

St Kilda Triangle Site

Report of the Design Review Committee
regarding

Improvement of views to the Foreshore from the Upper Esplanade

prepared for Port Phillip City Council

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18 January 2007

1. The Council Resolution

At its meeting on 13 December Council's Statutory Planning Committee resolved to defer determination of the application for approval of the St Kilda Triangle Development Plan (31 October 2007) subject to receipt of a report to its meeting on 24 January 2008, and that the report include (*inter alia*):

- *"a report from the Design Review Committee addressing opportunities for the improvement of views from the Upper Esplanade between the Green building and the Ogee building, across the area known as the Grassy Slopes to the foreshore area."*

This resolution was endorsed by Council at its meeting on 17 December. At that meeting, Council also determined that two community members be invited to join the Design Review committee (DRC) for the purpose of preparing its report to the Statutory Planning Committee.

2. The DRC's Task

2.1 The DRC carefully considered the task required of it by the Council resolution. The essential aspect of the task is to identify opportunities to alter the design as described in the Development Plan so that views from the Upper Esplanade to the foreshore are improved.

The DRC has met on several occasions to define the task, the critical viewpoints and the extent of changes that would result in different extents of improved views. To identify these possible changes, the DRC requested that the developer's architects investigate opportunities to modify the Development Plan to improve views. The architects' response is included at Section 7 and assisted the DRC in its assessment of the likely impact of such modifications.

3. Viewpoints and view destinations

The nature of views is determined by the originating viewpoint and by the subject of a particular view. The DRC recognised that 'views' are either broad (panoramas) or are directed to a particular object (vistas). Further, the DRC recognised that viewpoints can be either static (a person standing still) or dynamic (a person walking, cycling or riding in a moving car or tram).

In the context of this Report, static and dynamic viewpoints were considered to include:

- a pedestrian standing or moving adjacent to the blockwork wall on the Upper Esplanade with an eye level 1.5 metres above footpath level,

- a standing or moving pedestrian located on the northern footpath of the Upper Esplanade,
- a seated person in a low floor tram, whose eye level is about 1.3 metres above road level, and
- a passenger in a car moving along the Upper Esplanade.

It is relevant that a viewer may either be in charge of their position (i.e. as a pedestrian) or have that independence curtailed by being subject to the movement of a vehicle (i.e. as a passenger in a moving tram or car).

These different viewpoints must be taken into account in assessing whether any modifications to the Development Plan to improve views of the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade are warranted. While there are numerous originating viewpoints and numerous view destinations, for the purpose of this Report the originating viewpoint was determined to be any sequential point along the Upper Esplanade footpath adjacent to the blockwork wall at eye level, being approximately 1.5 metres above footpath level. Other viewpoints described above may be lower or further away from the foreshore, but in most instances the impact of these different viewpoint locations is marginal.

There is a need to define “foreshore” as the collective ‘destination point’ of views in the context of this Report. The DRC defined the foreshore as *"the area between the Jacka Boulevard footpath and the water's edge, and including elements within that area such as buildings, landscaping, trees, etc."*

It also determined that to achieve adequate views to the foreshore the entire foreshore area, as defined, does not need to be visible. A reasonable defining line for views to the foreshore above which enough of the foreshore was visible would be a line from the Upper Esplanade viewing point to the line where the sand meets the pedestrian promenade. (Essentially this line sets the ‘bottom frame’ to the lower limit of the landscape and architectural structures of the foreshore where they are framed by the backdrop of the sea and the sand.)

Setting this line or plane is critical in assessing both the extent of views as proposed in the Development Plan and the possible improvements to those views by any modifications to the proposed built form that the research undertaken in the preparation of this Report may identify.

4. Existing views to the foreshore

It is evident that the existing views to the foreshore from the part of the Upper Esplanade that is the subject of this Report are extensive and are blocked only intermittently by trees on the Triangle Site and, to a lesser degree, by parked or moving vehicles on the Triangle Site or on Jacka Boulevard. The main elements

of the foreshore currently visible are structures such as the Stokehouse and Catani Arch, trees and lower vegetation on the foreshore and areas of lawn. While there are extensive but broken views to the water there is very little view of sand.

Beyond the foreshore are other important views; vignettes to the St Kilda Pier and its Kiosk, the marina lighthouse and Brookes Jetty set against the background of water, and views to Williamstown and the You Yangs, Point Cook, Arthur's Seat and Mt Eliza along the horizon.

5. The extent of views to the foreshore as in the Development Plan

The Development Plan includes a number of sections cut through the site and extending to the water (pages 40 – 44). These are considered to be insufficiently comprehensive to enable the impact of the development on views to the foreshore to be adequately assessed.

It is evident that the proposed development will significantly reduce the currently unobstructed outlook to the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade. It is also true that the proposal will create new and extensive views to the foreshore from many publicly-accessible viewpoints at both the proposed Promenade level (one floor above Jacka Boulevard) and Esplanade level (two floors above Jacka Boulevard). A high proportion of these viewpoints are within 20 or so metres of Jacka Boulevard, offering closer views over the foreshore, its gardens and pavilions to the beach. The further back from the "yellow brick road" edge, less of the foreshore can be seen. From the Upper Esplanade it is unlikely that car and tram travellers would be able to experience a view over the rise where the Grassy Slopes occur.

In order to adequately understand the existing situation as well as the potential for modification of the Development Plan to achieve improved views, the DRC requested that the developer's architects prepare twelve cross-sectional drawings from five viewpoints on the Upper Esplanade to the foreshore. The five viewpoints are locations both within and beyond the gap between the Green building and the Ogee building, in recognition that oblique views through this gap from further along the Upper Esplanade in each direction are possible. Consequently twelve viewlines were defined to include alignments which cut through the proposed development in a variety of different locations.

In making this request, the DRC recommended that the architects use a viewpoint being 1.3 metres above road level at the centreline of the Upper Esplanade tram tracks at specific points which are nominated. However, the architects argued that a viewing point of 1.5 metres above footpath level close to the blockwork wall was a more populated location, and that viewers in vehicles

were unable to linger to take in the view. Thus a 'best case' scenario was adopted by the architects rather than a more inclusive approach.

6. Opportunities to improve views

As well as preparing viewlines to the foreshore based on the Development Plan, the DRC invited the architects to investigate whatever modifications they would propose to achieve improved views. The DRC suggested that such modifications would be by one or more of the following means:

1. removing some of the sub-structure of the development (being that part of the building below the level of the 'grassy slopes'),
2. removing intervening superstructure elements (being elements above the plane of the 'grassy slopes (FFL 11.00) such as balustrades, planters, etc.)
3. raising the public viewpoints along the Upper Esplanade (recognising that some changes to levels of the Upper Esplanade footpath are already proposed by the developer),
4. modifying proposed tree-planting species or locations of trees along Jacka Boulevard whose canopy could form a dense visual barrier between the Upper Esplanade and the foreshore, and
5. any other action or device that the architects may propose.

By the above means, the DRC encouraged the architects to creatively explore and propose changes to the Development Plan which would demonstrably improve views to the foreshore. The DRC considered this to be a preferable process than nominating specific changes to the proposal.

The DRC saw this exercise as also having the potential to identify and define new viewing experiences, not only those from the Upper Esplanade but from locations within the site as well.

7. The architects' response to opportunities to improve the view

The architects responded to the DRC request by providing a narrative and a series of explanatory cross-sectional diagrams to describe, firstly, a larger St Kilda Square and, secondly, a range of less physically interventionist actions. These are described below. The architects' also outlined their opinion as to the positive and negative consequences for each approach, and these are presented below.

7.1 The 'extreme' option

This option was illustrated by the architects as an extreme case. It is premised on the fact that the current extent of views to the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade would be retained if there was no built structure intruding above a

plane which extended from viewpoints on the Upper Esplanade to the footpath on the seaward side of Jacka Boulevard. Clearly, to pursue this option would be to have significant impacts on the amount of built form currently proposed in the Development Plan.

The architects provided sectional studies of viewlines drawn from all nominated viewpoints on the Upper Esplanade which showed that, to ensure the entire foreshore reserve remained visible from the Upper Esplanade, there could be no building development along the Jacka Boulevard edge of the Triangle Site.

The DRC does not consider such a dramatic option to be either practicable or consistent with the objectives for the Site as expressed in the UDF and the Planning Scheme. Consequently, this option has not been pursued further.

7.2 An enlarged St Kilda Square

The Development Plan includes St Kilda Square, a semi-enclosed space at Promenade level (one floor above Jacka Boulevard) overlooking Jacka Boulevard and the foreshore. The architects have explored the option of significantly increasing the size of this Square in order to allow a much more extensive view from the Upper Esplanade to the foreshore. In their words, they have:

“Investigated increasing the size of the square to allow a view from the Upper Esplanade footpath down to the Foreshore. This results in a Square in the order of 70 x 100m.

We advise that this strategy should not be pursued.

Positive consequences

The view to the Foreshore is improved.

Negative consequences

The area of parkland, The Grassy Slopes, is greatly reduced. Replacing the lost parkland at the Square level is unlikely to be successful as the parkland would be isolated from the Upper Esplanade.

The square becomes too large in proportion to the enclosing walls. It is now comparable in size to the unsuccessful and barren plaza at Waterfront City, Docklands. The current dimension of 30 x 40m has been carefully refined with reference to models such as The Rockefeller Centre Plaza and Piazza Umberto in Capri. This allows for a person to be recognized across the space. It also avoids the problem of appearing abandoned during quiet times.

The Jacka Boulevard streetscape is reduced to a single storey.

The large size of The Square increases the likelihood of severe wind problems.

The option of moving the (30 x 40m) Square down to the Jacka Boulevard level with terraces at the Promenade level was discussed. It is unlikely that this would be successful; wind issues are likely to be exacerbated, the elevated view from the Square is lost, The Square is no longer part of a natural pedestrian path, the terraces would be between 30 and 40m wide and the introduction of an open space at this level breaks the street typology along Jacka Boulevard, negating the existing proposal for a 'High Street' form."

Comment:

In the discussion of this option among the architect, the developer and the DRC, questions of its commercial impact were set aside.

The first version of this option, set out for discussion by the architects, excised enough of the Esplanade level of the 'substructure' to allow panoramic water and foreshore views from the Upper Esplanade (between the Ogee and Green buildings), resulting in a much smaller area of Upper Esplanade level open space and a much larger exposed area of public space on the middle Promenade level (that of the St Kilda Square).

The DRC and the architects agreed that this action by itself was unlikely to produce a desirable or successful public square.

For such a scale of redesign to remain an option, it was evident that more design development and articulation would be required. The notion of lowering the St Kilda Square to Jacka Boulevard level, set down within the broader 'excised' mid-level terrace, was discussed.

7.2.1 A lowered St Kilda Square

This is a subset of the enlarged St Kilda Square option and includes the introduction of a new semi-enclosed square at Jacka Boulevard level set within the area of the enlarged space one level above.

Essentially a format such as this would distribute the proposal's grassy roof-top open spaces over two, stepped-down, split-level terraced roof tops. (The mid level would become a lowered terrace of the grassy slopes, with the enclosed square within it). Much of the commercially-activated edge to Jacka Boulevard would be reduced from two storeys to one. And at some point along this frontage the opening into the sheltered St Kilda Square would occur.

Though rearranged, no public open space would be lost, and the concept of an intimate semi-sheltered public square would be retained.

The challenge to the designers would be to rearticulate the terraced spaces and pedestrian routes to render them attractive and viable. While this is considered by the DRC to be achievable in principle, further exploration and testing of the idea in terms of, for example, its improvement to foreshore views and its other impacts on pedestrian movement routes and reduction in the extent and location of viewing 'balconies' close to Jacka Boulevard, would be required before any firm recommendation could be made.

However, these advantages are apparent:

- a substantial proportion of the existing panoramic views of the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade would be retained,
- the shape and role of the Upper Esplanade as a 'viewing platform' (as identified in UDF) would be retained,
- new middle- and foreground views would be added to panoramic foreshore views from the Upper Esplanade,
- some of the viewing opportunities on the new terraces are retained and new ones would be created,
- the intimate, sheltered St Kilda Square would be retained, albeit at Jacka Boulevard level,
- the architectural and landscape vocabulary could be retained, and
- the commercial urban edge to Jacka Boulevard would be partly retained.

Evident disadvantages are:

- reduced strength of the two storey 'street wall' of built form facing Jacka Boulevard, with the scale of built form intended to activate Jacka Boulevard (and 'tame' its traffic) being compromised,
- a significant interruption of 'street wall' edge at the entrance to the relocated St Kilda Square, and
- loss of the "Soup Kitchen" dining terrace, thus reducing the capacity of the commercial uses facing Jacka Boulevard to become a public destination in themselves.

Other considerations which would require investigation include:

- the actual effects of inclement winds,
- the effect of splitting the public open space abutting the Upper Esplanade into two terraces,
- the impact on pedestrian movement routes through the Site which were a primary determinant of the layout of the lanes, stairs and open spaces and the axial views that these created. The DRC recognises that the Square needs to be a natural destination point in its own right as well as a natural through-route, and, importantly,
- the consequences of a redesign on this scale on the many subtle relationships and synergies that have been resolved and refined over a long period of design will be lost. A comprehensive redesign would be required to rebuild their richness.

The DRC recognises that this option represents a means of improving views to the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade, but acknowledges that it represents a significant change to the Development Plan. A number of positive qualities of the current design, notably the urban design outcomes on Jacka Boulevard would, to some significant extent, be compromised in order to improve the urban design outcomes on the Upper Esplanade

In essence, the enhancement of views from the Upper Esplanade to the foreshore can be significantly improved by implementing this option. The significance of its impact on civic features of the current development proposal and the design strategies and opportunities available to make it work and retain its richness would all need to be thoroughly investigated.

7.3 A suite of incremental actions

A series of modifications to the Development Plan have been identified which the architects consider to be both achievable and effective in improving views from the Upper Esplanade to the foreshore. These are discussed below. For each proposed modification, the architect's response is described (in italics) and the DRC provides a brief commentary.

1. Repositioning of a 'laneway' within the development to align with the Catani Arch

Architect's response:

"We have investigated realigning the stairway and lane that connects the Square and the Upper Esplanade and widening the stairway that connects The Square to Jacka Boulevard in order to capture a view of the Catani Arch.

Positive consequences

A new view from the Upper Esplanade to the Catani Arch is created.

A new axis is created from the Foreshore up to the Square and through to the Upper Esplanade. This increases the legibility of the pedestrian 'ant track' that connects Jacka Boulevard and the Upper Esplanade.

Negative consequences

The pedestrian continuity of the new belvedere (yellow brick road) will need to be refined during design development."

Comment:

The DRC acknowledges that the Catani Arch is an iconic and historically important aspect of the foreshore. To accentuate its presence by the realignment of the laneway is supported. It is noted that this modification would create a highly desirable "framed" view of the Arch from a key static point on the Esplanade. However it would not contribute significantly to the "dynamic" view obtained when moving along the sweep of the Esplanade.

2. Removing any solid upstand to the Yellow Brick Road handrail when viewed from the Upper Esplanade and the Grassy Slopes to maximise the transparency of the balustrade.

Architect's response

"The option of reducing the height of the solid balustrades and retaining walls at the Grassy Slopes level was discussed. We advise that this strategy should be investigated with detailed input from the builder and the landscape architect.

Positive consequences

The view of the horizon from the Upper Esplanade would be marginally improved, to a maximum of 0.5 degrees of view. This is a product of the distance (about 40m) from the Upper Esplanade to the edge of the Square.

Negative consequences

There is a risk that a reduction of the turf depth, due to reducing the height of retaining walls, would affect the survival of the turf."

Comment:

This small design detail may be expected to have a small but significant impact on the sense of visual connection with the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade.

3. Reducing floor to floor heights for spaces below the Grassy Slopes

Architect's response

"We have made some investigations into reducing the floor-to-floor heights in the area of the Soup Kitchen by say 500mm. Over the six months, we have worked hard to reduce the height of this area to ensure that it is under the horizon plane. We have formed the opinion that further reducing the head heights would be very difficult, risky and create a marginal benefit.

We advise that this strategy should not be pursued."

Positive consequences

The view of the horizon from the Upper Esplanade would be marginally improved, in the order of 0.25 degrees of view. This is a product of the distance (about 100m) from the Upper Esplanade to the edge over the Soup Kitchen.

Negative consequences

This strategy generates significant and ongoing design risk for issues that arise during documentation and construction.

Low ceiling heights may affect the long term quality and viability of internal spaces.”

Comment:

The DRC recommends that the architects review the position or level of the loading dock to reduce the higher plane of the ‘Grassy Slopes’ (that is, where they are at RL 11.70) to RL 11.00 which applies for the majority of the Slopes. Lowering this level would give significant improvement to the viewlines from the Esplanade, especially for people in trams and cars.

4. Reviewing the species and placement of trees along the footpaths and in the median of Jacka Boulevard

Architect’s response:

“The option of modifying the species and location of the proposed Jacka Boulevard palm trees should be investigated with detailed input from the landscape architect.

Positive consequences

Careful consideration of tree species and location will minimize blocking views to key features from key locations.”

Comment:

There is potential for the proposed regular spacing of the three rows of palm trees along Jacka Boulevard to become a major block to views. Revising the spacing and species will have a significant positive impact on views, although these will need to be carefully resolved with regard to key viewpoints and desired viewlines.

5. Raising the level of the Upper Esplanade footpath

Architect’s response:

“We have investigated raising the Upper Esplanade footpath in the subject area by a nominal 500mm with the introduction of a set of steps at the kerb and increasing the length of 1:20 footpath.

We strongly advise that this strategy should be pursued.”

Comment:

This is proposed to occur to some extent to accommodate basement structures. Any additional increase in footpath level will need to be compatible with road camber and kerb gradients. Whilst this is desirable for pedestrians moving along the footpath, it does not improve viewlines for other users of the Upper Esplanade.

6. Raising the public viewing level by introducing a footpath along the Upper Esplanade which is within and at the edge of the site and at the height of the ‘grassy slopes’ as an alternative promenade and viewpoint.

Architect’s response:

“We have also investigated incorporating an additional elevated footpath at the Grassy Slopes level.”

Positive consequences

The views from the higher footpath over the Grassy Slopes to the horizon are improved, more water is visible.

The views from the new footpath at the Grassy Slopes to the horizon and to vertical elements on the Foreshore are further improved.

A new axis is created from the Foreshore up to the Square and through to the Upper Esplanade. This increases the legibility of the pedestrian ‘ant track’ that connects Jacka Boulevard and the Upper Esplanade.

Negative consequences

Access from parked cars to the footpath is less direct than a simple kerb and detailed investigation and specialist advice will be required from the DDA advisor and civil engineer.”

Comment:

An alternative Upper Esplanade footpath that is along the edge of the site will raise the viewing level for this critical length of the Grassy Slopes, and should be incorporated. This is desirable for pedestrians along this edge of the open spaces, but does not improve viewlines for other users of the Upper Esplanade.

7. Realigning the raised planter beds that are on the Grassy Slopes

Architect’s response:

“The option of modifying the alignment and number of the proposed planters on the Grassy Slopes was discussed. We advise that this strategy should be investigated with detailed input from the landscape architect.

Positive consequences

Careful consideration of the alignment and number of the proposed planters on the Grassy Slopes will minimize blocking views to key features from key locations.”

Comment:

The DRC supports this modification, as the visual interruption caused by long lengths of raised planter beds and their vegetation that cut across viewlines as proposed in the Development Plan will have significant impact on views.

8. Altering the alignment of the Yellow Brick Road edge to increase the area of the St Kilda Square

This modification, which would widen the ‘throat’ of the St Kilda Square near Jacka Boulevard, albeit to a significantly lesser extent than the larger St Kilda

Square discussed earlier, has not been formally responded to by the architects, although it has been discussed with them. It received a positive reaction, and should be pursued.

These eight modifications have been considered by the architects, with the unofficial endorsement of the developer. They represent a suite of actions, all of which would have some positive impact on the extent of views to the foreshore. While they would be of minor effect individually their collective impact requires further design investigation and dimensional analysis to ascertain the optimum design solution to maximise the increase in views.

8. How much change is ‘enough’?

The DRC has pondered this question at some length. While not required to make recommendations for specific changes to the Development Plan, the DRC accepts that some changes to the Development Plan are possible and desirable. The challenge is to determine what is ‘enough’, in terms of modifications, to constitute a meaningful improvement of views to the foreshore?

It is evident that without major change, such as the lowered St Kilda Square, the cumulative effect of the incremental changes described in Section 7 (and any others that may later become apparent) will not dramatically increase the extent of views to the foreshore, although measurable benefit will be evident particularly in terms of directional vistas and slightly enhanced wider views, depending on the viewpoint position on the Upper Esplanade.

The converse must also be considered. A massive amount of time and expertise has been invested in the preparation of the Development Plan and any adverse consequences in terms of urban design and public amenity that may accrue from any proposed modification to it must be identified and balanced against the improved views that are achieved.

The Development Plan embodies important, carefully balanced, public qualities, many of which have been woven around the Site’s outlook and location between the Upper Esplanade and the foreshore. They are represented in part by a series of public routes and destinations through and cross the site, animated as much by the anticipation of these views as by the views themselves, when finally revealed. To achieve this, these various routes on all three levels of the scheme create these “view denied” and “view revealed” qualities as they approach and arrive in the St Kilda Square, Catani Steps, or at the Palais frontage.

The use of view and outlook as largely public attributes is a very conscious strategy in the Development Plan. Similarly, the generous grassed surface off the Upper Esplanade, while transforming the existing view relationship between

the Upper Esplanade and the foreshore, converts the Upper Esplanade to a different public role than it currently has.

Consequently, it is very important that whatever modifications that may be made to the Development Plan the effect on the scheme's significant existing public qualities are respected and hopefully enhanced.

9. Conclusion

The DRC was requested to prepare a report "*addressing opportunities for the improvement of views from the Upper Esplanade between the Green building and the Ogee building, across the area known as the Grassy Slopes to the foreshore area.*"

Views to the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade can be improved.

As a result of liaison with the architects, the DRC has identified two distinct and feasible solutions to improve these views. The two distinct solutions are:

1. **a suite of modifications** that collectively will improve views, albeit to a less dramatic extent than the enlarged/lowered Square, and which have the in-principle support of the developer, and
2. **a lowered St Kilda Square** set within terraced grassy open spaces, which does not have the support of the architects.

Both these solutions are described below because there is a divergence of opinion among DRC members regarding the extent of change necessary to achieve an improvement of views to the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade.

One view is that a suite of incremental modifications would have sufficient impact to meet the intent of Council's request to the DRC. However, due to time limitations, the actual extent of increase of view has not been quantified. These modifications are described in Section 9.1: The Suite of Modifications.

The other view is that the lowered St Kilda Square option (set within terraced grassy open spaces) must be pursued as it alone meets the objectives of the UDF. This view is encapsulated in Section 9.2: The Lowered St Kilda Square. The architects do not favour this solution (as set out in Section 7.2).

9.1 The Suite of Modifications

The DRC recommends that Council invite the developer to make the following adjustments to the Development Plan to achieve improved views. They have been discussed with the architects and agreed by them.

1. reposition the 'laneway' between the St Kilda Square and the Upper Esplanade to align with the Catani Arch and widen its western end,

2. remove any solid upstand to the Yellow Brick Road handrail when viewed from the Upper Esplanade and the Grassy Slopes to maximise the transparency of the balustrade,
3. investigate the lowering of the loading dock so that no part of the Grassy Slopes is above RI 11.00.
4. review the species and/or placement of trees along the footpaths and in the median of Jacka Boulevard, particularly between the Stokehouse and the main entry to the underground car park,
5. raise the level of the Upper Esplanade footpath,
6. raise the public viewing level by introducing a footpath along the Upper Esplanade within and at the edge of the site and at the height of the 'Grassy Slopes' as an alternative promenade and viewpoint to the Upper Esplanade,
7. realign the raised planter beds that are on the Grassy Slopes, and
8. explore any other actions that may be able to be achieved to improve views during the forthcoming process of detailed design.

The DRC considers that the interruption to views that will inevitably still occur following adoption of the above recommendations is acceptable given that there are other parts of the Upper Esplanade from which the foreshore is visible and that the Development Plan provides views of the foreshore from new and closer elevated locations within the area between the Green building and the Ogee building.

However, it is acknowledged that this section of the Upper Esplanade affords views of a different type to its other sections, such as the more urban views from the northern end and views largely of the Sea Baths from the central section. Across the Triangle Site, views are to significant foreshore features such as the Stokehouse, the Marina lighthouse, Catani Arch, seaside vegetation, etc.

9.2 A Lowered St Kilda Square

Recognising the central importance of foreshore views from the Upper Esplanade to the objectives of the UDF, the DRC believes it is essential that an alternative design option that would allow substantial views of the foreshore from the Esplanade to be retained is considered.

This solution includes:

1. cutting back, in extent and/or height, the Grassy Slopes (between the Green and Ogee buildings) sufficiently to allow significant panoramic views of the foreshore above a one storey Jacka

Boulevard urban edge from static and moving vantage points on the Upper Esplanade,

2. lowering the semi-enclosed St Kilda Square to Jacka Boulevard level, and create an opening from the Square out to the Boulevard to provide sufficient visual and pedestrian access to and from the Square,
3. redesigning (in the established architectural and landscape idiom) the resulting terraced public spaces, embankments, pathways, stairs, landings, pedestrian routes, and retail, entertainment and dining interfaces, to maximise the urban design qualities and civic values already achieved in the Development Plan, and
4. investigating and implementing any further design opportunities to improve and create viewlines across and within the site.

The DRC recognises that this solution represents a significant change to the Development Plan in order to achieve the one objective of improving views from the Upper Esplanade and that it lowers the Yellow Brick Road” viewing deck adjacent to Jacka Boulevard but provides new viewing terraces set back progressively from Jacka Boulevard, in the manner of a flattened grandstand.

9.3 Process

Further work is required to quantify the impact of these alternative design solutions on views to the foreshore. The DRC recommends that this process occurs, both to identify the extent of change that each would result in, but also for the benefit of the community’s understanding of the impact of these changes.

However, of the two solutions described above, only the enlarged/lowered square option would allow substantial views of the foreshore from the Esplanade to be retained. The other would result in a less significant change, but it is the solution that has the endorsement of the developer and architects.

The DRC considers the following factors to be of the highest importance in any design change to the development Plan that occurs as a result of this report:

- the integrity of the design language and the design and development vision of the general proposal,
- the need for proper, considered investigation of any design changes being contemplated,
- the need for graphic testing and explanation of the extent of any improved foreshore views that would be achieved through these design changes, and
- the centrality of the viewlines issue to the UDF and to public interest in the Triangle Site proposal.

The DRC therefore recommends that Council invite the developer to investigate and develop design strategies for both options, and provide Council with explanatory graphic evidence of their resulting effects on a) views of the foreshore from the Esplanade and from within the site, and b) their overall urban design impacts.

A Note from the Convener regarding the role of the DRC

The Design Review Committee comprises five members who represent themselves only and do not represent any employer, group or organisation. Their membership of the DRC is a function of their design expertise, local knowledge or direct experience in projects of a similar nature.

In May 2007, the Minister for Planning announced that the tender to develop the Triangle Site had been awarded to BBC. Included in the contract for the development is the role of the DRC, namely:

“The Design Review Committee will review those aspects of the project that are listed in Part 1: Design Development Criteria of Schedule 1), as follows:

The design development process is to be complied with by the Developer for areas of the Developer's Project that are typically of a heritage or community nature or that visually or physically impact on that area, including:

- *Palais Theatre;*
- *Community Development (including public open space, plazas, pavement, bridges or pedestrian links, balustrades or barriers, hard and soft landscaping, sun shading, lighting and furniture);*
- *Building facades and external treatment of structures;*
- *Building roof aesthetics, plant rooms and enclosures, exposed services and screening treatments;*
- *Advertising or signage; and*
- *Integrated Urban Art (as described in the Request For Proposal).”*

Thus the DRC's role is to review design changes that the developer and their architect may propose to the scheme that was the subject of the award of the contract and any revisions to it, and which has evolved into the Development Plan.

The architects prepared the 'enlarged St Kilda Square option' at the request of the DRC as a means of illustrating the extent of change that they consider would be necessary to significantly increase views from the Upper Esplanade to the foreshore.

The architects did not initiate it and, as set out in Section 7.2, do not support it.

Had it been proposed by the developer as an intended change to the Development Plan it would become the subject of DRC consideration and would, because of the extent of change that it involves, require considerable

assessment by the DRC against the Development Plan, the design rationale behind the Plan, and the relevant parts of the UDF and the Planning Scheme.

The DRC has to approach the task that is the subject of this Report within the context of its formal role under the development contract.

The DRC's role does not extend to proposing significant changes to the Triangle Site proposal, or is it the DRC's role to review design ideas that are not supported by the developer and which are prepared for theoretical purposes only.

Rather, the DRC's task for this Report is to identify opportunities to enhance the extent of views to the foreshore from the Upper Esplanade without compromising the integrity of the proposal or redesigning it. The enlarged St Kilda Square changes the design and affects the functionality of the open spaces of the Promenade level and the Esplanade level and affects the civic and commercial uses that abut them. This represents a significant extent of change and is one that the DRC, having been involved in the progressive refinement of the design since early 2006, understands why the architects and the developer do not support so massive a redesign in the context of improving views.

Jim Holdsworth
Convener, Design Review Committee