

CORRECTED VERSION

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

Melbourne — 30 January 2008

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Witnesses

Cr C. Ullin, mayor,

Mr H. Sides, chief executive officer, and

Mr H. Polydorou, project planner, City of Stonnington.

The CHAIR — I welcome Cr Claude Ullin, mayor of the City of Stonnington, Mr Hadley Sides, the chief executive officer, and Mr Harry Polydorou, the project planner. If you would make a brief introductory comment — we have your submission, which we are thankful for — and then we will perhaps ask some questions.

Cr ULLIN — Thank you very much. I thought I would begin by just suggesting to you what we would like to cover in this submission. You already have our written submission. I will cover some of that, but there are some other areas that I would like to discuss with you, particularly in relation to the letter that you sent to us on 7 January, so we will keep it within that context.

I want to begin by talking about the area of open space. Obviously there is a huge shortage of it within our city. I would think that many cities suffer that, but we are an inner area and therefore open space is extremely precious to us. We have endeavoured to do what we can in providing more open space. We have done that largely through a development called the Surrey depot in Surrey Road in South Yarra. We have allowed 60 or 70 per cent of that area to be redeveloped and it will become open space. The difficulty for us, as no doubt you have heard before, is in funding open space, particularly in an inner suburban area, with the prices of land just absolutely dramatic, if I can put it that way.

The second thing is that there is quite a bit of surplus land within our area.

The CHAIR — Surplus public land?

Cr ULLIN — Yes. At the moment we do not have the ability to purchase that. It is mainly VicTrack land, which has been there for virtually more than a century. It is probably useless for most purposes but it would be extremely important in terms of increasing the open space within our city and would provide more available parkland within our city. I know VicTrack has been discussing how that might happen, but again, if we were to purchase that at current value, it would not be within council resources. Even for a council like Stonnington that is well funded, it would not be within our resources to be able to do that.

The most interesting thing that I think has happened in the last 10 years is that at one stage when the Malvern council was in operation the Chadstone High School site was closed down and we made an arrangement with the then Liberal government to purchase that site. It was done at a very good value. It was valued by the Valuer-General, but they still managed to give us the sale of that land as a great opportunity, actually. That \$1 million is probably worth \$15 million to \$20 million today in terms of land value. We were able to develop that whole land for a complex that has been absolutely instrumental in providing community facilities for the city — a library, an area for people to use for elderly citizens and an area for young people. In fact our own constituents actually built a child-care area, and that could not have happened if we had not been able to receive that land at a reasonable price. It has been a great boon.

One of the other problems we have at the moment is that we need clarification in relation to Crown land holdings. For instance, the Malvern town hall sits on Crown land, and a lot of the land around it is Crown land, including the Malvern police station, yet we have recently purchased another property in Glenferrie Road almost next door because we have need to relocate our staff into one area. We have the problem of having looked after that town hall for well over 100 years — the buildings are owned by us — and we would certainly like to redevelop part of that land, but we do not necessarily have tenure of that site forever. I think there are probably a lot of town halls in that same situation. We would like to see that land being turned over to council — we certainly could not afford it at today's prices — but we believe that ought to happen.

I equate it to Stonnington Mansion, which you probably all know about. We were very disappointed that that mansion was in fact delivered by state government for nothing to Deakin University, which was able to obtain something like \$35 million for its purchase, yet we do not have that ability with the town hall at all. We are very sad about losing that; it was a great site. Prior to Deakin purchasing it, it was used a lot for public events. The city does not have that access now and will not have it probably in the future, because it is in private hands. We have lost an incredible asset, and we have lost a great deal of open space as a result of that, right in the heart of the city. We would like to make sure that we have assurances that one day we are not going to have — through a government or a different government — the rug pulled from underneath us in relation to the town hall. It is a very important issue from our point of view.

Equally there is an issue within the Prahran town hall area, in that the courthouse at Prahran was provided by an earlier government to the city, and it is now attached to the town hall. We do not have any idea whether that

courthouse really belongs to us or not at this stage. There are lots of conflicting arguments about it. No-one seems to know exactly what the real situation is, and we would like clarification in relation to that as well.

It is very important that we are able to continue to use some of our land for schools in the area. De La Salle uses the oval next to the town hall, and there are other smaller schools and state government schools that use a lot of our parkland for themselves. We do not receive any additional money for that. We still maintain the ovals, and yet basically in some areas we just do not own them. It makes it very difficult, but we are using them as open space. That will also have an impact in relation to the proposed extension of the freeway where it is going to affect the Malvern golf course. Whether that will be viable or not we do not know, because we have not seen the full plans. It also impacts on Gardiners Creek, which is a wonderful area within an urban city, and some of that will be taken away.

There does not seem to be any rule of thumb or any reason given for what sort of compensation should be paid and how that compensation should happen, because really what you want is compensation of land, not monetary compensation. We want to replace that with land of the same quality or even better quality than what we had beforehand. Those are really important issues.

You asked us in your letter to maybe suggest to you how in future we might be able to resolve some of these issues. I would like to suggest that councils should arrange to make submissions for use and ownership of public land within their city. There are lots of areas that a state government would not have any idea about. Also, with the other institutions and authorities that abound in our city, we would like to virtually have a very good idea of what could be available, what is available and what might not be available in the future, because the ownership of public land is so important, and the community gets really stirred up about it, as no doubt you have heard on many other occasions.

The way through this, I believe, is to set up an independent panel to provide recommendations. You asked how we might be able to do that. I know independent panels are also difficult and they cost money, but at the same time I think it should be outside the political area, and people who do think independently should be able to make recommendations to government as to what should occur in the future. To me that would be a way forward, instead of doing all of this piecemeal, because local government has lost significant areas of public land over the years. It continues, unfortunately, and there does not seem to be any way to stop it, so that is why we welcome this inquiry as well. I have got something to table. This is a register of public sector land. It is something that Harry put together for us as an example of the way they do it in the UK. There are 10 copies.

The CHAIR — Is it like a survey or an audit, as it were?

Cr ULLIN — You might like to talk to that a bit further, Harry.

Mr POLYDOROU — This is just an example of a register of surplus public land set up in the UK where basically to date they have got over 750 sites listed, and the internet address is there. It is basically an example of where something like this is being done internationally.

Mr SIDES — I think the advantage of something like this is that essentially the problem we have at the moment is that it seems to me there are almost two sets of values working. If you look at rural Australia, no-one questions the need for public money to acquire areas of natural beauty or unique environmental values or to turn Crown land from being a forestry reserve into, maybe, a national park. That is accepted. If you look at the urban areas where, if you count provincial cities, probably 85 per cent of Australians live and probably 85 per cent of revenue is generated, there is absolutely no program or willingness by governments anywhere to acquire anything of cultural value or even sometimes environmental value. Associated with that, not only is there not a program, it is not seen as a government responsibility. It is for non-residential land, but it is not seen as a government responsibility for residential land, yet that is where everyone lives.

If you look at the way in which land is disposed of — and I once worked in the state government in the land area — essentially government departments make a decision as to whether a piece of land is surplus to their requirements, and the key words there are ‘their requirements’. That is why a register is important, because it may not be surplus to other requirements. One of the problems, it seems to me, is that in an urban area we make judgements primarily on a business case based on the narrow interests of the agency who happens to have the land at the point in time.

Stonington Mansion is a classic case. It generated \$33 million. Under another hat I used to be an urban historian, and I cannot think of another state that sold a building that was its government house for a quarter of its existence; I really cannot. We have demolished a few over the years in different states, but that was an example where it made perfect sense. If I was Deakin, I would be selling Stonington Mansion. It makes perfect sense, but in terms of the wider community it does not. We are a changing community. The figure that everyone quotes is 2030, but the figure that interests me is that by then one in three households in Melbourne will be retired. There will be a lot of people with a lot of time on their hands, and land in the public realm where people can go and do things without a lot of cost is going to be critical, because retirees do not have a lot of money necessarily. In fact the pressure on public resources that provide a free recreating experience — and it does not have to be parks, it may be something totally different; coffee shops now are public recreation places — will become important. So I see the demand increasing, but I do not really see a mechanism that enables what happens naturally in non-residential areas to be happening in residential areas.

Cr ULLIN — Could I maybe just finish by saying that the two really important things are the availability of surplus or public land for open space or other use by the public and the other one is the funding of that. I am going to make a suggestion to you which is, in a sense, maybe what you could refer to as an ambit claim, but it is just a suggestion, though you might like to think about doing it in a different way. Because councils have enormous difficulty in purchasing land with all their other competing interests, where there is particularly government-owned land, we might suggest that it be sold to another level of government at 50 per cent of its value and that the council could then have the opportunity to pay it off over a period of 25 years. That is just an example. You could discuss that sort of thing over and over again, but it is just to give you an idea of one way that you could have a look at maybe dispensing with some of the public land which would be very useful to councils and those who live within those communities, particularly again, as I said, in the urban centres, as our city is, because there is just such a lack of availability.

The CHAIR — Can I begin by complimenting the municipality on the submission. It is very comprehensive and covers a lot of issues that we have dealt with, and I certainly appreciate the thought that has gone into it. I want to, in a sense, agree with you and record my personal concern about the loss of Stonington. It was frankly a shameful result.

Mr SIDES — Tragic.

The CHAIR — It was a travesty in a lot of respects, and it does point directly to the issue of getting the process right. We have certainly got to try to come forward with some recommendations, in my view, that will prevent such a thing happening again. I was interested in your point on Gardiners Creek, and I am very aware of the expansion of the freeway that is going to occur there. It appears to me, and I am happy to be corrected on this if I am wrong, that there has been no formal process of community consultation that has gone on.

Cr ULLIN — Correct.

The CHAIR — Is that correct?

Cr ULLIN — Yes.

The CHAIR — Has there been engagement with the council?

Cr ULLIN — Yes.

The CHAIR — What is the nature of that?

Cr ULLIN — Obviously there are a number of groups within the area who are very concerned about it. We do not have an answer for them at this stage, because we have not been able to discuss it any further at government level. I do not know if Hadley wants to add to that.

Mr SIDES — Final alignments and that are not known, so to a degree people on the other side are not able to give you the advice, but they are essentially project-driven people; they are people on a mission. They are not there to consider any wider values or issues. So it is only, again, going to be a line drawn for the purposes of building a road. In many ways it is sort of the same philosophy that gave us a freeway there 40 years ago. The worry is, on a couple of occasions when we do get down to a bit of detail, they say, 'We need to go there'. 'No you

can't, that is not within the area'. 'Well, we will amend the area; we will redraw the line of the zone of influence cut by the relevant act' — I think it is, or regulation.

The CHAIR — Have you had formal correspondence?

Mr SIDES — Yes, we have had some correspondence, but mainly it has happened through project-type working groups. It is very much happening — —

The CHAIR — In evolution, as it were?

Mr SIDES — In a joint developmental way, I think probably it would be fair to say.

Cr ULLIN — The interesting part about that is that when the previous freeway was built it came across some of our sporting ovals, and we lost them and they have never been replaced. We cannot supply enough sporting ovals in our city for the people who want them. It was tragic to lose those as well. There is nice public parkland, but it cannot be used for sporting purposes at all.

The CHAIR — Is it within your ambit to make available to the committee some of those documents that have been — —

Mr SIDES — Sorry?

The CHAIR — Some of the documents that have been exchanged with VicRoads? You can take it on notice if you like.

Mr SIDES — I will have to have a look. I do not always see them. You may possibly have seen some.

Mr POLYDOROU — I believe there is a presentation to — —

Mr SIDES — I think there may have been a presentation to some of the people on the working group.

The CHAIR — It would be helpful for us to see the way this process is operating.

Cr ULLIN — We will follow that up.

The CHAIR — That would be very helpful. Just on the courthouse in Malvern that you alluded to and the lack of clarity on ownership. You are basically saying it is Crown land — —

Mr SIDES — In Prahran, yes.

The CHAIR — Sorry, Prahran.

Cr ULLIN — In Malvern.

Mr SIDES — I think we specifically referred to Prahran. It has been put in our care on the condition it was used, I think, for a history group and some other thing — —

Cr ULLIN — Sorry, the courthouse.

Mr SIDES — That is an example. The post office across the road has just been sold for \$2 million or \$3 million, so obviously it is not a cheap building. One wonders how long it will sit there. If we do not have a use for it, one wonders what will happen. We are spending — I think — about \$220 000 on stone restoration at the moment. The trouble often with Crown properties is that they do not come free at all. Quite often they cost a lot of money — —

The CHAIR — Maintenance?

Mr SIDES — To maintain and keep up, and that is one where certainty is not clear. We are looking at building a new office building next door to the Malvern police station. If we build it in a traditional way, we will have a car park entrance off Glenferrie Road. We will have a fairly uninspiring piece of urban design with a great mouth down it for cars to drive down. My preference would be to come to an arrangement with the state about the

car park at the rear, which is not on our land, it is long-term Crown reserve again, and to access the car park off the rear and integrate it with public parking. The trouble with that is that we are being asked to build on a piece of private land we own and at the moment there is nothing that gives us any certainty as to why we should integrate it in a non-commercial way. Why would we make a non-commercial decision to actually get a better public good?

This is where I think the problem is. The only time that land is decided upon in the public realm is either for a national park-type situation quite often — and that is good; I applaud that too — but in a residential-type situation it is usually taken by the person who owns the land as being a business case decision, which is not necessarily for the public good, or worse still where it is our sort of Crown reserve that our town hall is on no-one really owns it in a sense because the state government does not believe that it is ever going to achieve anything from it. You write a letter about it and often you will not hear much back because no-one is much interested anyhow because it is not a problem to be managed by anyone really.

The CHAIR — The one other question I had is: has the municipality ordered a stocktake, as it were, of the public land inside the municipality? Has that occurred?

Mr SIDES — We would have a pretty good idea.

Cr ULLIN — We would have a pretty good idea, but Harry would know that better than anybody.

Mr SIDES — Our GIS system would plot it pretty accurately.

Mr POLYDOROU — We have strategies in place like the open space strategy which we are moving towards the definition of being a public realm strategy, to look not only at conventional open space but also at what contributes to the experience of open space.

The CHAIR — So it might be private space that is publicly available and integrates as well?

Mr POLYDOROU — Yes, it could be the streetscape, and historic buildings usually offer a large setback. That is almost like a borrowed form of open space. If anything it is visually pleasing and aesthetically pleasing for inner areas of Melbourne which are built up and where there is fragmented ownership in place.

Cr ULLIN — Another interesting little side issue here is that we have a lot of housing commission areas in the city. There is a lot of surplus land around the housing commission areas. We have had a number of community groups come to us and ask if could they put in a community garden. We do not have the resources to be able to provide that land, but we could do it and have done it in the past in the housing commission areas because there is all this land. We would like to continue to do that sort of thing, but that needs to be rationalised as well. Again, we do not want to impact in any way on the people living within the housing commission area, but there is a lot of land there that is at the moment useless and ought be put to better use.

Mr SIDES — One other issue that we have not covered on Crown land in the inner area is that it is often vacant for a good reason. That is it usually has environmental problems this long on a list. For example, there are sites near the MFB site in Richmond, and there are sites that almost have a negative land value —

The CHAIR — Because of the clean-up costs.

Mr SIDES — Yes. I am cleaning out my old depot now, and I think the clean-up costs are probably pretty close to the value of the land. They represent a real issue for government because in a sense they do not have a market value and no-one like us is going to take them on even if they have almost a zero value because the cost is pretty prohibitive. I think that is an issue in quite a lot of parts of inner Melbourne as to what is going to happen to those sites. You cannot leave them, for health reasons or environmental reasons, long term, and you cannot use them readily. Probably open space is the least expensive solution but there is still money involved in that. That is certainly a problem for the state, I think.

Mr TEE — I am interested in what you said about the absence of a mechanism in terms of country versus city essentially. I just want to know how that, in your view, sits in light of the evidence that we have just got from the National Trust where they talked about the proposed creation of six new metropolitan parks and four chains of parks to extend existing networks. They talked about the Werribee River and they talked about the Merri Creek, Melton and Cranbourne regional parks. There is a suggestion there — you can pull it out — that there is some

progress or some work being done in terms of metropolitan parks. It is not as bleak necessarily as the picture you painted.

Mr SIDES — I think in a parkland sense that is true. It is more other types of urban fabric. I am not saying I agree with them, but if you look at the arguments the Camberwell railway station people are putting up, they are talking about the ambience, the heritage of the area, the feel of the railway station, and these are important because the new open space, in fact, is the sidewalk where people sit and have coffees or do sidewalk shopping and so on — they are not necessarily parks. As our population gets older, there are less and less active recreation areas but maybe more of these urban landscape areas. The public realm is very important to that. They form a backdrop if nothing else. I guess that is what I am saying; there is no recognition of that perhaps when there is a business case made to dispose of land.

Mr TEE — I just want to get your views in relation to the Stonington Mansion. The impression I get, just looking at it peripherally, is that state government involvement really ended in 1995 when the state government handed that site over to the university, which, as you know, is a commonwealth wholly owned subsidiary, if I can use that term.

The CHAIR — All the universities are registered under the state act.

Mr TEE — I am wondering then in 2006 when that land was put on the market by Deakin whether there were any approaches to the commonwealth and to the federal MP, who I think was Peter Costello, and what his response to that was.

Cr ULLIN — There certainly was. We in fact mounted a campaign, which council led to a large extent, and got the community involved. We had an open protest meeting, which Andrea Coote spoke at. Peter Costello unfortunately could not come on that particular day. Evan Thornley spoke at that meeting, and a couple of other politicians who were concerned about that land disappearing out of the public realm. We did write to Peter Costello. I met with him on two occasions, maybe even three. He did undertake to provide some money from the commonwealth towards the purchase of that land, but we were then dealing with a situation where it had already been basically bought privately and the university wanted \$35 million. I met with Professor Sally Walker. We got absolutely nowhere with any negotiation there. They were just adamant in terms of achieving that sum of money, and I do not think they honestly cared about how they got it as long as they got it. There was no sympathy for the property itself or its historic significance or anything else.

The CHAIR — Were there approaches to the state government as well?

Cr ULLIN — Yes, certainly. We wrote to the Premier — Steve Bracks at the time — and received what I call a fairly bland letter referring us to the minister at the time. Nothing was absolutely achieved from the state government. With the greatest respect, they wanted to wipe their hands of it and did not want to know anything about it. That is the honest truth. We could get nowhere politically at all. The only offer did come from the federal government, but they were not going to provide more than \$2 million, maybe up to \$5 million providing the state government was prepared to also put something in. Peter Costello did in fact talk to the education minister at the time about it, and received a blank reply.

Mr TEE — Do you know whether he spoke to the federal education minister — the minister responsible for Deakin University?

Cr ULLIN — He spoke to Julie Bishop — I know that.

Mr TEE — Any progress there?

Cr ULLIN — No. Julie Bishop did, I believe, what she could but did not — —

The CHAIR — The state education minister?

Cr ULLIN — Yes, the state education minister, who was at the time — was it Kosky?

The CHAIR — Kosky.

Cr ULLIN — Yes, nothing. We got put into a circle: ‘This minister handles it’ or ‘That minister handles it’, ‘No, I can’t do anything about it’. It was just on that basis. I was not mayor at the time so — —

Mr SIDES — I actually did propose a solution which might have worked on an intergovernmental basis. It was an example really of why you need this central mechanism and this register and some sort of clearinghouse system for government land. I thought it was not a bad proposition. Tasma Terrace, just across here, which the National Trust is a sitting tenant in, badly needs repair and it is worth quite a few million dollars. It may have been of use to government, it may have been sold commercially. It is not a building under risk at all; it is always going to add to the public realm in its appearance. My suggestion was that maybe the state government could have financed its component, we would have paid a component, the federal would have paid a component, we were happy to subdivide even a bit off the back of Stonington and the National Trust could have exited Tasma Terrace and that money been used as the state government’s contribution towards buying Deakin out and then we would have had a National Trust headquarters at Stonington and a park, which we would have paid for and maintained. The commonwealth was prepared to put in a bit, and also if we needed any more funds there was a strip of subdivision along the back. That just became too hard, because there is nobody who puts those sorts of deals together, except cabinet, really, I suppose. I can understand it was an issue that probably did not get much play in cabinet. It is not earth-shattering at state level. So I actually think it points to what is needed. I think there is a group that manages the Mint building and things like that, which has a sort of wider ambit of management.

Cr ULLIN — I put that, too.

Mr SIDES — Yes. I think we need something like that when it comes to the disposal of public land. If there had been an agency that had a task of being creative and thinking about it, that solution, I think, probably had real legs, but there was no-one there really to take it up.

Mr TEE — The position now is — —

Cr ULLIN — I just want to finish this. We did see John Lenders and Evan Thornley, but the galling part of that was it was not a meeting that we had arranged. It was a meeting that the residents arranged that we were invited to, and then John walked out of it after 5 minutes, so we felt that we were very poorly treated over that issue.

Mr TEE — The position as I understand it now is that it is an issue of zoning, which is now an issue that the council will consider shortly, and in terms of the future use of that land, or at least the capacity to build on it, that part of it is in the hands of council.

Mr SIDES — That has been processed. It has been rezoned and permits issued, and — —

Cr ULLIN — And the National Trust has approved it as well.

Mr SIDES — Yes, and Heritage Victoria.

Cr ULLIN — Sorry, Heritage Victoria.

Ms PENNICUIK — I know we are constrained a bit by time. If I could just put my bit in about Stonington, I think what galled me about that was that it was originally owned by the people, given to an entity that is taxpayer funded — —

The CHAIR — And owned by the people, too.

Ms PENNICUIK — And then sold. So that is an issue. All of you have raised this issue of public land being transferred between government departments, but at the end of the day the land has always belonged to the people, whichever entity is actually managing it. We have had submissions from members of the public and community groups et cetera voicing that concern. To them it is public land; it is owned by the people. Whether the council is managing it on their behalf or the state government is managing it on their behalf, or the federal government, it does not matter to them. They own the land, and this sort of false transferring of money from one level of government making money out of another level of government in turn is just swirling money around in terms of land that is already owned by the people. Would you agree that is an issue that we need to deal with?

Cr ULLIN — We were prepared to put in \$5 million, and the concern was that we had to maintain it after that, which was going to probably cost more.

Ms PENNICUIK — I suppose my concern is why would you need to put in any money, because the land was owned by the people?

Mr SIDES — Quite right.

Ms PENNICUIK — To get to the bottom of it, the land was owned by the people. But other things that we have had from councils too and community groups working with councils is the identification by government departments of land surplus to their needs, as you have mentioned, Hadley. Somehow councils have other needs, or the community has other needs in concert with council, but they do not know about this until the last minute. There is 30 days, or something, statutory requirement for councils to be involved, and somehow lots of land — —

Mr Tee has mentioned there are big parks, but in terms of local areas it is those little pockets of land that are very valuable and often are being used by the community, and then are lost to the community. So with your suggestion about a memorandum between the levels of government, do you think that is a way of overcoming these issues that are coming up time and time again in this committee?

Cr ULLIN — Yes.

Ms PENNICUIK — What we need is suggestions from community groups, from councils — and we are getting them — so that we can make recommendations, so that public land in the future is kept for the public interest. We are not saying it is not always, but we are getting many examples where so many things are being lost and opportunities lost that seem to be falling through these cracks.

Cr ULLIN — Right.

Mr POLYDOROU — An additional comment in regard to the memorandum of agreement: I guess there are different areas of Melbourne that probably require different types of agreement, so an inner area — say a municipality like Stonnington — has in general a different nature to it than an outer area, so a different type of agreement would need to apply. That would be an additional comment to the submission.

Mr TEE — Is it an idea that you have progressed through the MAV or elsewhere, or with other councils?

Mr SIDES — No, it is an idea we have developed in response to the sorts of issues that you have put out. There are other mechanisms, too. One way to overcome some of these issues might be to change the machinery of government at a state level so that any property that is surplus returns to a central management authority which looks at these sorts of issues I am talking about. What would be the incentive for a government department to declare something surplus? None at all, except perhaps audit reports and inquiries such as yours into the efficient use of resources. My experience is those sorts of inquiries tend to make departments look pretty closely at the efficient use of their assets. We are subject to those audits from the state auditor, and — —

Cr ULLIN — Absolutely.

Mr SIDES — If I have got surplus assets, it is named and it is reported against. I think that could happen at a state level. People would then be happy to move on state assets, and then a central authority could perhaps deal with the surplus. That might be one mechanism of change.

Cr ULLIN — The only problem that could be encountered with that is what surplus land is valued at in the books and how you would transfer it out without — —

The CHAIR — Transfer the value.

Mr SIDES — Australian governments historically have been the best managers of public lands in the world. People came from all over the world to look at our Torrens system and our lands departments. We did it better than anyone. To some degree in the last 20 or 30 years I think we have lost our way in having a central — —

With the old lands department, if you like — which 2 Treasury Place was largely built around — I think some of those, if you like, philosophies and mechanisms may still be relevant.

Ms PENNICUIK — Could I ask one more specific question, which may turn into a long answer? You mentioned VicTrack land. I wonder if you could expand on your experience with VicTrack.

Cr ULLIN — Maybe Harry has got a better idea of all the property that VicTrack has in our cities, so maybe he is best to answer.

Mr POLYDOROU — Rail land does offer opportunities for open space and pedestrian networks. I think that is a really important point to note. It is important to look at the short, medium and long-term outlook when investigating how rail land should be looked at, in particular from a strategic planning perspective. That land should be looked at as public land, and net community benefit should be how that public land authority should be looking at that land, and not just again, as Hadley said earlier, as a business case to dispose of surplus land.

In the context of Melbourne 2030, our inner areas are going to intensify and density will increase, so the importance of pedestrian networks in terms of sustainable transport is empirical. There may be some hesitation on the use of rail land in the form of open space like bicycle and pedestrian links, as this may limit the future use of that land by that authority. They may have a long-term plan, and the use of the site, say, as a pedestrian link in the short or medium term may not be contemplated at that point in time. An idea may very well be that a contingency plan is put in place if that site is required in the long term, so there is net community benefit in the short and medium term for uses above and beyond that that provide that net community benefit and not just what the authorities are designating that land use for. That is just a bit more on VicTrack..

Ms PENNICUIK — Are you having much success with these ideas?

Mr POLYDOROU — There is an example.

Mr SIDES — Yes, the example of the South Yarra station, where they tried the big redevelopment project. It did not stack up; it was too hard to do. Sometimes lesser development actually works better economically, funnily enough. That can also be an opportunity to create a public forecourt which can be used. If you ever drive past South Yarra in the morning, there are 100 people standing out in the rain waiting for a tram where they have got off the train. It is one of the biggest interchanges in inner Melbourne. We need a public forecourt there with roofing and we need perhaps some coffee shops or something where people can wait and a nice connection down to the park, which the state was good enough to reserve pretty well permanently for us. It is a case where a modest development that probably pays for itself but does not make a profit would generate a huge public benefit. That is the sort of thinking which we are saying needs — and VicTrack has actually been okay on that, but only because the big development does not stack up, I suspect.

Mr POLYDOROU — That is detailed in appendix 3 of the submission. There is a concept plan on South Yarra station.

Ms PENNICUIK — Yes.

Mr POLYDOROU — The other point is that in the Prahran-South Yarra activity area the concept of putting a north-south pedestrian and bicycle link is put forward.

Mr SIDES — Across the railway bridge.

Mr POLYDOROU — Yes, along the Sandringham rail reserve. That is basically identified in our broader strategic thinking in our structure planning. That option is there. As to whether or not VicTrack will allow that, that is a different story, because it may need that land for other purposes. But council believes that that is an important link in not only this municipality but across Melbourne as a whole. A summary of that is outlined in appendix 2.

Ms PENNICUIK — Thank you; I did see that.

The CHAIR — I thank the three of you very much for the contribution from the city. I think it is one of the most comprehensive and well thought through submissions we have received, with practical examples but also some concepts that are very useful for us.

Mr SIDES — Good.

The CHAIR — At one point there you had some very useful outlines of open space through the municipality and also a worked up program of the South Yarra station. If that is publicly available, it would certainly be very helpful for us.

Mr POLYDOROU — I do not believe the open space strategy is publicly available as yet, but when it is we can make it available to you if you like.

The CHAIR — That would be good.

Mr SIDES — It has to be seen by councillors yet.

The CHAIR — I see. But it sounds like it is making progress.

Mr SIDES — Yes.

The CHAIR — We would certainly welcome it in due course.

Mr SIDES — Yes. Thank you.

Committee adjourned.