

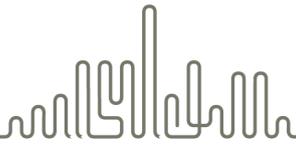
# 85-91 GAVAN STREET, BRIGHT

**APPLICATION FOR REVIEW NO. P1802/2007 & P2171/2007**

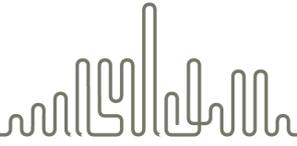


Urban design evidence  
Prepared by Tim Biles

November 2007



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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

I have been requested by Wantrup Associates, Solicitors to consider the urban design implications of a proposal to develop a supermarket and associated car parking and loading facilities at 85-91 Gavan Street, Bright.

In preparing this assessment I have:

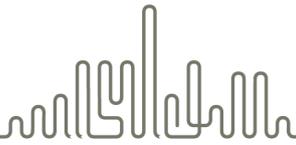
- Inspected the site and locality
- Reviewed the application material, the objections and the officer's report
- Reviewed the consultant reports
- Examined the relevant planning controls and policies affecting the site and locality.

## **2 SUMMARY OF OPINIONS**

The proposal is a poor response to context and makes a negative urban design contribution to the township of Bright.

The proposal should be thoroughly reviewed and more creatively designed to respond to the influences on the site and locality.

A summary of my qualifications and experience to carry out this assessment is included in Appendix I.



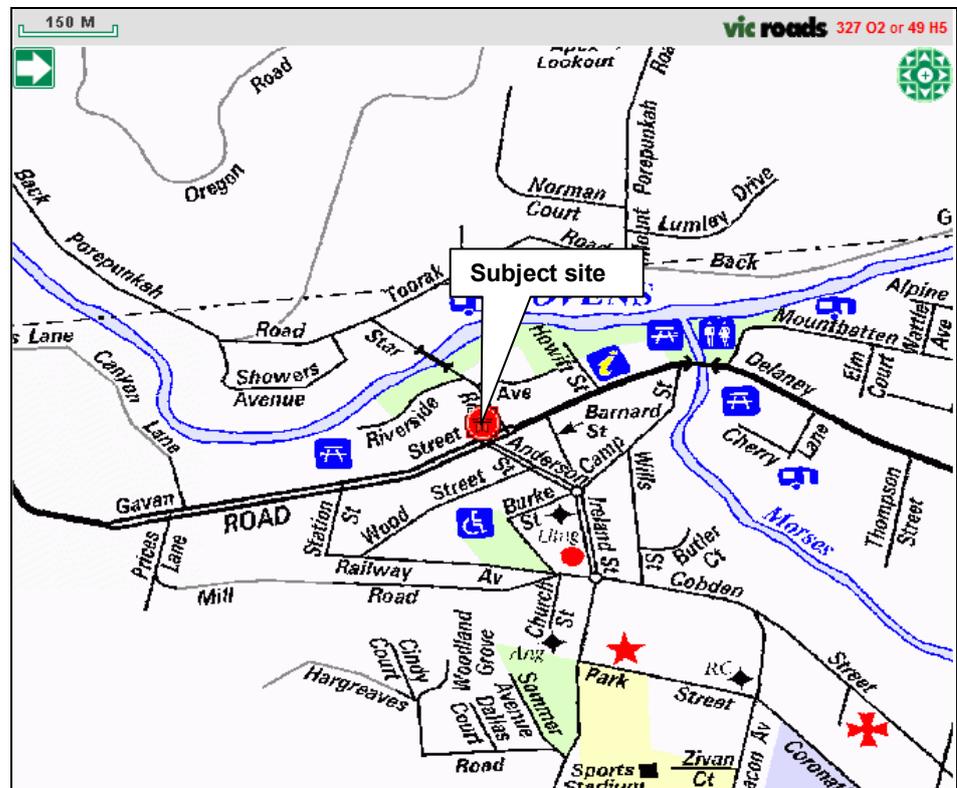
### 3 THE SITE AND LOCALITY

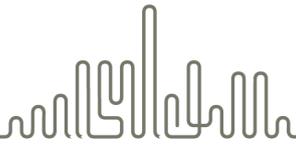
The review site is located on the north western corner of Gavan Street and Star Road behind the Acacia hotel/motel.

The site is identified in Figure 1. It is presently occupied by the Acacia hotel/motel which is a collection of single and two storey structures distributed across the site and down Star Road. The land sits at the beginning of the Bright commercial centre and on the edge of the Ovens River. It is a 'gateway' to the commercial centre.

The site falls to the north where it abuts single and two storey housing. The environs surrounding the site to the west are generally low scale housing set in well planted gardens. The application retains the two groups of motel units on the western edge of the site.

FIGURE 1 – LOCALITY MAP



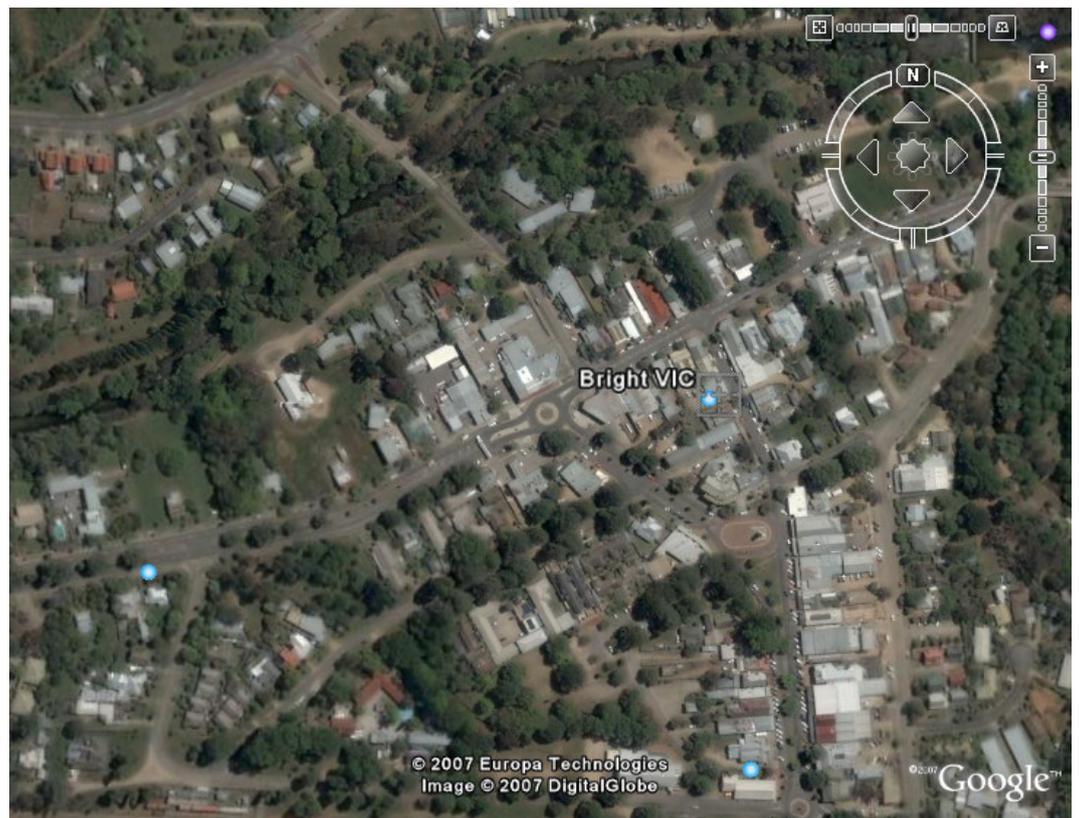


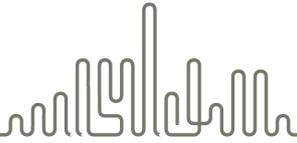
On the south side, opposite the review site are a group of shops and commercial premises while to the east Gavan Street continues to run parallel to the Ovens River and is lined with shops and commercial activities on either side.

On the north side of this road buildings give way to openings down to the river edge. At the intersection of Gavan Street and Star Road, Anderson Street gently climbs in a south easterly direction leading to the “town square” and the heart of the commercial centre.

These streets and many of those leading to them are generously planted with street trees.

FIGURE 2 – AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH





#### 4 THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is to construct a supermarket on the corner of Gavan Street and Star Road. The proposal retains the existing hotel on the intersection and the two storey motel units at the western edge of the site.

Car parking is provided for 111 vehicles between the motel units and the supermarket that backs onto Star Road and takes its deliveries from a ramp that runs parallel to the road alignment.

Specialty shops face the car park and two shops address Gavan Street. The plans indicate areas as follows:

- Supermarket 2,382m<sup>2</sup>
- Liquor store 132m<sup>2</sup>
- Specialty retail 360m<sup>2</sup>

TOTAL = 2,875m<sup>2</sup>

A landscape plan proposed planting within the car park and along the boundaries of the site including Star Road.

#### 5 PLANNING CONTROLS AND POLICIES

##### 5.1 Zoning and overlay provisions

The review site is located within a **Business 1 Zone** (B1Z) at the north western edge of the Bright commercial centre. The land at the western end at 85 Gavan Street, currently the site of the Acacia Motel, is zoned **Residential 1** (R1Z).

Under the provisions of the **Business 1 Zone** permits are required for use and development.

The site is not affected by any overlays.

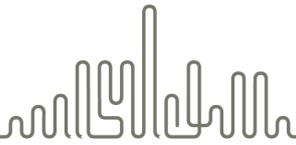
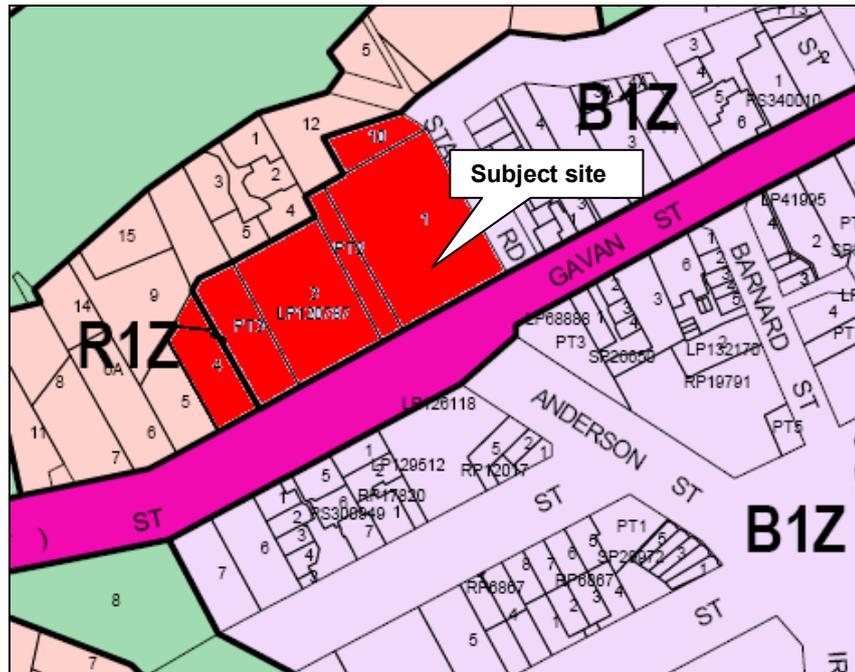


FIGURE 3 – ZONING MAP



## 5.2 Policy provisions

The principal policy provisions in the Alpine planning scheme that affect the site are:

### State Planning Policy Framework Provisions

- Clause 12 Metropolitan development
- Clause 12.05-2 Urban Design
- Clause 17.04 Tourism
- Clause 19.03 Design and Built Form

### Local Planning Policy Framework Provisions

- Clause 21.02 Vision of Alpine
- Clause 21.03-2 Bright

A summary of these policy influences is included at Appendix II.



The **Interim Design Guidelines for Large Format Retail Premises** (DPCD - 2007) sets down guidelines and recommendations for achieving well-located and designed new large retail premises in or on the edge of activity centres.

**Bright Future: Urban Design Framework Plan** (Alpine Shire - 2003) is not an incorporated or referenced document however it contains design planning objectives for the future of the town. It details strategies for particular precincts including the review site located in the Gavan Street precinct plan.

## 6 URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

### 6.1 Preamble

Supermarkets and other 'big box' retailers are often criticised for the way in which they stamp their generic footprint on a shopping centre with little regard for local context or design quality. The current proposal for Bright is no exception to this pattern.

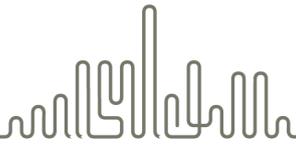
Urban design seeks to create "civil spaces" that improve enjoyment of the public realm. The policies that have been developed in recent years about neighbourhood character and in particular Clause 19.03 – 'Design and Built Form' are intended to give definition to that quest of creating better urban environments.

A fundamental tenet of these policies is for new development to understand the context in which it is set and to respond sensitively to that context.

Everything about this proposal for 85-91 Gavan Street, Bright points to a total disregard for context and a quest for a single benefit. That benefit goes to the supermarket.

This site is located at the 'entry' to the retail core of a major tourist town renowned for its tree-lined streets, excellent local produce and proximity to some of the most beautiful Alpine landscapes. In the country, on a tree lined avenue that is the "entry gate" to the town this development proposal offers the prospect of an open car park as the forecourt to a building that places its most interesting and **activated façade away from the main street** (Gavan Street) and **onto the car park**.

**Along Star Road, which leads to the Ovens River** – a significant icon of the region – the supermarket places **a blank wall and a loading dock for articulated vehicles**.



Star Road connects to the riverbank both physically and visually. The river is one of the most important tourist and recreation attractions of the township.

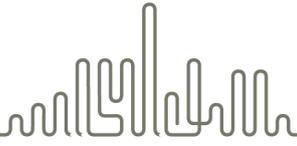
How can this design be seriously considered as sensitive? The policy objective asks that design “contribute positively to local urban character and enhance the public realm.” Do the applicants think that a planting edge and screen is enough to provide some form of benefit to the public realm? This is a token gesture.

What this design decision says is that our car park and the entry to our supermarket is more important than the entry to the township as a whole and we are going to turn our back on you.

The level changes and the entire relationship to Star Road is simply unacceptable.

On the northern interface the site abuts houses that in turn face the banks of the Ovens River. Tree lined and encouraging people to stop and picnic or walk along the river bank the designers’ response is to face the car park and the blank wall of the supermarket to the river, with the notation: “Precast concrete walls in accordance with structural engineers details...textured paint finish colour as selected...” A narrow planting edge is offered as a means of connecting with abutting houses and then the river landscape. This is again a poorly resolved interface.

The site plan demonstrates a total disregard for context. There is no documented site or context analysis. What we have here is an “identikit” format that is repeated across the nation. In a place like Bright where its economy relies on tourism and the attractiveness of the township, this is a disrespectful offering to the community.



My conclusion is that the site planning and layout for this project should be completely reviewed and readdressed. The current proposal is a blight on Bright. The detailed reasons for that conclusion are set out in the remainder of this report.

## **6.2 Context**

Much has been written and debated about context. Planning policy provisions and VCAT decisions regularly discuss the influences of neighbourhood character and context. One of the reasons it is so continuously discussed is that so much of our design makes little or no reference to context. And yet we all intuitively know and feel when a space or the buildings that define it feel and look good.

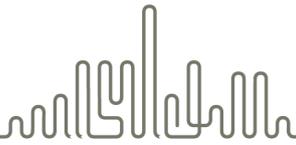
We applaud the old world village built of stone in places such as Greece, Italy and Croatia. We endlessly photograph St Marks Square. We swell with pride at the architectural legacy of Utzon in the Sydney Opera House. However it is the buildings that we use and experience on a regular basis – libraries, offices, shops, supermarkets, doctors' surgeries – which are given the least attention in design terms. Most of us find shopping in supermarkets a tedious and unpleasant task. Part of the reason for that is because the car parks are awkward. Wind swept in winter, hot in summer from lack of shade and difficult to navigate as a pedestrian. The box that is the supermarket is not a positive environment – there are no windows to let in natural light, there is no visual connection to the outside world that is the suburb or township we are living in.

The supermarket in Malvern is the same as the one in Bairnsdale. Any yet we have come to Bright because it is meant to be different from the place we have left behind.

We are spending our tourist dollar here because we want a distinctive and different experience. We want that experience expressed in the layout of the store, its architecture and its connection to the township.

Why then must we have one of our most significant weekly retail expenditures conducted in a facility that has no regard to the context that has drawn us to the town in the first place?

Planning policy (Clause 19.03) says that development should respond positively to natural, cultural and strategic context.



In **strategic terms**, Bright defines itself as a township through the role it plays as a tourist centre. It is an attractive town as a result of its setting in the Ovens Valley, its generally low



scale and its planting of exotic trees. It is the front door to the Alpine resorts and its “tourist brand” is reinforced by producing quality food and wine.

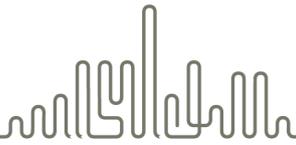
Bright is perhaps the most important township in defining the regional character of the Ovens and

King Valley’s. There is an irony that in the Essential Economics report on this project, tourism is identified as one of the prime reasons that the project can be sustained economically. And yet the contribution it makes to the town in urban design terms is to erode the very essence that makes it attractive. The economy of the town is strongly dependent on tourism and that tourism is dependent on keeping the town “unique and different.” Tourism is underpinned by Bright being different from other places. Yet the proposal is for a standard “cookie cutter” design that can be found anywhere in Australia.

A supermarket which is a major player in the retail turnover of the town should contribute constructively to that sense of differentiation and not simply respond with a generic design solution.

The local community of Bright enjoy a very attractive town centre - tree lined, a town square, well connected to the river and surrounded by verdant hills and mountains.

If the supermarket is to be part of the town’s economy it needs to add more value than simply offering jobs. It needs to contribute to the “character” and “brand” values of the township. It needs to express that in the way it physically takes its place in the township.



In strategic planning terms this proposal does not understand its place in this township. In physical and cultural terms the site plan and architecture of this proposal needs to be improved.

To quote from a recent review of supermarkets by CABE (the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment) in Britain:

“Supermarket proposals are becoming the lead element in many large redevelopment projects across the country and they should be setting the standard for the scheme as a whole. The challenge is for the store to become an integral part of the town centre, and for each proposal to be treated as an exercise in place-making.

What we need are innovative, high-quality, site-specific responses for the buildings and spaces, based on a sound understanding of the context – just what you would hope for in any other major intervention in the town centre. Ultimately, the supermarket chains should acknowledge the need for stores that are distinctive and enhance the town centre in terms of their architecture, urban design and public space, as well as in terms of their commercial offer.”

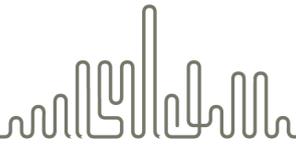
Even a cursory examination of the site and its context should tell a designer that the proposed response is substandard.

The site is located at the entry to the town centre. The architecture, the address to the street and the landscape treatment should celebrate “arrival” at this point and reinforce the imagery of the town.

Approaching from the west there is a strong sense of exotic planting - an avenue-effect - and buildings set within generously landscaped gardens. Maintaining this ‘character’ is reinforced in Clause 21.03-2-1 Bright “maintain the open landscape aspect and predominance of exotic vegetation in the town and amongst the buildings and maintain view corridors” (dot point 12).



Do we really want the first element we see of the retail centre to be a supermarket car park with small trees in pots as the foreground to a sea of parked vehicles?



Gavan Street is the main street leading to the town. This is where the streetscape should be activated. The front of the building should face the main street and the car park should be located at the rear. The planting should be tall and frame the street edge not be left as stumpy shrubs in pots.

The architecture of the building should say more about Bright and what it stands for. If it was not for tourism there would not be an economic basis for this proposal. The tourists are there for the qualities of Bright and the supermarket design should support that, not erode it.

On Star Road the design response is similarly inadequate. The plans do not clearly show the level changes down this street and the prospect of blank walls with “mock joints in accordance with structural engineers details and contrasting texture paint finish” is a design decision that lacks thought or detail and ignores the role of this road that leads to the Ovens River and the valley beyond.

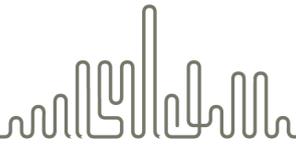
An approach from the north coming across the bridge will look straight into the loading dock. This again is a demonstration of the lack of sensitivity to the value of the river and its environs to the ‘brand’ that is Bright.

The loading dock should be away from this interface and the means by which it is accommodated more clearly defined in the plans especially in relation to level changes. The planting edge is tokenistic and an inadequate response to context.

On the northern interface there are a series of well spaced houses that face Riverside Avenue and the Ovens River. The wall of the supermarket is bland and close to the boundary with some retained trees and new planting proposed.

This is an uninteresting interface response. Section BB illustrates the interface condition and shows a wall height at the north of 5 metres. It is not clear how this relates to the sloping ground to the north which is descending to the river. The level changes between the car park and the abutting properties to the north are unspecified in the plans.

Siting the building mass on Gavan Street away from this northern interface would substantially improve this design. Any new proposal should more closely define the level



difference of the proposal relative to the properties to the north and more extensively plant the interface.

On the western interface the motel units obviously need to be accommodated in any design layout. I would regard this as a relatively straight forward site planning task.

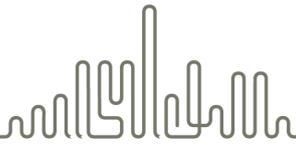
Clause 19.03 sets down a series of design principles. Those principles are reinforced by the recent publication 'Interim Guidelines for Large Format Retail Premises' (DPCD - 2007).

Additionally, Council's Urban Design Framework identifies a clear set of design principles for Gavan Street that includes making it an attractive and popular destination that is the entry to the CBD.

The critical problem with this proposal is that it fails to acknowledge its strategic, natural and cultural context. An analysis of context would lead to a different layout - one that could more positively contribute to the township.

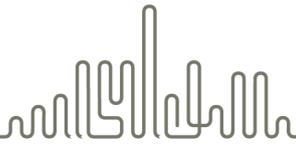
This is a site that requires a creative and sensitive design solution, Supermarket chains are not noted for making contributions of this kind, but it can be done. We see examples of new thinking overseas such as Sainsburys, Waitrose and Tesco in the UK but little of that has translated to Australia. And yet for more than a decade now we have been putting planning policy into schemes that asks for a better result.





**Clockwise above:** Street interface of Sainsburys supermarket, Greenwich; Undulating roof of Sainsburys Greenwich; Use of natural materials on front elevation of Sainsbury store, Deal; high quality verandah detailing on Sainsbury storefront, Deal

In the new Interim Guidelines for Large Format Retail Premises the Minister states that: "The...guidelines are published by the Victorian Government to raise the bar for urban design in our towns and cities."

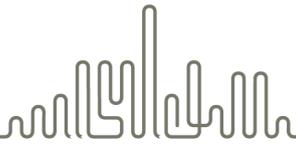


**Left:** Gabion wall helps hide service entrance to Sainsbury supermarket, Greenwich

In the township of Bright, on this key site the proposal before the Tribunal leaves the bar firmly on the ground. It has not moved on in 30 years. It is a proposal that should be sent back for a fresh look at what it might contribute to the town in terms of site layout, design, amenity and sustainability. These issues need to be more sensitively analysed and creatively addressed.



**Left:** Tesco supermarket on the main street of Ludlow, an historic market town in the UK



## 7 CONCLUSION

It is disappointing that a proposal of this kind pays such disregard for the township of Bright and the planning policies that have been developed to guide its future.

Unlike Melbourne where the metropolitan economy is diverse and robust, Bright relies on the image of its town to ensure that tourism remains a continuing part of the economy. It does not enjoy the diversity and depth of a metropolitan economy.

The local community have built an attractive town centre over the years. That centre is clearly a pleasing environment that should be enhanced and complemented by any new project especially one that is in a “gateway” location.

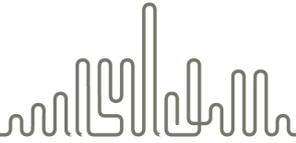
The businesses and residents in this township have worked together to create a setting of street trees and active frontages. By siting this supermarket on the edge of the commercial centre it will dilute the activity in the heart of the centre. To add ‘insult to injury’ it **turns its back on the main street, offers an open car park as its ‘gateway feature’ to the town centre and places a loading dock and blank walls on the principal street access** to the crossing over the Ovens River and the recreation and tourist facilities established along its banks.

If this is the best that can be done by these proponents why do we bother to write policy like Clause 19.03; develop guidelines and establish design frameworks that clearly say:

- develop Gavan Street as an entry to the CDB
- establish Gavan Street as an attractive and popular destination in its own right
- create a distinctive day-time environment
- ensure buildings located on the north side of the Great Alpine Road present active facades to both the street frontage and to the river and open space to the north?

It is for these reasons that the proposal needs to be redesigned to more clearly answer the planning policy objectives established for Bright and developments of this kind.

Tim Biles



## **APPENDIX I**

### **STATEMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS & EXPERIENCE**

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#### **NAME AND ADDRESS**

Timothy William Biles (BA, Dip TRP, FPIA)  
Urban Planner  
Message Consultants Australia Pty Ltd  
L1 - 35 Little Bourke Street  
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

#### **QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

Bachelor of Arts  
Diploma of Town and Regional Planning  
Fellow of the Royal Australian Planning Institute

1970 - 1978: Town planner in Local Government  
1978 - 1980: Lecturer in town planning, RMIT  
1980 - Present: Town planning & urban design consultant

#### **AREAS OF EXPERTISE**

Strategic and Statutory Planning for several local government authorities dealing with a variety of residential, commercial, industrial and conservation issues.

Consulting advice to a wide range of commercial and local government clients covering the management of urban development.

Extensive urban design advice to architect and project managers involved in the preparation of a range of commercial and residential projects.

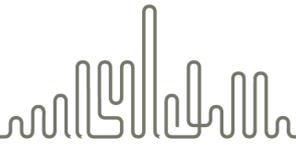
Led a series of townscape plan studies as well as landscape and urban design programmes in country Victoria and Melbourne.

#### **EXPERTISE TO PREPARE THIS REPORT**

Professional training and experience in town planning and specialist experience in medium and high density housing issues as a town planner including membership of the Review Panel to VicCode 2.

I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and that no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Tribunal.

I prepared this report.  
TW Biles



## APPENDIX II

### SUMMARY OF PLANNING CONTROLS & POLICIES

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The proposal is affected by the Alpine Planning Scheme. The following is a summary of the provisions which I consider relevant.

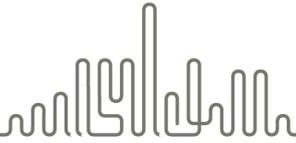
#### State Planning Policy Framework

- Clause 12** 'Metropolitan development' provides specific objectives and strategies for Metropolitan Melbourne. The objective is to "facilitate sustainable development that takes full advantage of existing settlement patterns, and investment in transport and communication, water and sewerage and social facilities."
- Clause 12.05-2** 'Urban design' seeks to promote good urban design to make the environment more liveable and attractive by:
- Ensuring new development or redevelopment contributes to community and cultural life by improving safety, diversity and choice, the quality of living and working environments, accessibility and inclusiveness and environmental sustainability.
  - Requiring development to respond to its context in terms of urban character, cultural heritage, natural features, surrounding landscape and climate.
  - Ensuring sensitive landscape areas such as the bays and coastlines are protected and that new development does not detract from their natural quality.
  - Ensuring transport corridors integrate land use planning, urban design and transport planning and are developed and managed with particular attention to urban design aspects such as open space potential and the use of vegetation to maintain wildlife corridors and greenhouse sinks.
  - Improving the landscape qualities, open space linkages and environmental performance in green wedges and conservation areas and non-urban areas.
- Clause 17.04** 'Tourism' aims to encourage tourism development to maximise the employment and long-term economic, social and cultural benefits of developing the State as a competitive domestic and international tourist destination.
- Clause 19.03** 'Design and Built Form' seeks to "achieve architectural and urban design outcomes that contribute positively to local urban character and enhance the public realm while minimizing detrimental impact on neighbouring properties."

#### Local Planning Policy Framework

**Clause 21.03-2** 'Bright' has the following key strategic directions relevant to this proposal:

- Maintain low intensity development and visual character of Bright.
- Maintain a compact commercial centre with provision for expansion in Camp and Wills Streets.



- Identify sites for future car parking areas.
- Require consolidated car parking areas.
- Commercial development including motels and tourist accommodation on declared roads must not dominate the streetscape.
- Maintain the open landscape aspect and predominance of exotic vegetation in the town and amongst the buildings and maintain view corridors.
- Encourage the scale and bulk of buildings to reflect that of existing development.

**Bright Future: Urban Design Framework Plan (Alpine Shire-2003).** In relation to the Gavan Street precinct the framework seeks to:

- to develop Gavan Street as an entry to the CDB
- to establish Gavan Street as an attractive and popular destination in its own right
- to develop a shared vehicle/pedestrian/bicycle streetscape environment
- to provide clear physical and visual connections to the town centre at the Clocktower Square
- to provide clear physical and visual connections to the Ovens River and associated open space
- to create a distinctive day-time environment

It identified the following strategies:

5. Ensure that buildings located on the north side of the Great Alpine Road present active facades to both the street frontage and to the river and open space to the north. Encourage a mixture of residential and commercial uses to make best use of the surrounding attractions and green space.

7. Encourage a zero setback for all new development to provide further visual cohesion. Where development intends to provide outdoor dining or product display areas, a consistent one metre setback to expand the footpath width should be enforced.