

## **SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES (Legislation and References)**

### **Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

*3081 Community Development Renewal Group* wishes to comment on the plan for the renewal of the Bell/Bardia and Tarakan Estates in Heidelberg West, postcode 3081. This group has recently been involved in the Social Housing Renewal Standing Advisory Committee's hearings on proposed amendments to planning rules for Bell/Bardia and Tarakan Estates.

*3081 Renewal Community Development Group* is comprised of members of Transition Banyule and Transition 3081 and includes local residents and St Pius X School. Transition Towns is a global movement bringing people together to make *their* towns sustainable. Transition Banyule formed in 2009 and has inspired the establishment of sustainability groups in Banyule, including Transition 3081.

The plan for renewal is generally welcomed by the Group as we see redevelopment of the estates as a unique opportunity for collaboration between the existing active local community network, Banyule Council and the State Government.

The government's policy of developing mixed tenure housing aims to find an effective way to fund an increase in the public housing stock, and to create a more cohesive community by decreasing the stigma of being a public housing tenant, thought by some to have been exacerbated by previous policies of segregating public housing from privately rented or owned homes.

Social cohesion is not promoted by just putting people in homes next to each other. The mixed tenure approach to public housing estates goes beyond the building blocks created by the planning scheme being more about the implementation of good design initiatives that focus on creating the foundations for sustainable, connected, socially diverse communities and ensuring social housing is less identifiable or distinct from private tenure. Most public housing is surrounded by private housing anyway. Meaningful interactions develop through purposeful gatherings and shared activities and these can be facilitated by the deliberative design of the proposed community activity spaces and a mix of housing types in the estates. A mix of owner occupiers and private renters will over time come to occupy the private homes, with a corresponding varied commitment to the local community. This needs to be taken into account also at the planning stage.

#### **AMENDMENT OF PLANNING RULES TO FACILITATE RENEWAL**

The proposal to amend the planning rules to designate the Tarakan and Bell/Bardia estates as Mixed Use Zones and Diversity Areas provides opportunities to include facilities in the development that foster social interaction among residents, and between residents and the wider community.

We understand that the redevelopment of the estates will include the provision of spaces for nonresidential uses (mixed use, including commercial and retail). These spaces should largely be used to support community integration and not retail or full cost commercial as these would affect the viability of a Bell Street Mall redevelopment. More appropriate uses for these spaces would be homework clubs, studios for music making and other meaningful activities for children and teenagers. Initiatives aimed at young people would be particularly important in an area like Heidelberg West. A recent draft Social Infrastructure Assessment made little reference to the needs of young people.

Other spaces, for example on the Tarakan Estate could be used for a "Fix-It" Café if located on the southern border adjoining and possibly, in partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic and adjoining the Bell Street Mall. This is only one possible example of a practical and useful Social Enterprise for residents and the surrounding neighbourhood.

We ask State Government to be proactive on their commitment to social cohesion and fund real low-rental opportunities for social enterprises. An increase of residents will mean a need for strong social/community infrastructure. We ask that funding of this be provided through the State. This is imperative for social cohesion. We ask for no 'retail' space but State funded partnerships that will enable Social Enterprises and partnerships with Banyule Community Health, Banyule Council and residents. A Wellbeing Centre is another example of a community resource would destroy any stigma whilst providing great opportunity.

A Community Arts Centre and a library might also be included or developed nearby by building in the 'air space' above the Eastern section of Mall Car park. This would also create a gathering space/hub adjoining the Mall and so integrate the new estates with the existing infrastructure.

## **HOUSING MIX**

The public/private housing mix on the estates has not been finalized in Heidelberg West, but, like the Council, are concerned at current proposals by DHHS for a significant imbalance of private over public units especially in Bell/Bardia. As of March 2016, there were almost 40,000 applicants for public housing in Victoria, with 10,000 being the most vulnerable people, with waiting times of two years. With a proposed increase in public housing of 10% this still leaves approximately 32,000 people on the waiting list.

There is a crisis in affordable housing for single older women, some fleeing domestic violence and a substantial increase in the proportion of single bedroom dwellings for this group in Bell/Bardia Estate might prove a huge asset to the community. Many of these women would grasp the opportunity to contribute to the creation of a cohesive community through their involvement community gardens, social enterprises, and general community activities.

We also propose that the inclusion of cohousing arrangements in both renewal sites would increase the commitment to neighbourhood, and facilitate mixing with the wider vibrant and creative 3081 community. Banyule is already associated with world leadership in housing with Murundaka Cohousing Community in its midst.

## **COHOUSING**

Cohousing is a model of community living. Community members have their own self-contained homes but there are a number of common spaces or facilities that community members share. The Common House is the heart of any cohousing community and it is where community members share regular meals together, hold social events, or have meetings where they manage the business of the community.

The cohousing model started in Denmark in the 1960s, then spread throughout Scandinavia; became popular in North America in the 1980s, and has since spread throughout the world.

### **Why is cohousing relevant to the Bell/Bardia and Tarakan estates?**

The proposed amendments to the Banyule Planning Scheme seek to facilitate and guide the redevelopment of the Bell/Bardia and Tarakan estates in Heidelberg West to create a mix of new public and private dwellings. Inclusion of cohousing in the Development Plan Overlays and Design Framework prepared in support of the amendment would increase the likelihood of outcomes that align with the *Design Principles for the Public Housing Renewal program*. In particular, a cohousing development is relevant to the following Design Principles:

03 – Safe Places: cohousing facilitates tenant engagement and creates safe, active communities and spaces.

05 – Neighbourhood Contribution: cohousing enhances the neighbourhood character and delivers ‘good neighbour’ outcomes.

06 – Tenure Equity: the self-management model and participation by tenants in cohousing has the potential to facilitate a successful public / private mix.

07 – Non-Residential Uses: cohousing stimulates local activity and participation, and become a local hub of activity.

10 – Social Integration: the cohousing model fosters social connections between residents and the local community.

### **A local example: Murundaka Cohousing Community, Heidelberg Heights**

Murundaka Cohousing Community is located in Heidelberg Heights. It is an 18-unit cohousing development and was established in 2011. Funding for Murundaka Cohousing Community came from the federal government’s Nation Building project and the funding that was made available to the social housing sector. Common Equity Housing (CEHL) undertook several development projects at that time (2009- 10), including the cohousing development with Earth Co-op in order to trial a different model of housing development.

Initially envisaged as a public / private mix, the development build began in 2010 and was complete in late 2011 with residents moving in for the first days of summer in 2011. The final development was an 18-unit site with common facilities including garden, laundry, car-park, workshop, and a multi-purpose building (called the Common House) which includes a large kitchen, dining / meeting space, and guest rooms. Now in its’ sixth year of existence, Murundaka is an established part of the local community with links to other local community groups, schools, and local council. Murundaka also give back; with outreach programs, workshops, hosting travelers and guests, and being involved in other community events. Murundaka has consistently run public sustainability workshops for the past five years with funding assistance from Banyule City Council, and recently Murundaka hosting the Mapping the Groundswell project which was a community-engagement initiative to map sustainable businesses and projects in the local area.

### **Cohousing in Australia**

There are other examples of cohousing communities in Australia:

- Cascade Cohousing in Hobart, Tasmania (est. 1992)
- Pinakarri Cohousing in Fremantle, Western Australia (est. 1999)
- Christie Walk in Adelaide, South Australia (est. 2006)

There are also a number of other forming cohousing groups in Melbourne:

- Urban Coup
- CoWest

- Frankston Digs
- Cohousing Banyule.

Added to this there is an extensive number of intentional communities who share similarities to cohousing:

- Commonground Co-operative in Seymour, Victoria (est. 1984)
- Moora Moora Co-operative in Healesville, Victoria (est. 1975)
- Bend of Islands in the Shire of Nillumbik, Victoria (est. 2000)

### **Benefits of cohousing**

#### *Community-focused*

Cohousing has been around since the 1960s. The original cohousing buildings in Denmark weren't purpose built, but they were people (mainly single parents and older people) who already lived together in apartment blocks and joined together to help one another with meals and childcare. This model was later formalized as it became popular and spread throughout North America but the fundamental idea of people coming together to help each other is still one of the foundation benefits of living in cohousing. We have seen that benefit at our own cohousing community at Murundaka in Heidelberg Heights. After five years we now have a close-knit community with people helping each other with meals, childcare, sharing resources (like cars and tools) and maintaining the community and common facilities together.

#### *Empowered community members*

There are also other benefits alongside the community focus. Cohousing and the housing co-operative model, which operates under sweat-equity, self-management model for things like finance and building maintenance, also empowers members to learn new skills and become more self-reliant and independent.

#### *Lower environmental impact*

Another benefit of the cohousing model is that the 'sharing economy' of the cohousing community naturally supports a lower-impact (environmental) lifestyle. Residents share resources like cars, bikes (including electric bikes), tools, washing machines, and eat together regularly, buying in bulk and reducing waste.

### **Criticism of public / private mix model**

A number of sources have recently been critically of the State Government's approach of converting older public housing sites to public / private mix. Kate Shaw and Abdullah Jama from the University of Melbourne published a report last year citing an ineffective mix of the public and private developments on the Carlton site at Lygon and Rathdowne streets. They cited that public and private tenants do not mix, and that they are separated into two buildings with separate entrances, with exclusive facilities for private tenants that public tenants can't access. Other anecdotal feedback from other members in the Common Equity Housing program who were part of a similar redevelopment five years ago in Abbotsford on Gipps Street, where they often feel 'looked-down upon' by private owners in the building because they are public tenants.

### **Could cohousing be an alternative?**

Murundaka Cohousing Community in Heidelberg Heights is an all-rental, social housing development through the CEHL co-operative housing program – though there were early discussions that the development would be a mix of private and public tenancies. Murundaka has been a success – it has become an important hub in the local community (as illustrated by being a multiple grant recipient

from Banyule City Council) for different public outreach projects and it is currently under consideration for multiple Planning Institute of Australia design awards.

Although Murundaka is an all-public development, cohousing has proven to be a successful public / private mix model in other places, including at Pinakarri Cohousing in Fremantle, Western Australia and overseas.

### **Cohousing design and planning suggestions**

Well-designed cohousing developments facilitate social cohesion and safer spaces and places. Listed below are suggested planning ideas relating to cohousing:

- Common House: a multi-purpose space that is shared, accessible, and fully equipped to meet resident's needs; including kitchen, lounge, dining areas.
- Communal outdoor areas that are accessible to residents.
- Bike storage facilities.
- Shared car-parking.
- Dwellings designed with minimal space and fit-out to facilitate and encourage use of communal facilities.
- Spaces that are designed to enable wheelchair access.

*An effective cohousing outcome would also consider:*

- A binding maintenance agreement between tenants and their dwellings and common areas.
- Sustainable travel plans

### **ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE DESIGN (ESD)**

Any renewal must place emphasis on ecologically sustainable design. The planning rules already require that a Development Plan has:

*"An Ecologically Sustainable Development Plan that demonstrates how development on the site will achieve best practice standards and incorporate innovative initiatives on a precinct-wide scale. The Plan is to address the areas of energy efficiency, water resources, indoor environment quality, storm water management, transport, waste management, innovation and urban ecology.*

This requirement, along with state and local government policies and plans, the Apartment Design Guidelines for Victoria, other documents, plans and reports required as part of a Development Plan and the 13 Design Principles for the Public Housing Renewal Program does seem to provide a detailed framework for ensuring that the Development Plans for both estates will have many of the best practice design initiatives that we seek.

We are assured by DHHS that the aim is for the new dwellings to have a 7\* Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) energy efficiency rating. NatHERS ratings enable builders to demonstrate buildings meet the mandatory energy efficiency requirements for homes and major renovations based on the National Construction Code (NCC). The NCC details the **minimum** necessary requirements for safety, health, amenity and sustainability in the design and construction of new buildings throughout Australia.

We want DHHS and their development partner(s) to aim higher than the minimum to ensure the development would result in comfortable, healthy, energy efficient, sustainable and 'low running cost homes' and housing of which Government and residents can be proud.

We do not get a sense that the Development Plans will contain sufficient innovations to contribute significantly to the mitigation of carbon emissions, and prepare for the severe weather events that will inevitably occur in the lifetime of these buildings and their potential occupants. In particular, there are no specifications that promote maximum roof area being suitable for photovoltaic energy systems, all appliances to be electric and the promotion of electric vehicles with electric car and E-bike charging facilities in carparks.

Our group wants a high level of innovation in 3081.

### **ENVIRONMENT CORRIDOR**

The local Catholic primary school and this Group has a vision for a green corridor between the Tarakan site and the existing development of the St Pius Environment Park to provide a therapeutic space to nurture the developing community and rehabilitate the indigenous plant and animal populations. With creative oversight this green space could extend beyond the Tarakan development site to link with The Mall and the Bell/Bardia development site. Ultimately, our vision is of a green corridor that stretches from the St Pius Environment Park all the way to Darebin Creek. This would connect our communities, reinvigorate the shopping precinct and truly make us a city of the future.

### **THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT ON 3081 INFRASTRUCTURE**

A Preliminary Social Infrastructure Assessment for the area has been completed by ASR Research Community Planning, to advise DHHS on whether additional social infrastructure assessment work is required to be undertaken as part any future Development Plan application. We believe that ASR's assessment did not adequately address, among other things:

- Alternative provision for local young people, particularly those who do not participate in organized sport;
- Potential population growth in the surrounding streets and wider 3081, the pace of which is illustrated in Figure 1;
- The absence of a local police station.

The ASR report also recommends that the Council consider either or both a new large-scale community hub or a new consolidated facility to accommodate the Olympic Adult Education service in the area.

We understand that DHHS have accepted that there is a need for a further social infrastructure assessment to be undertaken.

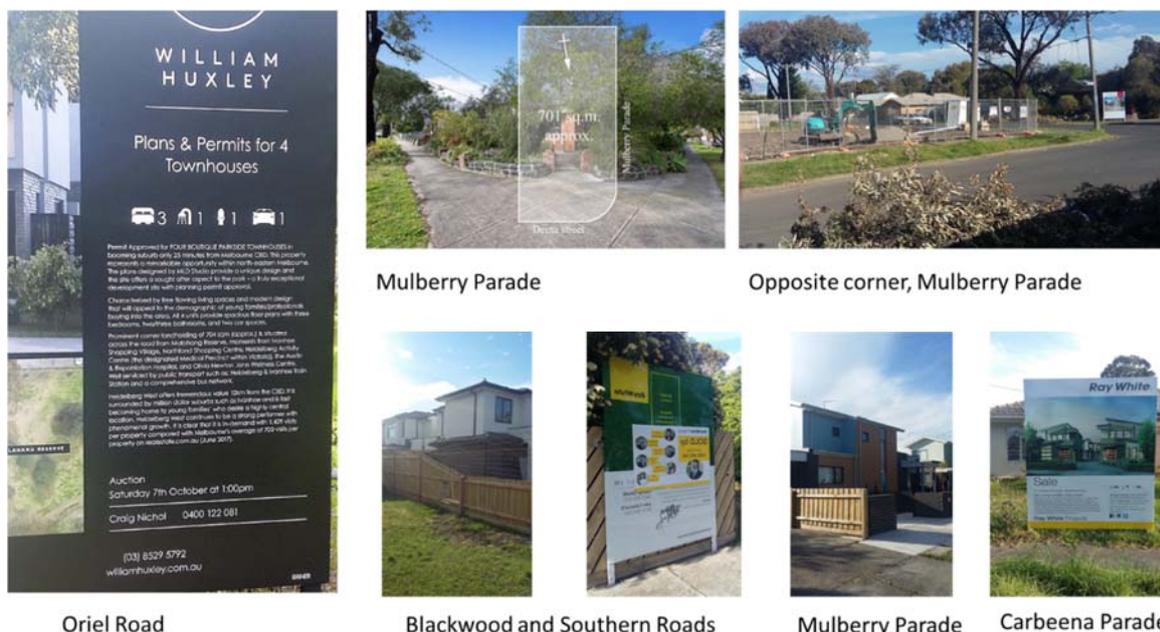


Figure 1 Recent and prospective development near sites

**PARKING AND TRAFFIC**

Parking is always an issue in new developments. With some amendment a proposed Parking Overlay within the planning rules has been accepted by Banyule Council. It remains to be seen whether there will be an overflow of cars on to the streets adjacent to the estates. Parking on the nature strip in West Heidelberg seems at present to be part of the local “neighbourhood character”.

The Development Plan must include an Integrated Transport and Traffic Management Plan. The new planning rules do not seem to be future orientated, with no reference in schedules to support the expected increase use of electric vehicles, including E-Bikes, with charging stations.

**CYCLISTS AND PEDESTRIANS**

Current proposals for the redevelopment contain a range of initiatives that support safe cycle and pedestrian paths. A route that traverses the two sites from Waterdale Road at one end to the Darebin Creek and includes the Olympic Village campus of Charles LaTrobe College would be a good outcome. Consideration should also be given to current public transport along school routes and perhaps a Community bus which could facilitate school runs. Provision for a Community bus (electric) should be part of the Integrated Transport and Traffic Management Plan.

**THE MINISTER FOR PLANNING AS RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITY**

We have advocated strongly that our group along with Banyule Council and other community groups and individuals should have the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the Development Plan and final design of the estates. DHHS proposes to contract with their development partner(s) that this consultation must happen as Phase 4 of their communication and engagement with residents, community, stakeholders and agencies. However, this commitment is not part of the planning rules which identify only the requirement for the Responsible Authority to consult with Banyule City Council. It takes far more than planning rules to determine success of attempts such as this renewal process to bring about a healthy, socially cohesive, connected and sustainable community.

## ONGOING COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

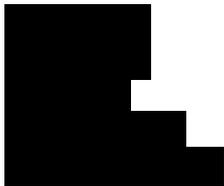
We believe that is imperative for the ongoing success of this renewal project that it be a condition of the Responsible Authority to work in partnership with Banyule Council and the 3081 community. The West Heidelberg community has a history of dynamic partnership with Banyule Council. Such collaboration will build on the already existing strengths and vibrancy of the many local initiatives and will bring about a healthy, cohesive and sustain-able community in Heidelberg West. We would therefore expect that this is inclusive of consultations with our local Aboriginal community (which appears not to have occurred so far).

## SUMMING UP

The Victorian Governments proposals for renewal of public housing purports to promote social cohesion. Social cohesion is not promoted by just putting people in homes next to each other but is more about the implementation of good design focusing on creating the foundations for sustainable, connected, socially diverse communities. Meaningful interactions develop through purposeful gatherings, shared spaces and shared activities. These are facilitated by the Deliberative Design of the proposed community activity spaces and a mix of housing types in the estates including co-housing. Postcode 3081 is full of purposeful gatherings, shared spaces and shared activities. The available knowledge, skills, and commitment within the neighbourhood is unbounded and waiting to be tapped to assist in integrating new members to the community, and reintegrating returning public housing tenants.

The Bell/Bardia/Tarakan project is an opportunity for the Victorian State Government to showcase to the rest of the world that in Australia there is progressive, innovative and visionary thinking about addressing many city living issues and climate change, comparable to that in Europe. Such a project will make West Heidelberg "the place to be", attracting a creative and innovative community and helping to reduce current negative perceptions of the area.

We have been told that the development of the estates will be provided with spaces for community use. It is essential that the Victorian Government contributes funding to ensure that developers do not require market rents to pay for these spaces as these will make an enormous contribution to ensuring the aim of the government to create an inclusive community.

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|---------------------|---|
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