

BUILDING COMMUNITIES ON CAR PARKS

Vincent Ryan

Manager Strategic and Economic Development, Banyule City Council, Melbourne, Australia
(Phone) 61 3 9457 0901 & (Fax) 61 3 9499 9475
Email vincent.ryan@banyule.vic.gov.au

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the opportunities to develop Council and privately owned car parks to achieve the objectives of Melbourne 2030 and relevant Activity Centre Structure Plans.

Council car parks represent one of the few larger redevelopment options in existing suburban shopping centres. Developing existing car parks also represents an opportunity for Councils to lead best practice mixed use developments and unlock the place making and development potential of shopping centres.

Banyule City Council is providing planning frameworks and mixed use development projects on selected car parks in key activity centres to facilitate development that meets community aspirations and creates a more sustainable future.

KEYWORDS: Mixed Use, Urban Consolidation, Car Parking, Community Building, Community Consultation

1. INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan Councils have invested heavily in car parks since the 1940s. As the push for urban consolidation grows larger strategic redevelopment sites become fewer and fewer. Increasingly Council car parks are some of the few larger development options in existing suburban shopping centres. Developing existing car parks also represents an opportunity for Councils to lead best practice mixed use developments and unlock the place making and development potential of their shopping centres.

However, many Councils are still caught in a way of thinking that demands easily accessible, free, at-grade car parking without question. Our preference for supporting an individual's motorised mobility in a car often comes at the expense of walking, cycling, public transport and community health and well being. The pre-eminence of the car is further underpinned by planning schemes and local agreements locked into the provision of car parking at specified

rates.

The design of buildings, spaces and places are often premised on the provision of car parks. A new way of thinking, driven by the creation of place and sustainable, liveable communities, is now challenging our reliance on the car and the space and resources it consumes.

To create sustainable communities and effectively use existing resources Banyule City Council is exploring the redevelopment of car parks and surrounding land in four key centres across the city: Greensborough, Heidelberg, Ivanhoe and the Bell Street Mall. Such an exploration needs an effective understanding of community consultation and collaboration, car parking, sustainable transport and development if it is to succeed. It must recognise the present need for car parking but also plan for a more sustainable future where there is a decreasing reliance on the car.

2. PLANNING FOR CHANGE

2.1 Structure Planning and Urban Design

Activity centre structure planning combined with an understanding of the potential form and density of development and effective community engagement can help transform a place. Having a clear vision for public spaces and community places and ensuring that this applies to all land within an activity centre provides a recipe for positive change.

Increasingly central to this is the inclusion of car parks and particularly Council-owned car parks in our thinking. While some Councils may include their car parks in structure plans and urban design frameworks few are enabling development on those sites. This is particularly constrained because of permit conditions and cash in lieu and special charge contributions for car parking which Councils must adhere to in any redevelopment of an existing site. Development is also fundamentally constrained by the cost of higher density buildings and property values that are too low.

Structure planning then becomes central to unlocking this potential and a Council's commitment to doing something with their off-street car parking assets. Banyule City Council has made this proposition central to its structure planning and policy approach to on-street car parking. It has also made urban design frameworks, which help unlock the development density potential of a site, central to any structure plan.

Our approach to urban design is being supported by the use of three-dimensional modelling that allows the model to be quickly changed, viewed from many perspectives and used in the development application process for higher density developments. The community is also able to understand more clearly the mass of any development being proposed. The model also becomes a useful tool for understanding a centre's capacity for change.

2.2 Parking

A comprehensive understanding of the land use and built form density potential of a car park is needed if a redevelopment is to be considered. Without that understanding it is unlikely that a Council will be able to redevelop a car park, continue to deliver the existing number of

public car parking spaces and explore community aspirations for improved or additional public spaces and facilities that may have been identified in a Structure Plan.

These starting points have allowed Council to explore these opportunities in:

- The Greensborough Principle Activity Centre (the only Principle Activity Centre on the Hurstbridge Railway line running through Melbourne's north east) where two car parks, an existing pool and offices are earmarked;
- The Heidelberg Major and Specialised Activity Centres (which host the region's major medical facilities with more than 5,500 staff working in medical services) where two public car parks and neighbouring private car parks are being explored for redevelopment;
- The Ivanhoe Major Activity Centre (which includes Banyule City Council's Civic Centre and major library service) where car parks adjacent to the Ivanhoe Library and the Civic Centre are being explored for redevelopment;
- The Bell Street Mall Neighbourhood Activity Centre, where all Council car parks and land holdings are being explored for redevelopment.

2.3 Community Use and Collaboration

Consultation, engagement and collaboration are important during the development of a vision for an activity centre. This becomes even more important when engaging with the community on the real development of a site that they may live or work next to or visit regularly. Often their capacity to contribute is best unlocked when they can see how a vision is translated into specific ideas for change.

The complexity of this is even greater when the site is a car park. The local traders association will usually want to increase the amount of car parking, a community group may want to ensure the site is safer and a nearby school may want to discuss community facilities they could access. Council may want to direct higher density residential development to this sort of site rather than to more sensitive residential areas but still preserve and increase parking to cater for increased densities.

For each of Banyule's key activity centre projects Council has developed either a Community Consultative Committee - which operates for the duration of the project - or engages in detailed collaborative processes that include one-on-one consultation, community meetings, focus groups, information sessions and design workshops. At the heart of this process is the need for a shared understanding of the issues and different interests and an opportunity to participate in producing the ideas for change.

2.4 Sustainability

Planning trends towards making activity centres more sustainable become a delicate juggling act when considering the use of a car park as a development opportunity.

Climate change and peak oil tells us that we must develop present assets for a more constrained future. Directing growth to activity centres and utilising existing car parking assets effectively means allowing some growth in parking but not at the expense of more sustainable objectives such as urban consolidation. To contribute to a more sustainable centre

Councils must ensure more people can live, work and play in a centre and improve access to public transport, walking and cycling. This means that the commercial, residential and retail yield of a car parking site must support a parking outcome the community and the planning system will support.

Understanding transport and access is central to a more sustainable outcome. Central to the success of considering this is effectively engaging with communities about the possibility of using cars less by creating development that allows people to live, work, recreate and shop around these key activity centres. The first step then is engagement on and understanding of this complex fabric of parking, transport and other needs. Once a better understanding is achieved more effective engagement and collaboration can occur around the sustainability possibilities for a centre and a car park.

3. OUTCOMES

3.1 Parking, Community Places and Spaces, Development

Central to a project's success are great development outcomes that meet the aspirations of Melbourne's guiding planning framework, Melbourne 2030 and a structure plan and urban design framework supported by the local community.

This work should be enshrined in a master plan that more clearly articulates the kind and cost of the spaces, places and development outcomes desired. The master plan needs to be used as a guiding document that represents a base case for Council – a case with which Council can compare proposals from the development community.

In Banyule's case the current opportunities being explored are:

- Greensborough - a regional aquatic and leisure facility, improved public spaces (including a town square) and facilities, shops, offices and apartments on neighbouring sites
- Heidelberg - community facilities, parking, public spaces (town square), shops, offices and apartments
- Ivanhoe - a redeveloped library, gallery space, public spaces (town square), shops, offices and apartments
- Bell Street Mall - a community-library hub, public spaces (town square), shops and offices.

Central to this master planning is effectively describing community buildings, places and spaces. This helps to communicate the base case and aspirational ingredients to the community.

3.2 Development Models

For each of these activity centres a flexible development model is being pursued that provides a broad planning framework with well identified community aspirations. For Greensborough, for example, the need for a new pool was not negotiable for the community. For Heidelberg higher density residential and commercial development with improved parking and public

spaces are central to the solution. For Ivanhoe the focus is on a better library and community facilities such as a gallery space. For the Bell Street Mall the community desires a radically improved place with a community-library hub at its heart.

A master plan, or a similar vehicle, provides an opportunity to understand the overall costs of a redevelopment and, in some detail, the cost of public facilities and infrastructure. This can then be taken to the market place and the offering proposed by any developer compared to Council's base case.

4. CONCLUSION

Roads, car parks and the design of many of our public spaces and buildings have been increasingly premised on the car and the seemingly endless supply of oil since the 1940s. This has dominated the fabric of older shopping centres and led the siting and design of newer ones.

Today we are presented with thousands of hectares of land throughout Melbourne dominated by off-street public car parks. These sites provide an opportunity for redevelopment that leads to a more sustainable future, addresses car parking - without being dominated by it - and delivers great mixed use developments and community outcomes. Car parks should be seen as community assets with the potential to help transform the design and development of our activity centres.

Through these assets Councils can help lead the development of buildings, places and spaces for a more sustainable future.