



"Cornell, Kimberly"

19/01/2009 04:26 PM

To "veac@dse.vic.gov.au" <veac@dse.vic.gov.au>

cc

bcc

Subject submission for open space

Sub:

1

2

No: 14

Attached is a submission in response to the investigation of open space in metropolitan Melbourne. I tried to attach 4 photos but they exceeded the 7MB limit of my internet server. If you want the photos I can send them separately.

Thanks,

Kimberly Cornell

January 18<sup>th</sup> 2009

## **VEAC SUBMISSION FOR OPEN SPACE**

**Vacant land from the old Heathmont Primary School site**

**Corner of Frances St and Erica Cres. Heathmont**

**(Melways Map Reference 49 K12).**

In April 1997 the Heathmont Primary School was officially closed and children were transferred to a new school in Great Ryrie street, Heathmont. As a result of this closure, the Heathmont site became vacant land, its future use yet to be determined. Local residents recognising the value of the land as open space formed a group and petitioned the Maroondah Local Council and State Government to retain some land for open space and preserve the original native flora. Over 1000 people signed a petition supporting this initiative which was tabled in State Parliament.

In May 1999 it was decided that the site would be used for a mix of public and private housing with 5% of the land (effectively one house block) retained as open space. Extensive submissions were made to the Maroondah City Council and State Government outlining the biological significance of the flora, the need to retain the treed landscape of the streets surrounding it, and a desire for open space for residents of the area.

In 2004 after dealing with local objections the Council agreed to negotiate with the Office of Housing to retain 13% as public space in the planned development. This was not successful and in a VCAT ruling the government's plan for 18 dwellings on part of the site and no open public space was approved. Some of the more significant trees were maintained to integrate the development with the treed streetscape but that was the only tangible concession.

The public housing development was completed in 2007 but the area behind this site designated for private development remains vacant. A 'For Sale' sign was erected, and then removed later, and as far as we know there has never been a buyer. One of the problems regarding this section of the old site is that it has a steep gradient and many old growth trees that would need to be removed. There are also two school ovals that remain above this incline and one of these was created with landfill possibly making it less attractive to build on. It was, in fact, created by the parents of the old Heathmont Primary School with their own funds and is still viewed by the local residents as a community asset.

This submission requests that the remaining vacant land of the old Heathmont Primary School site be retained as open space for several reasons:

1. There are important environmental reasons for maintaining the area as open space. The trees on the perimeter of the site maintain the bushland feel of the neighbourhood and the area was classified by Dr Graeme Lorimer as a site of biological significance in a Maroondah study done prior to 1997. In a submission tabled with the Maroondah City Council in March 1998 we noted that:

“The Department of Education also recognises that the crescent ridge [on this site] around the lower oval is of some biological significance because it contains one of the last remaining areas of original indigenous flora...”

We also noted that:

“...The trees and undergrowth on the Heathmont site act as drains for water run-off and hold the soil along the sloping end of the site. It would be in Council’s interest to maintain the trees and undergrowth if only to reduce the cost and possibility of future drainage problems.”

2. The older trees are homes to possums and birds. In December 2008 we observed two Tawny Frogmouths nesting with their chicks in one of the trees. Roger Lord a past Co-ordinator of Heathmont Bushlinks said the trees on the site are of:

“...biological importance as a habitat link for bird life moving through the suburb. The corridor of trees providing this habitat is well-observed and extends from Heathmont Park to Heathmont Primary School and then to Jubilee Park”.

3. As suburbs become more densely developed with smaller housing blocks and the population grows an area such as this becomes more important. Over time the loss of mature tree canopies in neighbourhoods leads to a reduction of faunal species and a change in the micro-climate which makes suburbs hotter, less shady and less visually attractive.
4. Aside from environmental reasons there are also important demographic and social reasons for maintaining the area as open space. Intergenerational change in the Heathmont area has seen an increase in the number of young families moving into the immediate neighbourhood and an increase in the need for playing space away from main roads and the train station. The school ovals would make excellent areas for play space, football kicking, and dog walking and keep children off the roads. Before the development children used to regularly play at the primary school after hours.
5. Finally, by maintaining the open space in this area it increases the potential for walking through the neighbourhood to public transport, shops and for general leisure. The proximity of this open space to the older people’s units in the new housing estate gives them the opportunity to enjoy access to attractive walking paths. It also acts as a shortcut from the lower streets to the shops, encouraging walking, social interaction and reduction of car usage. Prior to the closure of the primary school this area was treated as a public thoroughfare which is now fenced off and less accessible. Cont>...

Page 3.

Residents of the area would therefore welcome any enquiry into the use of this site and to consider it in future open space planning. It has been an on-going issue for nearly twelve years and one we would like to finally resolve. Should you require any further input regarding the site or need individuals to be involved in a consultation process I am sure that there are others along with us who would be happy to attend any discussion.

Thank you for considering this submission and we look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Kimberly Cornell and Annette O'Sullivan

Members of Open Space for Heathmont.