

# Trust Actions

## Espy Under Shadow

*The historic Esplanade Hotel on the Upper Esplanade overlooking the bay in St Kilda is under the shadow of a 38 storey development proposed by Becton Corporation.*

Becton propose demolition of much of the rear of the Hotel, the complete demolition of the notable Spanish Mission style Baymour Court flats and erection of two tall towers on this prime elevated seaside location. The site would predominantly be used for luxury apartments, with the remaining part of the Esplanade Hotel building restored and used for entertainment purposes.

In an effort to gain state government backing for protection of the Hotel, the City of Port Phillip applied to Heritage Victoria for the inclusion of the Hotel on the Victorian Heritage Register. While the Hotel has failed to gain formal state registration, Heritage Victoria acknowledge the building is of regional significance stating that local planning protection

would be adequate for assessment and protection.

Indeed, both the Espy and Baymour Court flats are within an Urban Conservation Area noted in the Port Phillip planning scheme, and are classified by the National Trust.

Becton is requesting three amendments to the local planning scheme for their development to proceed. They are requesting removal of the height limit, exclusion of the site from the Conservation Area and rezoning.

Currently the City of Port Phillip's planning scheme for the site has a height limit of 18 metres (6 storeys), yet the application includes a 132 metre (38 storey) tower. Becton is using the argument that the tower would be a "landmark" - in that it would be the focal point of several significant viewlines, in particular the axis with the St Kilda pier. Their promotional material states that it is "an ideal location for a building design of great significance. A design which not only heralds this important precinct, but visually repairs the disparate collection of existing residential towers".

The Trust likewise believes the site is particularly significant, but reject Becton's



Artist's impression of Becton's redevelopment of the Esplanade Hotel.

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premise that good design can only be achieved with great height.



Key: UCI denotes Urban Conservation Area with proposed exclusion of the Esplanade site.

The Trust is most concerned with this proposal on two counts. Firstly Becton proposes demolition of part of the hotel, and the whole of Baymor Court. Secondly, that the two tall towers will totally dominate the Esplanade, the whole of the Upper Esplanade and set a precedent for Melbourne's bayside skyline. Becton propose erecting the tallest building outside Melbourne's CBD on the shoreline.

In a twist of logic, Becton is also asking for the site to be removed from the existing surrounding Urban Conservation Area. They suggest that only the section of the Esplanade they will keep should be covered by heritage overlay.

The National Trust is opposing the amendment to the Conservation Area and the height limit. We are concerned not only with the potential impact on an important part of Victoria's heritage, but

also that such dramatic variations to a planning scheme might send a signal to other developers to attempt similar changes to planning schemes that protect historical sites across the state.

As part of our campaign we have written to Trust members in the St Kilda area, urging them to protest at the proposed development. If it goes to a Planning Panel, hearings are likely to be in January or February 1999.

*Should you wish to register your concern please complete the enclosed letter and forward it back to us. We will use them as part of our campaign. Your involvement is important!*

IAN PAUSACKER  
Conservation Manager,  
National Trust.

## Your new planning scheme - be vigilant!

*As of 1 January, new local planning schemes will come into effect across Victoria. We ask all members to monitor a number of key issues, including heights, for their impact upon heritage.*

As reported in August *Trust News*, representatives of the Trust, through both head office and branches, have been attending panels across the state which are reviewing local planning schemes. We are pleased to report that local government continues to positively respond to the Trust, agreeing in most cases to incorporate heritage controls for classified buildings and to commission heritage studies where information is inadequate. Panels have expressed their appreciation of the high quality of our submissions which summarise 42 years of classification work by the Trust. Once the new planning schemes come into force, local heritage sites will at last have full statutory protection.

There will then be a very important role for Trust members across the state in

ensuring that the new planning schemes operate effectively, and are enforced.

One change in the planning schemes that we particularly ask members to monitor carefully are new height controls. Whilst municipalities will still be permitted to include height limits in their planning schemes, from 1 January 1999 these height limits can be challenged by a developer. Ideally each council should have its criteria clearly identified e.g. in the City of Melbourne's new planning scheme relating to St Kilda, there will be clear design objectives which include:

- enhancing the appearance as a major boulevard
- protecting the visual amenity of Fawkner Park
- building height limits, and
- minimum set-backs.

As from 1 January any planning application to exceed the maximum building height and/or plot ratio must be accompanied by a site analysis plan and a written urban context report documenting

how the proposed development will achieve the specific design objectives.

The government says that this new approach to height controls will enable orderly planning to continue, whilst encouraging innovative design. Opponents say that there is a risk of precedents being set which in a worst case scenario could see places like The Esplanade in St Kilda looking like Surfers Paradise in twenty years time. The key issue is how the new system is implemented.

The Trust will be carefully monitoring the new planning schemes as they came into force. We ask all Trust members to keep a watchful eye in their area, and to contact your local Branch if you feel that the new planning schemes are being implemented in a way that is detrimental to heritage protection.