

The Esplanade Alliance

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News

Esplanade

Foreshore

Edited transcript of Cr Brand's comments in debate, Statutory Planning Committee, 10.2.03

Tonight is a defining moment in this process. After so many years and innumerable steps and stages, this is a very important, defining moment. Because of the officer's recommendations, which I think we're about to adopt, it won't be the final moment by any means.

But for the first time in this whole process we actually have a decision to make on a concrete design proposal in front of us.

Its extremely disappointing to me, in fact it's dumbfounding to me, that after all the discussions and negotiations and hearings and investigations and expert opinions and warnings, over all this time, that the application before us still falls so far away from satisfying the objectives of the planning controls.

And we shouldn't forget that Becton bought this site years ago with heritage protection and a six storey height restriction already in place. So they shouldn't ever feel disgruntled that they keep running up against heritage and height concerns when they seek to ignore them.

Similarly, as they were forewarned right from the start, the Espy Hotel itself came with a long and dramatic history of community action to protect it, and it should not be any cause for complaint that a proposal that threatens the on-going viability of the hotel as the cultural institution that it is, should be met with resistance. Ever since they bought it, the planning scheme has been reviewed and amended with Becton's constant participation in that process.

I believe that the planning scheme can be satisfied and the site can be developed sensitively and well. Becton are obviously quality developers and the architects, Fender Katsalidis, are quality architects: its not beyond their capacity at all. They've got the capacity and all the advice on hand to do it, it's just the [developer's] brief which is the problem.

There are aspects of this application which I support and I think which show that they are capable of meeting the objectives of the planning scheme, and I'd say for instance - that the balconies of this proposal, of the new building, as an instance, I would think would probably be the best set of balconies on the whole foreshore, and express all that we could aspire to as far as urban character's concerned in this regard. There are many aspects of the building that I think are really quite admirable, but there are many, many points that aren't. And I won't, I don't think I'd be tolerated [by the committee Chair] to go through all of the problems and most of the deficiencies, which have been well expressed here already.

But there are some; like the design of the rear elevation of the tower: the front elevation is actually, I personally think, quite good; excellent. I think the back of it is quite, I think really it is something for the architects to be ashamed of, in terms of whether it actually meets the design objective of relating to the residential character of the streets behind it. It just clearly and obviously doesn't.

I think if you look at the newspaper article this morning, look at the at the photograph, the image of the proposal here, the building beside the Esplanade, where the bottle shop is, I think is an incredibly pallid and weak response to the Esplanade context and the foreshore and the hotel itself, and I think it's clearly just a failure in design. And there are many, many other reasons [for refusal], which I don't think I'll go on with.

I have spent many, many years being optimistic and open about Becton and their architects and what they might eventually come up with. I have personally been prepared, and still am, to be their strongest advocate for a bold, controversial and innovative contemporary design proposal. But only as long as the other design objectives are met. The whole thing could be settled if only the applicant could get their head around the aims and values of the planning scheme.

It is highly disappointing to me, that the scope for these discussions was pre-empted last year with the lodgement of the fully designed application immediately upon the gazettal of the amendment. Despite the claim of the architect, that the design would be free to change and evolve after lodgement, it clearly could not and has not.

I would lay down a challenge to Becton: in the spirit of optimism and openness, instead of running to immediately appeal tonight's decision at VCAT, why don't you sit down with us again, and be creative, and actually see if you can't design something that actually meets the aspirations of the planning scheme.

The advantages to you of getting it right must be legion, leaving aside the factor of just the time wasted with further wrong turns. And the community, the many communities, that have such a vital interest in this place, would be extremely grateful if this could be done, and we could once and for all get this right.

That's what I would like to see, and that's why I commend this recommendation with, I think, its very clear and comprehensive and real set of reasons for refusing the application.

[Council vote in favour of refusal...unanimous.]

Cr David Brand
City of Port Phillip
St.Kilda Ward Councillor