

URBAN RENEWAL

'Urban renewal' is the big agenda for Kensington in the next couple of decades. If you go to Google Maps and look at a birds-eye view of Kensington you will immediately see why, it will be most significant for the Southern and Eastern side of the suburb, big roof tops are the give-away. Of course, urban renewal is not new, it's a continual incremental creep; over the next 10-20 years the big roof tops in South and East Kensington will gradually disappear.

The area of South Kensington bounded by Chelmsford St, Arden St, the Craigeburn railway line and Moonee Ponds Creek is in the thick of renewal pains. At present in this area there are effectively 3 incumbent parties, residential property owners, a variety of commercial/industrial businesses, and the 'new kid on the block' – IIG as the developer of the iconic YoungHusband building. And then, in addition, as in any area, there are developers who swoop in to throw a spanner in the works.

There have been two main recent issues for the incumbents, the first a proposal by YoungHusband to close the main North/South street – Elizabeth St. The development of YoungHusband building is, in my view, a very attractive and innovative development with the potential to add character, variety and liveability to the area – the proposed closure was part of that vision. However, the idea was opposed by local businesses because they believed it would restrict transport and delivery to and from their premises. It was also opposed, to a lesser extent, by some residents who feared losing some parking spaces. The proposed street closure was eventually ruled out by the City of Melbourne, but that is academic now, as sadly, Covid-19 has cast a pall over the complete YoungHusband development. It is now suspended due to the uncertainty of financial backing.

The second issue in the area is a development proposal in 14-26 Bruce St – the potential intrusion of bulky 8 storey office building, completely at odds with the height and character of the street. This proposal has aroused a variety of opposition from residents and businesses, on account of its bulk, lack of set-back, and impact on parking and traffic movement.

The above described controversies are just examples of what is ahead for many streets in South and East Kensington as they grapple with urban renewal. At present it feels as though the vultures are circling to snap up juicy urban precincts, transform them, and make a quick buck. The task for us – and anyone who lives locally – is to seek to influence any transformation so that our quality of life is maintained or enhanced; that the liveability, the vibe, and the amenities are all enhanced.