



13 December 2002

Richard Schuster
Team leader, Statutory Planning
City of Port Phillip
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cc. abalshaw@portphillip.vic.gov.au

Re: application no. 1448/2002, 11 The Esplanade St Kilda

Dear Richard,

The Esplanade Alliance is an incorporated association with two hundred members and several thousands of expressed supporters. Our objection to Becton's proposal for the Esplanade Hotel is in three parts:

1. comment on the proposed demolition
2. the planning and design of the new elements, and
3. their impact on the operation of the hotel.

1. Proposed demolition

Baymor Court, the stables behind the hotel and the hotel itself are listed as significant buildings in the Port Phillip Heritage Review. They are protected by a heritage overlay with strategic support from Council policy.

It is policy under Clause 22.04-4 to not support the demolition of a significant building unless and only to the extent that:

- the building is structurally unsound or cannot be feasibly reused
- the replacement building and/or works displays design excellence which clearly and positively supports the on-going heritage significance of the area.

The proposed demolitions are not in accordance with Council policy. The buildings are not unsound and can be feasibly reused. Even if they were not, it is submitted that the proposed replacement does not in any way support the on-going heritage significance of the area. This question and that of design excellence is addressed in the following section.

2. Design issues

- 2.1 The proposal not only fails to secure the pre-eminent place of the Esplanade Hotel among the landmark buildings of The Esplanade, it erodes that pre-eminence by overpowering the hotel visually. From many angles (for example, views 1A, 1B, 2, 4, 10 and 11), the hotel is overpowered and diminished by its new neighbour.
- 2.2 The proposal fails to respond to the character and amenity of the local residential area. Although the scale of the two-storey apartments is generally sympathetic with Victoria Street and Pollington Street, two critical aspects of the design destroy that sympathy:
 - the hard-edge, masonry and glass structures challenge and confront rather than respond to the character of the streets; and
 - the overpowering and intrusive glass wall of the tower is a brutal statement of CBD aesthetic, compounded by the reduction of the set-back that was intended to protect the character and amenity of the local residential streets.
- 2.3 The attempt to articulate and modulate the new development has been frustrated by the intrusion of the core building towards Victoria and Pollington Streets, so that the core building now appears as a curved (but not articulated or modulated) wall of glass confronting the local residential area.
- 2.4 Because of the intrusive bulk of, and the confronting materials used in, the core building, the scale and massing of the development at street interfaces fails to acknowledge and mediate the surrounding built form, which is characterised in Victoria and Pollington Streets by low scale, well-mannered, Victorian residences.
- 2.5 The transition in building scale between the perimeter and core areas of the site is obvious, but it is not 'appropriate' because of the overpowering bulk of the core buildings and the unsympathetic materials used in its construction.
- 2.6 The built form elements along the Esplanade include the Marli flats and the Esplanade Hotel. The proposed development does not respond to, but dominates, those buildings.
- 2.7 The character and amenity of the St Kilda foreshore has already been assaulted by Arrandale and Bayview. However, as views number 10 and 11 demonstrates, that assault will now be compounded by the proposed development, with an overpowering mass of buildings looming over the foreshore.

- 2.8 The location and design of the new development shuts out much of the view of Port Phillip Bay from Victoria and Pollington Streets, confronting the viewer with a solid, glass clad, wall.
- 2.9 The view of the Hotel from the south-east corner of the intersection between Victoria Street and The Esplanade is obstructed and confused by the development – not enhanced.
- 2.10 The new development not only has no regard to the unique urban design contribution of the Baymor flats building to the built form and streetscape of Victoria and Pollington Streets, it destroys that building. This is a travesty of the design objective.
- 2.11 The development will unreasonably overshadow the private open space of private residential properties, as the shadow diagrams at 1 pm, 2 pm, 3pm and 4 pm demonstrate.

3. Operational issues

It is a statutory requirement in schedule 12 to the Design and Development Overlay to 'ensure that the reasonable access, operational and service needs of the Esplanade Hotel are appropriately addressed such that the cultural significance of the hotel is not compromised'. Becton's application acknowledges the cultural heritage values of the hotel:

The Esplanade Hotel holds an important place in the heritage of St Kilda, due mainly to its associations with popular culture, entertainment and leisure. In this context it is appropriate that any new development should seek, as far as reasonably possible, to retain elements of particular interest to the community (FKA submission Nov 2002, *Heritage Conservation npn*).

Nevertheless, the application does not address the above design objective. Indeed it almost pointedly disregards the operational needs of the hotel, to the extent that the proposed design seriously compromises not only the hotel's cultural significance, but its continuing viability. The following points summarise our main concerns with the proposal: we would be happy to expand on these at any time.

- 3.1 Performance areas. There are two main performance areas: the Gershwin Room and the Sunset Bar/Nimrod Room/backroom area. On a big day up to 30 bands might play into the evening. Live music is central to the Esplanade Hotel's cultural significance, and has particular requirements. Music equipment is valuable and heavy, it has to be unloaded usually from a truck and carried into the back stage area. This requires unobstructed access and short distances between the loading bay and the stage. Performers need a route onto the stage other than through the audience. The proposed design seriously compromises access to these two areas.
 - 3.1.1 The Gershwin Room. Currently, trucks drive in from Pollington Street, unload and park in the back area behind the kitchen wing, before turning around and driving out. The proposal eliminates this back area, leaving only the driveway which becomes the loading bay.

Trucks will have to reverse in, unload and drive out again. On busy weekends, when the streets around The Esplanade are at their most congested, trucks will bank up in Pollington Street as only one can unload at a time. The unloading area itself is constricted, creating an unsatisfactory situation when pre-performance tensions are already high. This is not conducive to good relations between performers and management, nor between management and close neighbours.

- 3.1.2 The Sunset Bar/Nimrod Room/backroom area currently loads from the beer garden. The proposal eliminates this option, leaving three alternatives: 1. access from the same loading bay used by the Gershwin Room, creating more congestion and contributing further to the mayhem in Pollington Street. 2. through the café/terrace area, two sets of narrow doors which would normally remain closed and along a narrow walkway. 3. through the front doors and the mass of punters. None of these are acceptable.
- 3.2 Carparking. Currently the back area and the bottleshop provide parking for up to 25 cars, used by staff and performers. There is no mention in the traffic consultant's report of the existing off-street parking, and so no provision for its re-accommodation in the new proposal: it allows no car parking for the hotel at all. The Hotel cannot and should not operate without these back-of-house parking facilities. Staff and performers' cars and trucks would be pushed onto the street, competing for parking with everyone else including visitors to the residents of the 50 additional apartments and townhouses. At the very least, there could be some sharing arrangement with the generous provision of on-site residential carparking, preferably on the service floor directly behind the hotel.
- 3.3 Noise attenuation. Becton has made verbal commitments to noise attenuation works, specifically double-glazing of the new development windows, in order to maintain reasonable relations between residents of the new development and hotel management, and ultimately to ensure the continuing viability of the hotel. The application is silent on this issue.
- 3.4 Toilets. The elimination of the beer garden takes out toilets that are necessary to current patron levels. Their removal compromises existing operations and prevents expansion.
- 3.5 Service areas. The service areas for storage, garbage, bottles etc. is extremely limited. Loading and services for a potential new restaurant on the first floor, to replace that lost through demolition of the kitchen wing, are non-existent.
- 3.6 Cold storage. The loss of the bottleshop removes an important source of cold storage for the entire hotel. Whilst there is potential for relocation of the bottleshop into the hotel, there is no obvious place for relocated cold storage. The hotel of course cannot possibly operate effectively without it.
- 3.7 Fire egress. There is no provision for external fire escapes. Becton has proposed that one be located backstage in the Gershwin Room which is

completely unacceptable: in the event of a fire the area would become impossibly congested and compromise the ability of the performers to escape.

- 3.8 Other issues of space limitations. Space is generally limited for all sorts of other necessary functions such as air conditioning ducts and other fire escapes.
- 3.9 The proposed building is so close to hotel windows and doors that they become almost suffocated and impossible to use in a reasonable way.

Many of these point emphasise a theme that runs through the entire application, that is, to build so close to the lease boundary that the hotel is almost muscled off the site: it tries to shift services and facilities essential to the hotel's operation into the hotel, which is in some instances impossible and in others, severely compromising of current operations. The proposal is rude and cavalier to an extreme, not simply disregarding of, but almost thumbing its nose at the acknowledgment of the hotel's cultural significance by Heritage Victoria (at a regional and local level), the City of Port Phillip, the local communities associated with the hotel and, finally, the planning provisions contained in amendment C25 to the Port Phillip planning scheme to give effect to this acknowledgment.

One final point must be made: the hotel's continuity depends not just on on-going operations but on the restoration of its upper floors and expansion of hotel uses into these areas. This is critical: the hotel simply will not survive if important structural and functional improvements are not made. Becton's proposal for the remainder of the site not only seriously compromises existing use but precludes expansion. Activities on the upper floors will require more storage areas, more service areas, more parking, better access, better loading and lifting functions.

For all of these reasons, the proposal should not be permitted.

17 December 2002



CITY OF
PORT PHILLIP
ABN 21 762 977 945

ESPLANADE ALLIANCE
C/- Kate Shaw, Faculty of Architecture Bld & Pln
Room 5.34/University of Melbourne
MELBOURNE VIC 3010

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Planning Application 1448/2002
11 Esplanade, ST KILDA VIC 3182
1. Demolition of buildings (excluding main Esplanade Hotel building).
2. Construction of a building of up to 10-storeys (50 residential apartments) & associated car parking.

We acknowledge receipt of your objection to the above Planning Permit Application. Please be advised that your concerns will be carefully considered by Council and will be taken into account as part of the determination of the application.

You will be formally advised in writing of the outcome of the application and in the event that Council supports the proposal, you will be given an opportunity to appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), as will the applicant in the event that the application is refused.

Please be advised that in some instances where objections have been received, the Council may arrange a consultation meeting. The aim of a consultation meeting is to provide an opportunity for affected parties to discuss the application with the applicant and relevant Council staff.

In the event that a consultation meeting is to be held, you will be further advised in writing.

Should you have any queries regarding this matter, please contact me on 9209 6424.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'RS', is written over the 'Yours sincerely,' text.

Richard Schuster
Planning & Building Services

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