

Unsafe at Any Height

A Submission to Boroondara Council

Re: KRS Draft Urban Design Framework

Kew Cottages Coalition (KCC)
[File Copy Online]

17th July 2003

1. Preamble.

This submission has been prepared in response to Council's letter of invitation dated 8th July 2003 seeking an outline from the Coalition of our preferred housing model, and as a second part of the submission, how the proposed draft urban Design Framework would prevent delivery of that model.

Our position is as follows:

1. Keep Kew Residential Services (Kew Cottages) site in public ownership. There should be no sale of Kew Cottages site for housing development.
2. Develop an Intellectual Disability Centre of Excellence (IDCE). This should include a variety of research and care initiatives such as housing, respite care and support services.
3. Land on the Kew Cottages site that is not directly required for the IDCE should be used to develop joint sporting and recreational facilities for use by the IDCE and all citizens of Boroondara.
4. All IDCE and sporting/recreational development of the Kew Cottages site should:
 - maintain and improve the site's important heritage value, environmental features and sense of space
 - further enhance the integration of Kew Cottages residents into the Kew and Boroondara community
 - be respectful of the site's important Aboriginal significance
 - be consistent with, and enhance, the environmental integrity of the Yarra Bend National Park.

2. Introduction.

The KCC believes that the Draft UDF, as considered at the 27th May meeting of the KRS UDF Working Group, is a deeply flawed document.

It was advanced as the guiding light for Boroondara's largest ever urban renewal project, yet it lacks any publicly disclosed economic research or analysis whatsoever.

It was promoted to the wider community as being responsive to their expectations, yet it appears to overwhelmingly ignore their feedback.

Initially the Draft UDF was proposed as serving the very public needs of Victoria's intellectually disabled, yet as time has passed it has progressively taken on the appearance of a private property developer's high-rise fantasy.

There has been no traffic study, no infrastructure assessment, no 'crash' protection for the intellectually disabled residents, no risk analysis, no environmental impact statement. So in our view this was not, and is not an authentic plan, and as such it is not to be relied upon.

It appears to us that one reason for some of these failings may simply be a lack of adequate resources.

In its response to the Melbourne 2030 Strategy document Council argued that the development of urban design frameworks tailored to the characteristics of a particular area are a more appropriate approach than the application of a generic planning control alone.

But Council also recognised the need for adequate resources to be made available to undertake the UDF plans, and said that the provision of assistance in their preparation should form part of the implementation process of Melbourne 2030.

We understand that Council allocated only \$100,000 to cover all its UDF projects in its 2002/3 Budget (such as this site, the Coles Myer land in Tooroonga, and the West Hawthorn Commercial Corridor to name two others.)

To put the latter figure into context, however, we understand Council also allocated a similar amount to upgrade a single BMX Track in the municipality!

Given that the KRS UDF is but one of a number being undertaken, and given that it is the largest urban renewal project in the city's history, the resources available do not at face value appear to us to be commensurate to the task.

Of course, there may well be other budgetary needs and priorities that also need to be reassessed by Council. For example, we understand the budgetary allocation for the BMX track referred to above was recently increased to over \$170,000.

Besides the problem of bridging the 'budgetary gap', Council has noted the gap that exists *between planning controls over developments between one and three storeys and developments of four storeys and more*, and agreed that this gap "*must be filled*".

Council said that it: *would also like to see the development of planning controls that strengthen its ability to prohibit medium or higher density development in certain areas that have been identified through strategic work and ESD principles as unsuitable for such forms of development.*

(Melbourne 2030...Council
Submission,24.2.2003,p.23

This issue will no doubt be addressed in the revised UDF plan currently being prepared by Council staff. However, in the version made available for public consultation, there was no further analysis. provided. of this problem either.

In our view therefore, the KRS UDF plan remains sadly deficient, and too many gaps remain, no matter what nature and form of urban renewal is being considered

It is not, in our submission, a plan to be relied upon for constructing any of the proposed 7 storey, 6 storey, 5 storey, 4 storey, 3 storey, 2 storey, or even single storey buildings where the Cottages now stand , because in our view the Draft UDF is simply unsafe at any height.

3. Appropriate Housing Models.

The future form of the KRS site is predicated on the need to re-develop Kew Cottages in a manner that best serves the interests of the current residents and other intellectually disabled Victorians. .

Once the manner in which that goal can most appropriately be achieved from a social, medical, economic, and cultural perspective, then other needs, demands, and expectations can be considered. For instance:

The needs of the residents' support community, their families, friends, advocates, and staff;

The environmental and heritage character, and expectations of neighbouring communities;

The demands of developers, regulatory bodies, and the voting public;

The Intellectual Disability Centre of Excellence (IDCE) that we propose would be the appropriate organisation to help ensure that new 'inclusive' choices are fully developed for residents, and that world's best practice procedures would be applied in meeting these medium and longer term goals.

At the present time we are aware of a number of housing models that have already been advanced for the site.

Firstly, the 'Villa Housing' or what we will term here the Village model first put forward by the Kew Cottages Parents Association in 1998, just two years after a catastrophic fire had killed nine residents of the Cottages.

Secondly, the 'New Suburb' proposal for up to 250 homes, including DHS 'Community Residential Units (CRUs) to be built constituting ' a new suburb, like any other suburb' advanced by the current State Government in 2001.

Thirdly, the 'High Rise' units model as advanced as part of Council's current (2003) UDF project..

We note that the Village model at face value flies in the face of the fashionable de-institutionalisation rhetoric of the Victorian Government. Similarly, we note that Council's staffs' enthusiasm for the "High-rise' model appears to have been driven in part by the apartment home boom bubble of the new millennium, which in turn has been fuelled by falling international share markets, and the local, Brack's Government recent attention to urban sprawl, with its 2030 Urban Strategy Plan.

However, notwithstanding current fashions, predilections, and the historically notorious reputation of the property developer market, on balance we believe our goal of an IDCE for the site, and the current residents' best interests would both be better served by extending residents' current range of choices rather than reducing those choices.

In our submission the best way to accomplish this is to include both the CRU and the Village models together with an IDCE, rather than limiting residents' choices by excluding any housing option already requested by residents or their advocates.

It may, therefore, be asked why at this point we have not chosen to include the 'high-rise' model. within this hybrid approach. The answer is simple, we are not aware of any requests by or on behalf intellectually disabled residents for high-rise accommodation; indeed to the contrary, we are advised it is not appropriate for KRS residents.

The IDCE/ Village/CRU 'inclusive model' is notable, however, by its absence from the agenda of both the State and Local government staff representatives' input to the UDF process to date.

So Council will need to adopt a pro-active approach if the model is not to be excluded from residents' range of choices at this stage of the planning process.

One problem is that in our view none of the housing models so far considered have been adequately examined, and we believe this represents a crushing limitation on Council's deliberations.

However, the overall failings of the KRS UDF go further than just the latter problem, and in our view are failures of both process, and of practice. Evidence by way of public submissions is before Council showing:

- KRS residents' on-going on-site housing needs have been largely ignored;
- Feedback and concerns expressed by Boroondara residents and Kew Cottages family members have not been fairly presented to the Working Group;
- Both the design and implementation of the community consultation process have been brought into question;
- Early recommendations by UDF consultants pointing to the need for more work to be done on traffic, environment, and heritage matters appear to have simply been ignored and/or forgotten.

As a consequence, and as outlined in our earlier submission (4/6), Council needs to review not only particular aspects of the UDF such as the housing models available, but the UDF process itself.

4. How the Proposed Draft UDF would prevent addition of a more inclusive Hybrid IDCE/Village/CRU model for KRS residents.

We are advised that overseas experience has shown the potential value of using UDFs as a process to build a shared 'vision', and consensus for action. This in turn can be expected to help boost both community and investor confidence, minimise surprises, and simplify and reduce the cost of the regulatory planning process.

We understand that Boroondara's own early experience with the UDF process, which Council used with the Tooronga Village site was also positive.

We note that when the Minister for Community Services, Bronwyn Pike and then Mayor Meredith Butler jointly announced the commencement of planning the KRS UDF last year emphasis was placed on a '*vision for people with a disability*', and the assertion that, "*the redevelopment will very significantly improve the quality of life for KRS residents.*" (KRS Planning Update, Issue 1 April 2002)

We note also that the Urban Design Framework planning process was subsequently reinforced and codified last October by the State Government in a Planning Note that characterised a UDF as inter alia:

“.. not a fixed view of the future... (but) it includes a design vision for how a place might develop and should include sufficient detail at key locations so that the vision can be tested for economic and functional viability..”

Urban Design Framework,
Urban Planning Note No.3
Department of Infrastructure, (DOI)
October 2002

However, since that date the good news for the KRS UDF appears to have stopped. The ‘sufficient level of detail’, never emerged. The community consultation process was disappointing, and letters and opinions in the press called for a review of State Government policy on the proposed sale of the Cottages.

As criticism of the UDF Project has mounted however, so Council’s staffs’ definition of the UDF process also appears to have changed.

Gone, now it appears to us is any evidence of the need for a commitment to a shared vision, gone is any emphasis on consensus for action.

The UDF favoured by Council staff now appears to have become a process that sets out to take a grab bag of ‘principles’, and objectives, mixes them with a few maximum illustrative building heights, and densities, to build not a “Vision” but a vehicle.

A still useful vehicle we are assured because it is promoted as being capable of carrying, accommodating and absorbing all the housing models advanced to date ie: “Village”, “New Suburb”, and “High Rise Units”.

Instead of a ‘Vision’ we are now being offered a Toyota .

However, in our view this is simply the wrong approach. It is wrong because without a shared ‘Vision’ there is no agreed journey to be undertaken, there is no common road for us to build, there is no need for a vehicle, there is no need for a UDF of that form at all.

In our submission without agreement on a common “Vision”, the UDF is effectively dead.

For the Hybrid ‘IDCE/Village/CRU Model’ to be part of the UDF in our submission it must be part of the Vision, and to be part of the Vision it has to be celebrated as such:

- it has to be shown on the UDF plan as part of an IDCE, (and not just another amorphous green/brown ‘blob’ on the current UDF sketch plan);
- it needs to be distinguished and detailed in its housing forms, frontages, heights, open space elements, common resources, specialised facilities, and priorities such as access, gardens, views, vistas, and heritage values;

- and the latter should include sufficient detail at key locations so that the vision can be tested for economic and functional viability..”

In our submission neither the Hybrid Model nor the IDCE proposal are currently on the draft UDF plan in the above form, nor are any of their elements supported by the plan to the above level of ‘testability’ as set out in DOI’s Planning Note³.

Indeed, to the contrary, and, to state ‘the bleeding obvious’ the sheer bulk of over-development evident in the plan, combined with market forces aimed at extracting maximum yield from the site will in our view prevent delivery of not only the Hybrid model, but also our proposed Intellectual Disability Centre of Excellence (IDCE).

5. Recommendations.

1. Re: Policy Objective 2 of the Boroondara Draft Residential Development Strategy

We recommend that Council give notice that it proposes to designate the Kew Cottages site as a whole as “*an important cultural and historic asset*” of the municipality pursuant to the above Objective.

2. Re: KRS Draft Urban Design Framework.

We recommend that the KRS Draft UDF be withdrawn and re-drawn to properly take account of all the community feedback received including this submission.