

## **The Strategic Background to the Kew Cottages Debacle** **Geoff Harris Kew Cottages Coalition AGM 2006.**

Brian Walsh has briefed me about the Coalition's views regarding the Kew Cottages land. Tonight, I intend to outline some strategic issues, which should form a context for any decisions as to the future use of "surplus" Cottages land (if any). However, Mr. Chairman, perhaps I should clarify what I'm talking about- a debacle is a confused rout, and as we will see, that is a major understatement!

### **1. The Heritage lands of Melbourne**

The Cottages land forms part of the Crown lands which were with-held from subdivision and sale, at the direction of La Trobe. Figure 1 in my 2005 paper, *Melbourne's Green Belt and Wedges*, shows the extent of those lands in 1852. The future cottages land was shown as a "village reserve" on Ham's 1852 map. However, by 1862, a bean counting outlook prevailed. This was well demonstrated in an "Argus" article on 19<sup>th</sup> September of that year. A proposed sell-off of the St Kilda Road frontage of Fawkner Park alarmed local Councils. Representatives met with a self-important Mr. Duffy, who told them that "it was notorious that the metropolis of Victoria had more parks than any other city in the world, and any excessive reservation of lands for this purpose would only check the reasonable extension of the city, and also cause an unfair reduction in the public revenue." He offered, however, that the land skirting the road should be expressly sold for villa residences. This was agreed, then similar sell-offs occurred for Albert and Royal Parks, and elsewhere, all Duffied. Despite all this, my paper said "-- Melbourne's inner areas still comprise a heritage of inestimable value. The progressive sell-off of Crown lands, handed down from our founding fathers, continues to this day. Measures for effective preservation of the remainder have yet to be established."

You are well aware of the history of the Kew Cottages land. Much of it has remained relatively open in character for over a century, with remnants of natural bushland, in addition to planting, recently described by the National Trust. (Trust News, November 2005). Your newsletter has covered the action taken by Heritage Victoria in imposing permit conditions for re-development of the site. Here, I am raising a much broader issue- we must also see this land within its metropolitan heritage context. My view is that **"surplus" open areas, which formed part of the retained Crown lands of inner Melbourne in 1852, should be preserved and preferably replanted, rather than sold for any commercial purpose.** This is one of the matters raised, in Royce Millar's "Age" article of December 2, page 13- "Parks under Pressure".

Royce Millar call this a "noble" concept, yet it has a precedent- Birrarung Marr! The site formed part of a 44 Acre area, "permanently reserved" for a "Public Park" on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1864, but was subsequently usurped for railway. Thus, Birrarung Marr entails a **partial re-establishment** of parkland, rather than a "first new major park", as claimed by Government. I bet it doesn't know this! Anyway, good work- there should be more such action, rather than selling-off for housing, as is happening just down the road.

## 2. Melbourne's Green Wedges

A second issue relates to the Kew Cottages land's position in the Yarra Valley. In the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) Metropolitan Planning Scheme in its final form in 1984 (prior to transferral of staff and powers to State Government), **the land, together with Studley Park, formed the apex of a green wedge extending outwards through Warrandyte, along the Yarra River, as part of a non-urban area**, shown on a 'Strategic framework Plan', on page 19 of Reprint No. 12. The Ordinance contained overall strategic objectives, including 'to conserve and permanently maintain the rural activities and significant natural features and resources of areas shown as non-urban on the strategic framework plan.' (page 23) Housing clearly wasn't envisaged there!

These Yarra Valley provisions were raised in furtherance of the Victorian Government's Statement of Planning Policy No. 4, which came into effect in September 1971, at the direction of the Honorable Alan Hunt, Minister for Local Government. Alan's services have since been well recognised in several awards including Order of Australia.

Now, let's jump forward to the *Melbourne 2030* report, October 2002. At page 66, it says- 'The 12 non-urban areas that surround the built-up areas of metropolitan Melbourne and are outside the urban growth boundary are known as green wedges. **They are an important legacy of past metropolitan planning.** Most of them lie between the 'fingers' of urban growth that follow the transport corridors---- *Melbourne 2030 will protect the green wedges for non-urban uses and encourage proper management of these areas*'.

Doesn't that give you a warm feeling! Apparently, the green wedges, conceived decades ago, and virtually diced in the Kennett era, are back in vogue. The urban growth boundary, in most cases, accords with the above statement, and that's fine. But whoops! There's a problem. **The lower Yarra Valley and Dandenong Creek Valley, within which lands have previously been identified as green wedges, with parts acquired for metropolitan parks in accord with the former Metropolitan Planning Scheme, are now not outside the urban growth boundary and thus, not within green wedges!**

Several people have questioned why these two valleys have been omitted from the green wedges. Each have received the same answer- it's not necessary, because the land is reserved. But elsewhere, such as at Point Cook, reserved lands **have** been included in green wedges! So, apparently, the Kew Cottages land can now be sold off for housing, in complete conflict with previous strategic policies of a former state government! So, what is the future for the former Yarra Valley and Dandenong Creek metropolitan parks?

It is time that the government and opposition stopped playing silly buggers, and agreed to settle down and institute a meaningful bi-partisan process directed to establishing a viable, long term strategy for Victoria. ( **In U.K., successive governments have pursued**

**policies for London's growth beyond rather than within a growth boundary, over a century!** ) There are further crucial issues yet to be addressed. I'll outline some of them.

### **3. Public Health and Motor Vehicle Emissions**

In 2000, EPA Victoria issued a report, "*Melbourne Mortality Study- Effects of Ambient Air Pollution on Daily Mortality in Melbourne 1991-1996*", carried out by EPA in liaison with Griffith University, the University of Queensland, NSW Health Department, and a Consultant Respiratory Physician.

In discussion on the Melbourne study area, the matters mentioned include the following-  
\*The topography and climate combine to make the region an area of high pollution potential during still weather. (P.5)

\*In a review of the health effects of CO (carbon monoxide), comment is made that "Until recently it was thought that current exposure levels were unlikely to produce serious health outcomes, however the results of these recent studies brings this into question. Several studies (identified) have shown that ambient levels of CO are associated with hospital admissions for cardiovascular disease at concentrations as low as 3ppm (1 –hour maximum). These effects have been observed in all age groups." (P. 7,8)

\*Conclusions were - "The results of the study have shown that ambient air pollution in Melbourne is associated with increases in daily mortality. Although all the air pollutants under consideration, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, fine particles and carbon monoxide, were found to be associated with daily mortality, the strongest associations were observed for ozone and nitrogen dioxide. The main sources of these pollutants in Melbourne are motor vehicles and industry, and the results suggest that strategies to reduce these pollutants are important to reduce the risk of adverse health effects arising from exposure. The results of this study are consistent with other studies conducted within Australia and overseas."(P. 42)

EPA's current views, set out in "*The Environmental Impact of Motor vehicle Emissions in Melbourne*" include the following-

\*"Motor vehicle emissions make a major contribution to the level of pollutants in Melbourne"

\*"Motor vehicles emit pollutants at street level where layers of cold air may sometimes trap these emissions close to the ground. With little chance of dispersion, pollutant concentrations can build up and persist over large areas. Levels are highest in regions with high traffic densities such as the CBD, inner Melbourne residential areas **and along major arterial routes.**"

In USA, the "Environmental Defense Foundation" based in New York, with some 400,000 members, has said that "since residence near a major road has been shown to convey particularly increased risk of lung cancer and childhood leukemia, **all efforts should be made to increase the distance between major roads and residences.**"

Here, such an outlook has particular relevance to lands within the valleys containing the Eastern and South-Eastern Freeways. Substantial buffer areas would be preferable on health grounds- a matter of direct relevance to Kew Cottage lands! Would you like to live

cheek by jowl with a freeway?

#### 4. Public Health and Urban Form

CSIRO, amongst its many fields of research, has been analysing the consequences of metropolitan growth over many years. Decades ago, John Brotchie and Ron Sharp undertook investigations entailing use of their TOPAZ model for MMBW, when it was the metropolitan planning authority. These provided important insights, which were taken into account in the selection of a metropolitan growth strategy at that time.

In 1998, CSIRO Manufacturing and Infrastructure Technology Chief Research Scientist, Dr. Peter Newton, released a study "*Reshaping Cities For a More Sustainable Future*" A current internet notice about that study says- "Using advanced spatial planning and design software, integrated land use-transport emissions-airshed models were used to explore the effects that alternative residential, workplace and transport structures might have on energy consumption and urban air quality to 2011." Of the six alternative scenarios examined, one of these called compact city, entailed "increased density and population of inner suburbs" as in *Melbourne 2030*, page 30. Another was called "Corridor City", entailing "a focus of growth along linear corridors emanating from the CBD and supported by upgraded public transport infrastructure", (as in the urban corridor /green wedge concept evolved by MMBW in the 1960's- discussed in "*Melbourne's Green Belt and Wedges*", Chapter 9). The analysis, illustrated in charts, showed that for summer photochemical fog, the best performer under these conditions was the corridor model; - a much higher level of emissions arose in the compact model. For exposure to fine particles, the level for compact city was more three times that for the corridor model! (In 2003, I suggested that "our green wedges – are an environmental insurance policy" MGB&W, p.68) The results of this study clearly are at odds with *Melbourne 2030*, and it is highly desirable that a detailed evaluation be carried out. Dr. Peter Newton should be invited to advise Government on these matters. In the meantime, measures to impose urban consolidation concepts on a disaffected public should be shelved!

#### 5. Conclusions

Thirty years ago, I wrote a report on strategies for Melbourne, for MMBW. In it, I said- "The capability of man to adjust to changes in cities is thus an essential element for consideration in the development of a strategy. Present indications are that one entailing increased rates of change in the urban fabric and in life styles --- may be quite adverse for segments of population. (*MMBW Report on General Concept objections* 1974, p.39) Regrettably, that prophecy has come home to roost!

So that's it! What a mindless can of worms! Unless and until we can move on to create an effective, bi-partisan, strategy for Melbourne, which above all else, recognises in a truly memorable way the significance of the Yarra Valley and its nurturing waters; birthplace of countless generations before European settlement; **Melbourne's** birthplace; we will continue to have debacles in which our heritage, health and quality of life are despoiled. Practical initiatives must **now** entail the relocation of the Urban Growth Boundary so that **outside** the UGB are a Yarra Valley green wedge with **Kew Cottage lands as well as**

**Studley Park at its apex**, and a further Green Wedge in the Dandenong Creek Valley,  
with enhanced **metropolitan** status for the Parks in each valley. Thank you for listening.