

## Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important subject. I consider my submission to be linked to the following terms of reference:

- 1) *Review the evidence of the contribution of the natural and built environments to the promotion of health and well being;*
- 3) *Assess the extent to which these factors are currently taken into account in environmental planning and design in both the public and private sectors, with particular reference to the new growth areas;*
- 5) (d) *the consistency of policy approaches across the Victorian government to promote health through evidence based environmental planning and design measures; and*
- 5) (e) *the role of public open space in promoting health.*

I wish to refer briefly to a series of attached case studies, all focussed on the City of Melbourne local government area:

- 1) 49-53 Batman St, West Melbourne [a large apartment block with limited amenity for occupants]
- 2) Latrobe Close Redevelopment, North Melbourne [a Nation Building Social Housing project]
- 3) City North and Arden Macaulay Draft Structure Plans [currently in consideration by the City of Melbourne.

If required I am happy to elaborate further on these brief submissions.

**Kind regards**  
**Angela Williams**



unhappy that their living space/bedrooms are sub standard in terms of privacy and access to light and air.

Although I was not an objector to the proposal [as I only became aware of it on the night it was going before council committee] I sent an email to a Councillor and a senior council officer prior to the meeting which stated the following:

*I note that there is an application going before committee tonight which is a 140 apartment building which on closer look is mainly comprised of bedsits.*

*13 of the 140 apartments have one bedroom which is a separate room [ie with walls and a door], and none of these units have balconies, and the units all face east.*

*The remaining 127 of the apartments are bedsits. These are no more spacious or private than a hotel room. Some of the units appear to be 3 metres in total width.*

*The officer's report does not refer to the mix of housing provided in the development and it is suggested that the provision of such a high percentage of bedsit units in the one block is not good planning. It is interesting to note that the traffic report refers to the need for provision for removal vans to access due to the high turnover of residents, and with such living arrangements this is likely to be the case.*

In summary, the proposal contained 140 apartments, all with questionable amenity levels. I predict that this building will not provide decent long term affordable accommodation for the population. I imagine that the impacts of such housing will be detrimental to those who occupy them, and I consider that the health of the community will not be richer for an injection of people who will probably be 'just passing through'. I would challenge many people to live in a bedsit and feel that their environment was organised and capable of being shared with visitors and others, at least separate bedrooms allow a separation of function, and a sense of private space. I consider that planning should be more about the minimum standards, and that applications such as these would be vastly improved by being required to provide a mix of housing types, balancing the amenity levels to a significant proportion of what may normally be expected, ie bedrooms which have walls and windows to the outside air.

## **CASE STUDY 2**

### **Latrobe Close, Courtney St, Chetwynd St and Howard Sts, North Melbourne**

This was a two stage social housing project which was developed by the Office of Housing under the Nation Building Program, which had many issues unresolved in the eyes of the community.

The planning process, or lack thereof, due to the Stimulus program, resulted in the planning process being decided by the Minister for Planning, with no avenues for third party review. Members of the community, despite this, attempted to engage with the Minister for Housing and Planning on a number of occasions without success.

This left the community with few avenues to be represented or have meaningful input into the outcome. And yet the community ultimately is left to deal with the development outcome provided.

In this case, the issues which I wish to highlight relate to:

- an initial proposal which also included many units with bedrooms without light and ventilation [ contrary to Office of Housing own guidelines];
- the provision of units for disability access which were only bedsits; and
- the provision of meaningful open space.

Revised plans addressed the number of units with bedrooms without windows, but the units which were designed for disability access remained as bedsits, inappropriate in my view for people who

may need carers and certainly need visitors, in terms of maintaining dignity while living with a disability. I was alarmed that more compassion was not shown by the Office of Housing in this regard.

The open space, accessible to the broader community, which was formerly on the site is now being built over, and the open space provided within the development amounts to no more than minimal spacing between four storey buildings.

The community view was that the open spaces should be created in the development which would act as shared public open space. This would maximise the safety of the spaces, and facilitate the integration of the social housing with the remaining part of the North Melbourne community, by providing a gathering space. I was alarmed that there was no shift from the Office of housing in this regard during the process, and I predict that the open spaces in this complex will not invite public access and will be little used by the occupants of the site. In saying this I consider that there is a lost opportunity for both the new and the existing community.

My reflection about the systems which have failed the community in the planning of important community infrastructure is that the planning system often excludes the ability or the will of government agencies to meaningfully engage with local communities to obtain quality outcomes.

### **CASE STUDY 3**

#### **City North and Arden Macaulay Draft Structure Plans [Currently under consideration by the City of Melbourne]**

Two significant structure plans which are currently being considered by the City of Melbourne are causing the community to question the way local government have gone about engaging the community in planning for significant growth of population and workforce in the inner city.

Extremely tight time frames are being kept, 'consultation' has been token and has been more like a series of information sessions, limited detail is available about commitment to the provision of quality community infrastructure provision and no alternative options for development are being presented and evaluated which can be scrutinised by the public.

The population growth envisaged will require significant community infrastructure, including schools, childcare, kindergartens, aged services and community meeting places. One concern which I will elaborate on is the reluctance of the council officers to engage in the community concern that schools in the inner city should be provided with quality open space and the need to reserve appropriate land for this function at the earliest possibility within the structure plan. The new inner city schools will be for children who live in high rise apartments without open space; they will need open space in their schools. Preliminary advice from council officers is that land in the new structure plan boundaries will be too valuable to allocate for such use, and the schools of the future will be vertical, with no dedicated open space and that students will need to travel to access open space. One example given was that in the City North precinct students should travel to the University to access open space. I do not consider this approach is workable in a crowded school curriculum, nor does it provide for spontaneous outdoor learning and active pursuits, and I doubt that this approach will cater for the future health and well being of our children.