



the dome development

Honourable Mayor, distinguished councillors, Your Grace and my fellow neighbours - thank you all for making the time to listen and be heard on an issue that is close to the hearts of many residents.

Before I begin I would like to extend my sympathies, and those of the Donvale Ratepayers Association, to Bishop Suriel and his congregation with respect to the recent suffering of your brethren in Egypt, on the 6th of January this year, and to condemn the persecution of any person due to their faith.

I will try to be brief, as you can see there are a large number of people gathered tonight who wish to be heard.

Just so that we can gain a perspective on who is here this evening, I ask if you can raise your hand if you are a resident of Donvale or Park Orchards. Now, please keep your hands up if you are here because you are against the development proposed tonight. Thank you.

Since moving into Donvale in 2002, the Coptic Orthodox Church has been an excellent neighbour, enjoying the site and the tranquil neighbourhood much in the manner and form of its previous owners, the Roman Catholic Carmelite Brothers.

In 2009, Manningham City Council received a Planning Application to build a Multipurpose venue at 88-154 Park Road in Donvale - a development which would tower over 7 stories high, include 3 basketball stadiums, 4 squash courts, a gymnasium, a 50 seat café, an indoor pool and a youth centre, and be convertible to a 2,000 seat function centre or place of assembly for several thousand people.

Taking up a footprint of over one acre of land, this is a building the likes of which has not been seen in the local area before - and let us not ignore that it is intended to be a major commercial operation situated within a Low Density Residential Zone.

The cost of this project is estimated at \$8 Million, but it is only the first of six stages of a master plan to develop the 22 acre property to eventually include 12 new buildings, and to be the central meeting place for the Coptic Orthodox Church within the Southern Hemisphere.

As I mentioned, this proposed development is only Stage 1. Stages 2 to 6 are proposed to include:

- 2 Education and Administration Buildings
- The demolition of part of the existing monastery - which is protected by a heritage overlay - and then to extend it as Student Accommodation;
- A Cathedral which is not much smaller than the proposed multipurpose venue, and by all indications is much higher;
- 3 buildings for Aged Care Accommodation,
- 2 Convents;
- A Bishop's residence;
- A Security Post; and
- Proposed Tennis Courts to take up the existing oval that the developer has said would be used for overflow parking.

The intention of the Donvale Ratepayers Association is to preserve the current environment and tranquillity of the local neighbourhood, and with all due respect to the desires of the developer to expand the commercial return on the site, this proposal does not fit at all within the current character of the local surrounds.

I wish to point out that a person, informing us that he was speaking on behalf of His Grace Bishop Suriel, contacted the DRPA on the 1st of December 2009 to address - and I quote - "some of the misconceptions that may be emerging." We have openly requested that the developer advise us of any misconceptions that we may have made, and to date have received no such advice.

As residents we feel that this is a gross over-development of the site which if permitted to proceed, would drastically alter the amenity and landscape of the surrounding area, affecting all residents for all time.

The Donvale Ratepayers Association, with the support of the Park Orchards Ratepayers Association, opposes the developer's proposal on seven major grounds, these being:

1. Character: The proposed usage, including a commercial sports and function centre capable of hosting some 2,000 people, student accommodation, aged care accommodation, a convent and a theological college, is not in keeping with a Low Density Residential Zoning that primarily and historically comprises acreage-sized family land and homes.

2. Heritage: The proposal would dwarf the existing Heritage-listed Carmelite Monastery, about which it has already been advised by a Manningham City Council planner that - and again I quote - "Its bulk and appearance may overly dominate and detract from the architectural prominence and significance of the significant Monastery building."

3. Environmental: The site includes one of the very few suitable habitats identified by the Department of Sustainability and Environment for the Powerful Owl, listed as "Vulnerable" under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act of 1988. The proposal also threatens to harm or destroy 0.78 hectares of Very High conservation significance Valley Heathy Forest, which is classified by the Department as "Endangered".

4. Traffic: During construction, which will continue over many years - and according to one councilor it may take more than a decade to complete the entire Master Plan - the number of trucks carrying cement, building supplies and evacuating dirt from the site will be catastrophic. This construction traffic alone will require ongoing repairs to local roads, which are more like country lanes, without concrete guttering and footpaths, and which are not built to sustain traffic of this nature - as well as being a danger to local children who use these roads to travel to/from school and to move around the local neighborhood.

Then, when the development is completed, the volume of traffic on Heads Road and Park Road would increase dramatically to the detriment of local residents, as we have already experienced to a lesser extent before the Eastlink Tunnel was completed. The reports from the developer's paid consultants have not considered properly or impartially the impact of traffic, and they have not allowed for adequate parking on the site to satisfy its proposed function.

5. Noise: The initial noise that will be created by the construction of such a monumental plan will be horrendous and relentless, given that construction will continue for many years.

Such an enormous place of assembly would generate large amounts of noise pollution affecting both local residents and native fauna alike, as well as the requirement to light the building and its surrounds for safety and security well after functions or sporting events are completed.

It is important to note that the proposed MPV will not only be used for public gatherings, but is proposed to be used 7 days a week for sporting clubs into the later hours of the evening. Having been in touch directly with local sporting clubs currently interested in using the site, I have been advised their interest in using it will require it to be available up to 11:30 at night.

6. Encroachment upon Existing Dwellings: The very high buildings, up to 22m, or approximately 7 stories in height, would overlook existing neighbours, creating an eyesore in their backyards, and encroaching on the panorama of the local environment. One neighbour will have the 7-storey MPV within 34 meters of their back door.

7. Domination of Landscape: In addition to the up to 7-storey-high buildings, the proposed new cathedral appears, from the architect's images that are available publically, to be perhaps twice as high as this, set to dominate the skyline of the 3111 postcode area and beyond, and well above the height of the maximum 2-storey dwellings normally permitted to be built by other residents in the area. For those of you who know the site, the roof of the current monastery can be seen for kilometers. Well, Stage 4 in the development – the new cathedral – proposes to dwarf this current monastery building completely.

In summary, the Donvale Ratepayers Association does not consider that the Developer's proposal meets in any way, shape or form with the intent of the State of Victoria's definition of a "Low Density Residential Zone", and if approved would be detrimental to the peaceful enjoyment of the local residential properties that has attracted and retained a strong core of Donvale ratepayers for many, many years.

The Donvale Ratepayers Association therefore opposes the approval of both the Stage 1 proposal and the Master Plan for the site as put forward.

Bishop Suriel, I implore you, that as you have stated your aim is to become a member of the Donvale community, then please respect the environment into which you have decided to introduce your church.

The reasons that have attracted our residents and no doubt your congregation to this special area are much the same - the natural, peaceful environment that surrounds our residential homes and your spiritual home, and everything else that makes this area unique, especially given that it is encompassed by suburbia on three sides.

This development aims to erode the doorstep of the green wedge and if we don't make a stand here, then where does it stop? We do not wish that in generations to come, our children's children may wonder what the natural surroundings once looked like.

We welcome the Coptic Orthodox Church into our neighbourhood and hope that their church and ecumenical spirit thrives in the surroundings of the Donvale community.

The DRPA is happy to work with you to canvass local residents' opinions as to what they feel is an appropriate level of development for the area that respects the natural beauty and heritage of the area, and that does not isolate the church from its neighbours.

I would like to highlight a couple of key figures to demonstrate that opposition to this development is not coming from a couple of neighbouring properties who are concerned about their backyard vistas.

Since the beginning of this year the DRPA website has received over 50,000 hits from people wanting to know more about the proposed development.

We have received 42 apologies from local households who are in opposition to the proposed development and cannot be here tonight, and we have collected over 200 signatures so far on a petition opposing the proposed development at 88-154 Park Road in Donvale.

This petition grows daily - including pledges for financial assistance, should this be necessary, to enable us to engage legal or other professional assistance in the future.

And finally to our councillors - our elected representatives.

Oscar Wilde once said that a man may know the price of everything but the value of nothing. The price of the development may be \$8 Million, which negates council's responsibility to provide facilities for its ratepayer, and the revenue from this commercial operation may continue to fund the development of the site at 88-154 Park Road in Donvale - but what is the true value of this development as we take the first step into eroding the green wedge, as we destroy the native flora and we remove the habitat for the local species including the Powerful Owl, the local kangaroos, koalas and other animals who use this land as a corridor and sanctuary. Once these animals are scared off they don't come back.

Where do we STOP?

Kristian Tkatchenko
President
The Donvale Ratepayers Association
27 January, 2010