

Sell-off of Public Housing Land on the Carlton Housing Estates

As justification for privatization of 3.5ha of open space on the Carlton Public Housing Estates, the Bracks Labor Government promised an integrated public/private, “salt and pepper” housing mix. The rationale for this model was that this would assimilate public housing tenants, who are isolated on the Estates and alienated from the wider Carlton community. At a pre-election forum in Carlton in 2006 Member for Melbourne, Bronwyn Pike, enthused that (a) “there will be no loss of open space”, and (b) this social mix will “break down the public housing ghetto”. CRA sees it as misuse of estate land and gross overdevelopment.

When building commenced, the community learned that the Brumby ALP Government had reversed its stated policy of social inclusion and implemented a model of intentional segregation on the Estates, which will inevitably further isolate and alienate public tenants. The redeveloped component of public housing on the Lygon/Rathdowne Sts Estate is a single row adjacent to the existing towers and isolated along the western boundary of the redevelopment. **Private housing has taken the form of a gated community including exclusive green space, and secured against public tenants by a 2.5meter fence!** The gated development was advertised as “private . . . secure . . . fully enclosed space” (*Viva Carlton* brochure).

Numbers of units: 550 private units are under construction, along with 248 generally smaller public units (198 units were demolished). The number of public tenants who can be accommodated in the redevelopment was not increased. **This despite a waiting list for public housing of 40,000.**

Government should be concerned to create direly needed “affordable housing” for sale into the community, rather than to maximize profit for the developer.

Further justification for privatisation was that it would pay for reconstructing the degraded ‘walk-ups’. CRA’s independent expert advice on demolition and construction costs was \$50M. Government input to date is \$165M (Ed David, Director, DHS Property Services and Asset Management). Clearly there was no need to hand over 3.5ha of estate land as a developer incentive.

Massive loss of Green Space: the City of Melbourne advocates 1 ha of open green space per 1,000 people. **Carlton’s Public Housing Estates will have 1ha for 4,500 people.** Jenny Mikakos MP (CLC chair) contended “several new public parks being developed (**on 1ha open green space**) will provide families with pleasant, safe, useable spaces for a diverse range of activities”.

Consultation: CRA, like other stakeholders, was led to believe that it would be included in a process of consultation, which would lead to the preparation of a development plan for public display. This did not happen. Instead a development plan appeared which had as its objective, maximum site coverage/yield. Clearly, private development concerns have prevailed over public interests. The Community Liaison Committee (CLC) is farcical, a ‘sham’ consultation at its worst. Participants consist mainly of bureaucrats who deliver ‘spin’ and intimidate tenant and local agency representatives.

Increased segregation of Public Housing Tenants: According to Jenny Mikakos MP “interaction between public and private residents will occur through day to day interactions between neighbours at local shops, recreation facilities and public parks” (parkland is 1km away and across major arterial roads). A joint MCC/Govt project *Opportunities for Carlton* (OfC) has foreshadowed infrastructure and essential services for public tenants on Council land adjoining the Lygon/Rathdowne St Estate. Plans include extension of the Neill St primary school to become a ‘community hub’, ensuring tenants remain isolated on the Estates.

Additionally, **Australian Unity** has been sold land on the Lygon/Rathdowne St Estate to develop aged care facilities. The long vacant Royal Women’s Hospital could have profitably been converted to this purpose.

This cynical, economically driven outcome takes **no cognisance of the social, physical and psychological consequences for the tenants** of the Estates. Developer *Lendlease* presented a plan at the Panel Hearing in 2006, which included full social integration but was rejected early in the bidding process. *Becton* advised necessity to separate private from public units, or private units won’t sell. CRA’s unwillingness to accept this outcome caused major enmity with politicians and bureaucrats. Approaches to Housing Minister Richard Wynne and Member for Melbourne Bronwyn Pike met with spin, and claims that this is an excellent outcome. (Doubtlessly it is, for the Singapore based developer *Australand*.) At a pre-election forum (8 November 2010) Minister Pike proudly announced, as justification of privatisation, that all private units were quickly sold off-plan. It is scandalous, in this time of affordable housing crisis, that 80% were purchased by overseas investors.

In 2010 CRA called on the State Government to (a) halt current development plans, and (b) implement a wide-ranging review of the current directions of the redevelopment project. Public Housing policies of the recently elected Baillieu Government as they relate to the Carlton Estates, are not yet evident. We will continue to lobby for an equitable outcome for tenants and the Carlton Community.