and increase public housing is obvious to all Victorians. However, with respect to Markham Estate (and presumably this philosophy applies to the Housing Renewal program as a whole) the Victorian Government has stated that :

"This will be funded by the construction of 190 townhouses and apartments that will ensure that new homes are provided at no cost to the taxpayer." ¹ [Markham Estate Redevelopment](#)

Why does it require the sale of 163 private housing units to cover the cost of 62 public housing units? on land already owned by Victoria? What profit margin has been calculated? Has Development Victoria calculated how much profit they expect to make on the various Urban Renewal projects? Who will be accountable and how will the profits be tracked and used?

There has been no explanation as to **why** there should be no financial cost to the taxpayer. The public housing that is being demolished was built with costs carried by all Victorians. So, why is there now a requirement that Victorians should not share in any of the financial costs of the replacements?

¹ http://www.places.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/24524/About-the-project-web.pdf

In fact, with the allocation of some of the public land to private housing, there is a very real **social** cost to the **local** community. Public land is being given up and will no longer be available to the local community.

Costs cannot always be identified in dollar terms. Community values do not appear in the columns of a financial ledger. Victorian taxpayers may not be required to pay any dollars for the increase in public housing, but local residents will pay a huge cost in the impact on the character of their community.

The Government is being disingenuous by saying that the new homes will be provided at no cost. “Cost-neutral” is the term that has been used. The implication is that the sale of the private housing, on what was previously public land, will cover (and no more than cover) the dollar costs of removing and renewing the old public housing. Unfortunately for the Government, a departmental email referred to “**super profits**” in relation to Markham Estate, [URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY VICTORIA AMENDMENT \(DEVELOPMENT VICTORIA\) BILL 2016](#)

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The sale of private units on Markham Estate in Ashburton will be enormously profitable. It will result in a loss of public land and actually fewer public housing bedrooms than there were on the original Markham Housing estate.

The question must be asked, “What is the Government’s priority? Improving public housing availability? Or Land Profiteering?”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Development Victoria be required to identify the profit expected from the various projects occurring under the Urban Renewal Program.

Public Housing projects to be funded by the Victorian taxpayer.

The Government resist the temptation to sell public land.

The proposed significant increase in density and heights and any local environmental impacts, such as the loss of open space and mature vegetation

Victoria, with a population of 5.8 million, is almost twice the size of England with a population of 66 million. It is simply not true that growth in Victoria’s population must be accommodated by greater densification of Melbourne. True, it is cheaper than expanding the City fringe or building new towns with all the extra infrastructure involved. Fortunately our predecessors did not think along these lines. They were willing to invest for the future. Densification means less expense for the Government, but it also means more people living on top of one another in crowded suburbs of multi-storey apartment blocks and congested roads.

² https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/daily-hansard/Assembly_2016/Assembly_Daily_Extract_Wednesday_7_December_2016_from_Book_17.pdf

Every suburb of Melbourne has its own unique character. We owe it to future generations to protect the specialness of our heritage neighbourhoods. Densification, such an ugly word, will result in established homes and businesses being demolished. Our individual streets and lanes with their much-loved traditional and mature trees will be replaced by roads lined with oh-so-neat housing units and multi-storey apartment blocks. Architects' photo-shopped pictures with stick-like people posing in unnatural 'park' settings all too cruelly show us what will become of our local communities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Urban Renewal Program to relinquish the concept of densification and focus on expanding the outer fringes of Melbourne and regional towns.

The removal of planning controls from local councils, and planning implications surrounding communities including existing neighbourhood character, traffic flow and provisions of services

Local councils are responsible for ensuring that individuals, families, and communities flourish in a planned environment where homes and businesses exist in social harmony. To ensure this happens strategies are developed, and planning controls created, with great care and extensive consultation. The controls must take into consideration the unique needs of the local environs and the requirements of architects, residents, businesses, and predicted service demands. It is therefore essential that councils have the ability to make decisions concerning the location and type of buildings which are developed within their municipality.

RECOMMENDATION

Urban Renewal projects be required to comply with local council planning controls and any planning schemes.

Transparency and genuine community consultation with affected residents, neighbouring communities and the broader Victorian community

According to the official documentation, redevelopment proposals for Markham Estate were described in leaflets which were 'letter-boxed' to homes in the local area. The official Engagement report states that 1500 leaflets were letter-boxed.³ [Markham-Engagement-Report](#)

I live in an adjacent street but did not receive a leaflet until I contacted Places Victoria. None of my near neighbours received a leaflet in their letter-box. The report also states that 'door-knocking' occurred. Again, neither I nor my neighbours were 'door-knocked'. The report states that, in fact, only 15 residents were actually contacted by 'door-knocking'. This is, to put it mildly, ridiculous.

³ http://www.places.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0014/28040/Markham-Engagement-Report.pdf

Several mornings there were representatives who stood on street corners to answer questions and listen to comments. I spoke to these staff and voiced my concerns. However, at no stage did I see any of the staff documenting those concerns.

Public Housing envisaged in Markham Avenue, Ashburton

Does Markham Avenue come under the Public Housing Renewal Program?

The Terms of Reference include Markham Estate. The website [Public Housing Renewal Program](#)⁴ has a list of projects but this does not include Markham; this is apparently because Markham is not considered to be part of the Public Housing Renewal Program, but it is not clear to me why this is the case.

Clarification needed as to what is being proposed for Markham Avenue

At the end of September 2017 it was reported in the press [Progress Leader, 28/9/17](#)⁵ that the number of dwellings to be built would be 225, 62 of which would be for public housing. This implies 163 will be sold as private dwellings. However, the Development Victoria website (as at end of October) states that there will be 188 private dwellings.

The website also states that a revised plan results in an increased setback to the east of building F. However, the Boroondara Council states⁶ [Positive signs on Markham Development](#) that revised plans result in setbacks being increased for '*both the eastern and southern boundaries*'.

Markham Avenue being sacrificed on the altar of densification ... or greed?

An area of 1.45 hectare which once had 56 dwellings is now proposed to have 225. There will be no possibility of preserving established trees. Any trees that are planted will need to be of small canopy and maintained as such. There will be considerable basement construction (to provide parking) and this will inevitably alter the water table, affecting established native trees in the Reserve and along Gardiners Creek bicycle trail.

Markham Avenue is always clogged with vehicles whenever a cricket or soccer game occurs on the Reserve playing field. The adjoining roads, Ashburn Grove and Victory Boulevard, are very busy morning and evening. There is a 'blind' curve near a popular children's playground which attracts many families and their cars. Victory Boulevard is a feeder to Warrigal Road, one of Melbourne's busiest suburban roads. Vehicles attempting to turn right from the Boulevard into Warrigal must wait in the middle of Warrigal, sheltering in a narrow median

⁴ <http://housing.vic.gov.au/public-housing-renewal-program>

⁵ <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/inner-east/the-state-government-reviews-ashburtons-markham-estate-and-reduces-its-size-by-25-apartments/news-story/157a828ce4a5028662df10070f74b476>

⁶ <https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/about-council/news-and-media/media-centre/media-releases/positive-signs-markham-estate-development>

strip. This is very difficult for a caravan or car with a trailer. An extra 255 dwellings will obviously result in many more vehicles using these streets.

According to the development plans, there will be no need to increase resources such as the local schools. This is difficult to understand because the proposal will result in an extra 225 families.

What was a tiny community of 56 dwellings will become a 225-residential conurbation with associated vehicles, squeezed onto the same footprint that previously held 56 units. This conglomeration will result in a very significant impact on the traffic in Markham Avenue and the adjacent roads of Ashburn Grove and Victory Boulevard. The character of the neighbourhood will be massively affected by 5-storey buildings overlooking homes, Markham Reserve, and Gardiners Creek bicycle trail. Where previously there were two-storey apartment units shaded by established native trees in a quiet avenue, there will be 5-storey blocks with a statistically calculated allocation of space and natural light. The unique character of this quintessential part of Melbourne will be irretrievably damaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Development Victoria website to clearly describe what is being proposed for Markham Avenue.

The Markham Avenue redevelopment to consist solely of 70 public housing residential units (a 25% increase above the previous 56).

Markham Avenue redevelopment to be funded by the Victorian taxpayer.

The accounting cost of any redevelopment of public housing should allow for the fact that public land is owned by the State of Victoria..