

Shadow Minister

Residential renewal in the suburbs

...densification downsides



David Davis MP,
Shadow Minister for
Planning and Heritage

I want to draw attention to, in particular, the government's support for densification across the city. Under this government, the planning amendments that it has put in place – VC110 and a series of other recent amendments – all focus sharply on densifying our city. *Plan Melbourne* under this government anticipates that. It is not a sophisticated version. It is a version that pushes very hard to strip away protections, take powers from local councils and take powers from communities to have a democratic say.

I want to put on record my growing concern about what is happening around our suburbs. We are seeing loss of tree canopy, we are seeing loss of streetscape, we are seeing risk to heritage buildings, and we are seeing this arrogant approach by the Andrews Labor government. In Elsternwick there are issues. The Minister has called in a tower at number 7 Selwyn Street. It is a good proposal in its essence and its aims, but it is just simply too tall. On the other side of the street a Woolworths development was knocked off by the Council and ultimately VCAT. In this case, just before the VCAT hearing, forced by objectors, the Minister for Planning called it in – four days before. So, I can only imagine that he has done that because he thought a different outcome is required. I want to put on record in the case of that Selwyn Street property that I support the objectives of the museum and the Jewish community, but the height is simply too great in that circumstance.

Further, in the City of Glen Eira, the Carnegie and Bentleigh townships are now under huge threat. The government promised before the last election there would be proper mandatory height limits in those centres, and those mandatory height limits are not being adhered to. There are now discretionary height limits that are too open and too subject to fluidity, abuse and VCAT decisions that are frankly not in keeping with the local community's views and not in keeping with the desire to keep a village atmosphere, not an atmosphere of tall towers. I say that Carnegie and Bentleigh are under the gun, under the pump, and they are going to get the treatment – the Andrews Labor government treatment, the Richard Wynne treatment – which will do huge damage.

Markham Estate, Bills Street, Surrey Hills and Mont Albert – in all of these, democracy is being torn away, and in each case dense development is likely to occur. This is changing the shape of our suburbs. John Kennedy, the Member for Hawthorn, is hopeless at protecting his community. He is not prepared to stand up. He was not there at Bills Street the other day. Ms Crozier was there, and she was leading the charge. I say that the Member for Hawthorn was not prepared to fight on that circumstance.

That development, an intense development on a very small site, is going to impinge directly on parkland. It is going to change the shape of that area with effectively a multi-storey development and a huge number of dwellings. I say it is intense – I say it is too intense – and I say the density of that development is far beyond intense. And it is undemocratic, what is being done in that development. The councils have had their powers stripped away by Richard Wynne, and the local community have not had their say other than at the public meetings that Mr Kennedy refuses to attend. I say he is weak, I say he is vacillating and I say he is not prepared to stand up for his local community, and I think they are increasingly becoming aware of that.

*There are now
discretionary height
limits that are
too open and too
subject to fluidity*

Further across in the City of Boroondara at the Markham Estate there is a massive development proposed there. This is the third attempt by the government to develop that site, and each time they have come back with too intense, too many dwellings and too tall, in this case in an area that is right next to parkland with one- or two-storey properties around. There is no traffic management plan. In that area everyone supports public housing, and they do in this case too, but they do not support the intensity of development, which is effectively a 4½-storey development – massive – across that site. It will ruin the neighbourhood because of the traffic congestion, it will ruin the parkland vista and it will change the shape and nature of that community, and it will do so undemocratically. Again the government has torn powers from the local council, undemocratically ripping those powers from the council and the community. In this case, along with many other cases, the community is increasingly angry about the changes that are being made.

I say in the case of public housing that the community want to see public and social housing but they want to see it at a density and in a shape that is satisfactory. They do not want to see a re-creation of the dense clusters and towers we saw in the 1960s. That was botched, and it was the wrong way to go in every respect. It was not the best outcome for people in those towers. I say local communities have got to be involved and local councils should be the responsible authority. I have made a commitment in the case of Bills Street that if we are elected next year we will actually make sure that the council is the responsible authority, and the same with the University of Melbourne site – a site that the government has got its eyes on to develop. I say that site too should be a matter for the City of Boroondara as the responsible authority. 📍

**David Davis MP can be contacted at
david.davis@parliament.vic.org.au**