



"Bracks the developer's friend" by Spooner

Cartoon by John Spooner *The Age* 6 August 2003

Royal Park Protection Group News Bulletin – August 2003

“BRACKSVILLE” – A NEW SUBURB FOR MELBOURNE

Tuesday 5 August 2003 was a dark day for Royal Park and, indeed, for the inner northern suburbs when Games Minister Madden announced plans for the so-called Games Village. This is, as we all know, the excuse for a real estate development the size of a new suburb. Our worst fears have been realised. The 1,000-dwelling development will prove, in the long term, an environmental and social disaster and will be, inevitably, destructive of Royal Park with increased traffic and pollution and increased demand for more parking and access roads through the Park. In the short term, the Games Village for 6,000 athletes and team officials, will be an overcrowded, dysfunctional camp city. It can only damage Melbourne's reputation as a host for sporting events.

After conducting a hearing over one month, the Minister's Planning Advisory Committee on the Games Village submitted a report on 30 June 2003. The Minister accepted a swag of their recommendations but added a few of his own that had not been discussed or even raised during the month long deliberations of his Committee. For example, the height of three tower blocks on the apartment wall along the freeway is to be increased to 11 storeys. The very worst features of the various plans presented to the hearings have been retained for “The Village Park” – this mega real estate development.

These features include: greater density of development; reduced open space (see below also); three 11 storey tower blocks on the freeway wall of apartments (increased from 9 storeys) which will overshadow and overlook surrounding suburbs, the site itself and nearby Royal Park, including the

wetlands. These towers will be visually intrusive blots on the landscape and block the magnificent views from Royal Park across to Mt Macedon. In addition, the plans adopted spell the certain degradation and destruction of the heritage precinct with demolition of the central building; infill housing to be interspersed between the buildings; and no space or landscaping left around the precinct buildings. (See below RPPG 's attempt to save the heritage precinct) The 100-bed aged care facility is now to be located on Park Street and a new road will be built through to Brunswick Road. Government promises to provide public transport to connect this inaccessible and isolated site with other suburbs and the city have been taken with a grain of salt. This settlement will be entirely car based and hence a major contributor to future increased traffic chaos and gridlock in the northern suburbs.

In a day of high drama on 5 August 2003, when Minister Madden made announcements on the design of the Games Village, RPPG was interviewed for comment by all four TV channels including a live-to-air interview on Channel 10 from Royal Park, plus an interview on ABC Virginia Trioli Drive Program and on radio news bulletins. Public hostility to the sudden introduction of 11 storey apartment blocks on the site along the freeway is evident and there is growing anger over the alienation of public parkland for high density, high-rise, private development not only in Royal Park but Kew Cottages, the Showgrounds and Point Nepean.

Quotable Quote: *“What we’ve had in this State because of the way the Kennett government went about their job, we have had assets in decline for many years. What you have is Kew Cottages, which were basically run down and neglected for many years. The former psychiatric hospital at West Parkville, again a site, which was not appropriate, in decline, land in surplus and not parkland. And the Showgrounds - in decline for many years.”* A literal quote from Games Minister Madden on Phil Cleary program 3 AK on 6 August 2003 attempting to explain why public land and assets are being sold off for private development.

MORE VILLAGE NEWS

Bid to Save the Heritage Precinct

RPPG submitted an application to Heritage Victoria to have the heritage buildings included on the State Heritage Register. The application has been rejected and we will possibly appeal. The request for an interim protection order to be placed on the buildings has been rejected as under the Commonwealth Games Arrangements Act 2001 the Minister has the power to over ride the heritage act. The Minister can proceed to demolish heritage buildings without waiting for our appeal to be heard.

The Story of Bracks Phoney “Gift” of 1.4 Park to Add to Royal Park

On 20 August 2003 the Bracks Government announced a "gift" of parkland to the public - 1.4 hectares supposedly to be added onto Royal Park. Games Minister Madden promised that the "Games Village" on the Royal Park site would have

4 hectares of "open space". This was in the developer's 2002 submission, which was accepted on 23 October 2002 when Bracks announced that the Village Park Consortium (Australand and the Citta Property Group) was the successful tenderer. We understood that the developers had guaranteed that 20% of the 20-hectare site would be open space.

The plans for the "Village Park" then underwent major revisions over the course of the 4-week hearing of the Planning Advisory Committee on the Games Village in May/June. Finally, a decision was made to move the 100 bed aged care facility from the middle of the site behind the heritage buildings to locate it on Park Street, on the northwest corner. This meant that the developers can't fit the 1,000 houses and apartment units plus aged care home onto the 20-hectare site without sacrificing open space. Note that the developers do not intend reducing the number of dwellings on the site, nor has the Government instructed them to do so. Obviously the imperative is to maximise profits even if it means reducing open space, which includes nature strips, footpaths and roundabout but not roads, according to the Minister .

In an attempt to solve this intractable planning problem, the Minister came up with a bizarre solution and announced, on 20 August 2003, that he would add 1.4 hectares of "parkland" onto Royal Park. The strips of land to be "gifted" to the public are verges along two drains and cannot be used for anything else. The northern spur is the drain, which runs between CSL and the Department of Human Services Parkville Centre. The Eastern spur takes surface run off from the Zoo area which has been contaminated by Zoo effluent for years (according

to EPA reports). The land along the creeks is unsuitable for any recreational activity and will be difficult to plant with trees. The land is unreserved Crown Land and has always been seen as part of Royal Park. These creeks will drain into the wetlands when established.

No amount of spin or promises of extra bits of park can conceal the fact that a fraud is being perpetrated on the people of Melbourne. The Bracks Government has alienated 20 hectares of open space - parkland with 2,000 trees - for a private real estate development, fails to keep a promise that the new real estate development will have 4 hectares of open space then gives us a "gift" 1.4 hectares of public drains!

Asbestos Clean up Continues

The site has been temporarily fenced and a massive clean up has been proceeding for months with removal of asbestos cladding on underground pipes, from telephone pits and from buildings. Construction has therefore started by default. In the process workers appear to have been axing many trees. Live electricity cables are supposed to be on the site but no warning notices have been issued. Members should obviously stay away from the site.

UPDATE ON CITY OF MELBOURNE ROYAL PARK PROJECTS

RPPG is represented on the Royal Park Master Plan Advisory Committee and its Vegetation Sub-Committee and is eternally vigilant to prevent inappropriate development. Our chief concern is that the Park should be replanted and regenerated as an indigenous parkland with as little intrusion as possible of "furniture and fittings" beloved by bureaucrats (eg barbeques, parking, roads, asphalt paths, toilet blocks and lights). There are a number of projects underway in Royal Park, in addition to the big Wetlands project in Royal Park West, which include: survey and preparation of a Management Plan for the two remnant indigenous vegetation sites in west Royal Park; planting of eucalypts along Brens Drive; restoration of shrub beds with infill plantings following the end of the drought; completion of two paths in the Australian Native Garden; study of fencing and bollards in the Park; the new children's playground on Manningham St (opposed by RPPG on health and safety grounds); upgrade of lighting to two sports ovals – McAlister and Ransford – on Park Street; and redevelopment of the Ryder Pavilion on Park Street (in design phase). The arbitrary decision by Council staff and at the urging of the State Netball and Hockey Centre to install obtrusive lights along the walkway next to the Zoo has been condemned by RPPG. The City of Melbourne continues to hold community planting days in Royal Park, the last being on the hilltop area near the Urban Camp and around the State Netball and Hockey Centre. The restoration of the skink habitat site in Royal Park West continues to be of concern after initial design and vegetation failures. (Initially the "designer" dropped a load of white sand on the site, which did nothing for survival of the endangered skinks).

WHAT'S ON

Prepare to Protest over the "Games Village"/Private Real Estate Development: RPPG will ask members and supporters to gather for a protest when construction starts in earnest on the site. Please be ready for a call to action. Our telephone tree will be used. We must show the Government that we object to alienation of public land and assets for private profit. Ring Julianne on 98184114 or 0408022408 or see our website www.royalparkprotect.org.au for details.

Attend National Trust Rally "Protect our World Heritage Suburbs": The rally is to protest over Melbourne 2030 and the impact on our suburbs of high-rise, high-density and high-cost developments. Meet 1:30 pm, Sunday 31 August 2003, outside the Church of All Nations, corner of Palmeston and Drummond Streets, Carlton. (Melways Map 2B G6).

Renew Your Membership for 2003 to 2004: Membership forms are enclosed as a reminder for renewals.