



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

**Prahran Renewal Project
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects Submission**

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The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) champions quality design for public open spaces, stronger communities and greater environmental stewardship.

We provide our members – in urban and rural Australia, and overseas – with training, recognition and a community of practice to share knowledge, ideas and action.

With our members, we anticipate and develop a leading position on issues of concern in landscape architecture. Alongside government and allied professions, we work to improve the design, planning and management of the natural and built environment.

AILA represents 2,000 (and growing) members throughout Australia and overseas.

AILA members with development, urban design, community engagement, sustainability and landscape architecture expertise undertook a review of the proposed master plan for the Prahran Renewal Project and we make the following comments for consideration by DHHS. We are available for further discussion at your convenience.



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

SUMMARY STATEMENT AND AILA POSITION

AILA recognises that the Prahran Renewal Project presents an exciting once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver a benchmark project within this established urban community and high amenity inner city area. The size of the available land parcels, unique in this inner suburb, allow for buildings of different types and scales to be delivered, meeting a variety of community needs and blending this site with its (changing) context, so that visible demarcations and current pre conceptions about this site versus its neighbourhood, are effectively eliminated. It also allows for public realm systems to be re-established – an essential step in the knitting of the sites back into the surroundings and delivering a significant public open space asset linking existing parks to the north and south. The large size of the land parcels also demands a staged, market responsive, approach to delivery which also provides great capacity for the relocation of existing social housing residents from existing to new dwellings in a sensitive and appropriate manner, ultimately ensuring that dislocation of this community is avoided. Opportunities to integrate site wide environmental sustainability measures are also much enhanced by the size of the project.

AILA congratulate DHHS for undertaking a design led masterplanning exercise over time in an effort to unlock the enormous potential of these sites and urges DHHS to continue to test broader options for the towers including considering their demolition in the future. We note that previous options presented to the community did investigate the potential of staged removal, or at least the potential for this in the future. The current master plan solution compromises options for removal of the towers in the future. AILA encourages DHHS to provide more detailed information to the community, and engage in an informed and active discussion about retention versus removal of the towers as well as demonstrating alternatives through the delivery of exemplar housing models. These discussion need to include a relocation strategy, a strategy for distribution of public / private housing and an understanding of ongoing management and maintenance costs.



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

COMMENTS ON MASTER PLAN AGAINST STATED OBJECTIVES

AILA recognises and endorses the driving principles established for the master plan.

We commend DHHS on the 6 main priorities stated for the project as follows:

- *Facilitate a sustainable and vibrant community*
- *Create well-designed housing, facilities and outdoor space*
- *Re integrate the estates with neighbouring areas*
- *Incorporate environmentally sustainable design*
- *Incorporate universal design principles*
- *Be capable of delivery and long term success*

AILA supports the integration of social housing with private housing through the Prahran Renewal Project and endorses the stated project commitments of:

- *No net loss of public housing*
- *Introduction of a mix of housing types, including private housing*

In order for these priorities and commitments to be realised in the built outcome, they must be embedded into the master plan in the form of a clear framework for next phases of design and development. However, we believe the retention of the existing residential towers on the Horace Petty Estate, and at King Street severely compromises the ability of the Prahran Renewal Project to achieve the above stated project priorities and commitments.

- **The retention of the residential towers compromises the potential for integration of the public and private dwellings and can reduce the stigma of social housing ‘estates’.** Retention of the existing residential towers is contrary to international best practice. Their retention is also contrary to the approach taken in many contemporary Australian, and indeed Melbourne, examples of successful renewal projects incorporating social housing. In these projects, it has been found that the *social* stigma associated with public housing estates can be significantly reduced with the *physical* removal of the existing building stock.
- **The retention of the residential towers compromises the potential for physical integration of built form and public realm into the neighbourhood.** Street pattern, block size, building heights and transitions across the site, open space type and configuration are all compromised by retention of the existing large footprint residential towers. The master plan incorporates a ‘retrofit’, rather than best



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

practice design in order to accommodate the existing towers. The aim to reduce the visible difference between these sites and their neighbourhood is compromised by the retention of the residential towers. “Re-skinning” of the towers and the addition of new residential product at ground level relies completely on the quality of its architectural resolution for success. The opportunities for integrating public realm into the surrounding context is limited in the vicinity of the retained towers as the large footprints of the existing buildings and additional built form proposed around their ground floor peripheries does not provide new public realm opportunities.

- **The retention of the residential towers limits the opportunities for achievement of best practice environmental design.** Retention and reconditioning of the existing residential towers compromises the ability for the best environmental design solutions to be incorporated into the built form. The master plan incorporates a ‘retrofit’, rather than best practice design in order to accommodate the existing towers. The cost of living in, managing and maintaining the ‘retro-fit’ option should be a determinant in decisions.
- **The master plan limits the opportunity for delivery of housing in small, manageable stages and, in the case of the private housing, in response to market demands.** The larger footprints of the existing residential towers, the retrofitting work required, and additional built form proposed around their ground floor peripheries effectively ‘locks up’ the western half of the Horace Petty Site.
- **The master plan lacks clarity regarding distribution of public / private housing.** The strategy for distribution, whether adopting an integration model of public and private or a clustering approach, has social, physical and design implications and impacts on management regimes, so should be considered at the masterplanning stage.
- **In order to keep families and communities together, AILA supports a ‘move only once’ relocation strategy. The master plan will not limit disruption to the lives of current residents.** Residents will need to be moved out of the towers to enable building works, so lives will be disrupted. If the alternative accommodation is of high quality, those residents may not want to return to the towers. More detail on the relocation strategy and how communities / individual lives will be affected, should be provided in the master plan. A staging strategy should be embedded in the masterplanning process.



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

COMMENTS ON PROPOSED PUBLIC REALM (streets, publicly accessible outdoor spaces, public open space)

The public realm is the key to unlocking the potential of the site and defining a positive interface and address for buildings.

AILA questions the role of the new east west street and the internalised, poor frontages that it will create. It is also noted that community uses have been proposed for this road which will internalize the site rather than promoting an 'outward facing' prescient that is well connected with its context.

The character intended for Malvern Road is unclear and more information should be provided to the community.

The master plan envisages a significant increase to public open space.

AILA supports the notion of quality open space rather than a focus wholly on quantity. Significant investment in the public realm will be required to make it an asset for the public housing residents and also a value generator for private sector development. The master plan lacks detail on the proposed function of the green spaces (for example the location of the adventure playground needs to be clearly shown), and in particular how these proposed uses respond to City of Stonnington needs and Chapel Vision. The master plan lacks detail on the connections to Princes Park and to land which the City of Stonnington plans to acquire for the purpose of establishing additional public open space.



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

COMMENTS ON CONSULTATION MATERIALS

Generally, the consultation materials lack detail and provide a poor level of information to the community. While we recognise there has been a long process to date, the level of resolution of the information provided is too broad for a master plan of such a significant site. The masterplan should lock down key moves of the site and qualitative outcomes.

We set out response and challenge to the individual boards below.

“Well-connected community”

- Compromised by large footprints of existing building stock
- Retention of residential towers limits ability to achieve individual front door and street addresses

Mix of building types

- Fails to blend well with surrounding neighbourhood. Stigma remains for community
- Sun orientation is compromised in design of new apartment buildings where these need to work around existing high rises
- Interface with Surrey Road and Bendigo Street (6 storeys) is inappropriate

Sustainable and Vibrant Community

- “Diversity of residential types”, “improved look and feel” and “successful integration” (visual and physical) are all compromised by the retention of the existing towers. None of these opportunities are maximised.

Open space

- The master plan makes a significant addition to this neighbourhood’s usable public open space
- In places, it is significantly compromised by basement car parking which either limits the type of landscape that can be delivered or significantly increases development cost. This may ultimately jeopardise commitment to the quantity and quality of public open space envisaged by the master plan.
- The status of the public open space is unclear. If this is not handed to local government as an asset managed by them, what protects the allocation of land as public open space in perpetuity?
- Existing trees to be retained are shown. The quantity and location of those to be removed is not shown.



Australian Institute of Landscape Architects

Environmental Sustainability

- Uncertainty about the adaptability of the existing high rise residential buildings which are “subject to structural engineering and building certification advice”. (Is there confidence that ESD targets will be met? At what point do modifications become so significant that a rebuild is warranted on the grounds of affordability, liveability, ESD and ongoing maintenance requirements?)

CLOSING STATEMENT

AILA recognises that much design led investigation and research into best practice Australian and International examples of renewal projects has been invested in the generation of this masterplan. We urge DHHS to continue to explore options that will maximise flexibility for future development and community benefit.

AILA members would be pleased to have a meeting with DHHS to discuss other models and the briefing of future project stages.