

CORRECTED VERSION

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

East Kew — 26 September 2007

Members

Mr D. Davis

Mr P. Hall

Mr P. Kavanagh

Mr E. O'Donohue

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Secretary: Mr R. Willis

Research Officer: Ms C. Williams

Witness

Mr J. Roach, acting president, Boroondara Residents Action Group and Planning Backlash.

The CHAIR — I welcome Mr Roach from the Boroondara Residents Action Group and Planning Backlash. All evidence at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Any comments you make outside this hearing may not be afforded such privilege. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript in the next couple of days. Mr Roach, if you would care to make a few opening comments before any questions.

Mr ROACH — Thank you, Chair. It looks like being an early lunch because I only have a few words to say. My purpose in coming here today on behalf of BRAG and Planning Backlash is by way of supporting the Kew Cottages Coalition. It is unfortunate that they have not spoken yet, so there is not a lot to support. However, it is important to note that BRAG, the Boroondara Residents Action Group, has about 500 members, mainly from the Boroondara area. Planning Backlash, on the other hand, is 110 organisations similar to our own from all over Melbourne, from some of the rural areas beyond and the coastal areas. If you put numbers to that, you are talking about thousands. The purpose for which we are here today is to offer support to the position taken by the coalition.

One of the problems we face in Boroondara is that it is said by some that there is a syndrome in Boroondara of protest:— it is only those with a bit of time on their hands who take up these sorts of issues. I just want to point out that Planning Backlash members come from all over Melbourne and is represented broadly. In fact more than half our members are from the Labor Party or have Labor Party affiliations. It is interesting that we have a broad church. Our position on public land and open space is that it should be preserved for future generations — you have heard all these words before. If the land or open public space is used for some specific, legitimate purpose, that it provides a real benefit to the general community, then compensatory land or open public space must be provided as a replacement. That is our stand.

If I can just digress for a moment, even in my own street there is a bit of public land being knocked off. Some years ago the railways wanted a bit of land to create an overpass to the Alamein train line, and they took a bit of Reade Park. Reade Park is a nice little garden just at the end of my street. It reminds me a bit of a TV ad at the moment on alcoholism and driving — ‘Just a little bit over’. This is a syndrome. They keep saying, ‘We just want a little bit’. It never stops; a little bit here and a little bit there.

Camberwell station is another area. The track between Camberwell station and Reade Park could easily be concreted over and they could whack up all sorts of residential, affordable housing, so another little bit. Of course we have gone through other areas right across Melbourne: Royal Park and Burnley Gardens. I can remember driving past Burnley Gardens and its entrance on Swan Street; it was a lovely area. What is it now? It is a commercial complex. That is just another little bit. A super tram stop went up outside and they knocked off a little bit just on the other side to fit in the tram stop. It is a little bit here and a little bit there.

Right here at Kew Cottages, of course, it is a big bit. I am sure you will hear a lot more about these other issues in time to come, but I repeat, my purpose is one of support. BRAG and Planning Backlash support the coalition’s stance on this, and we just thought we should put our numbers on the table. That is all I have to say. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — I thank you for your succinctness, but I will also ask a very simple question. Given the decision was made to redevelop the facilities on the Kew site, do you think a better outcome in terms of public open space could have been achieved while accommodating the interests of the residents?

Mr ROACH — Certainly. I am horrified that a Sydney developer and our government have put their heads together for a commercial enterprise and shared the profits, and that is really what it is all about. It is just a grab for money. There are a lot better purposes than that.

Mr TEE — I have just two questions. As I understand it, any of the money raised will go back into services for the intellectually disabled, and I suppose that is more a response to the issue you raised. The other question I have is that as I understand the Kew Cottages proposal, for the first time in the history of Kew Cottages, we will now have 30 per cent of that land available to the public. It will be linked with Yarra Park, and there will be a number of pathways. For the first time ever, there will be public access to the Kew Cottages site, and I suppose I am just raising this in that context. What triggered it in my mind was your ambition to make sure that we do not have a net loss in public open space, which I thought was the thrust of your submission.

Mr ROACH — Thank you for that. There will be a net loss though.

Mr HALL — Thanks, Jack, for your comments today. I was going to ask a couple of questions just about BRAG. How long have you been going as an organisation?

Mr ROACH — BRAG was formed in 2002. The genesis may have been a shade before that, but mainly in 2002. We have been going for about five years.

Mr HALL — Do you find your main business is in relation to planning issues?

Mr ROACH — Totally.

Mr HALL — Totally. So not rates or any of those other issues?

Mr ROACH — No.

Mr HALL — Other residents action groups do not get involved?

Mr ROACH — It was formed initially because of the grab to build over the Camberwell station. That was its first activity. But it has gone more broadly since, and as our membership has grown we take on other projects. But we are mainly concerned with issues in Boroondara.

Mr HALL — What sort of relationship have you developed with the council?

Mr ROACH — We have developed a good relationship. In fact the councillors and the professional officers are two parts of the council. We have developed a good relationship with the councillors and in fact on the issues that we put in submissions on we tend to get cooperation on most of them. With the professional officers they are still professional and they do have a view of things that are sometimes very contrary to ours. Nevertheless we have built up a rapport over time. We consult considerably and I see it as a good relationship.

Mr HALL — That is good to hear. Do you have any view as to the council's ability to have input into the development at Kew Cottages?

Mr ROACH — I think Boroondara council is one of the better councils of Melbourne. I think its planning department is probably one of the most professional.

Mr HALL — Do you know whether it is having access to the decision-making in regard to Kew cottages at all?

Mr ROACH — I think it has been totally taken out of their hands. That is as I see it.

Mr HALL — Yes. All right. I will talk to them after lunch too. Thanks Jack.

Ms PENNICUIK — I was just wondering how many other projects you are involved in around the area beside Kew?

Mr ROACH — Around the Yarra?

Ms PENNICUIK — Around the area.

Mr ROACH — At the moment I have on my table about five submissions to other projects, and my phone never stops with people ringing me up to say, 'What about this? What about that?'. I suppose over time we are talking about 100 or so projects that we have been involved in. It has become almost a full-time job I have got to say.

Ms PENNICUIK — Are they just in this local area mainly?

Mr ROACH — Sorry, I am a bit deaf.

Ms PENNICUIK — Are they mainly in this local area?

Mr ROACH — BRAG confines itself to Boroondara, yes. Planning Backlash, on the other hand, which BRAG supports, is much more broad. We work quite cooperatively together.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Thank you for your comments Jack. Just to clarify, assuming that 30 per cent of the Kew Cottages site is open space — I think it is still unclear whether that will be the case because the final plans have yet to be released — do you consider that to be an appropriate outcome if that happens?

Mr ROACH — I am not sure that I am qualified to make a comment on that. My knowledge of the Kew Cottages site as such is probably limited to what I have heard and seen over time. I have toured the site. I know clearly what is happening there. I do not think that 30 per cent is a replacement for what was there.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Jack.

Witness withdrew.