

Its great to be here in a room full of passionate people all united in their concern for the long-term future of our wonderful piece of social and cultural heritage - the Preston Market. I expect that we are all in shock and disbelief at the very possibility that such an important community asset could be at risk. I believe that our doubt and uncertainty has arisen through council indecision, a lack of information from the development consortium and a lack of information-sharing, let alone genuine consultation with the community.

As you heard in the introduction, I am a member of DADA and I would like to start my comments by making it very clear, that we at DADA are not opposed to development per se but we are opposed to *poor* development and *poor outcomes* such as:

- overdevelopment,
- poor design internally
- the cumulative effect of a lack of visual interest externally, and
- disregard for a sympathetic interface where the old meets new

We at DADA are speaking at this forum this evening because we feel compelled to join forces with you and all community groups as one voice in our opposition to the potential loss of this vital part of our community. We hope that together we can persuade the State Government, the Darebin Planning Department and the Development consortium- that what they are doing is not reasonable, not transparent, not community-minded and not beneficial for the long-term amenity of the area. We are concerned.

Can anyone provide a satisfactory response to the question: How will the proposed development contribute to the community in general and specifically to the market precinct?

Regarding our opposition to poor development, our concerns for the Preston Market are based on the evidence around us. What is the current benchmark in the Preston area?

If we take the Junction development precinct as an example, our understanding is that \$3million dollars of ratepayer money was used for beautification to 'the gateway' to Preston. However the outcome, even with this additional resource is far from exemplary and if that is the blueprint for the market we suggest it is likely to be a treeless, harsh environment with limited air-space and a generally unwelcome atmosphere. The example of the type of building this development consortium has constructed in the area so far, that is the Centrelink building, is a hard-edged, uninteresting and dominating building – it is a building that yells at you to be noticed but unfortunately *what* is yelling is: *there is an absence of character here!* Perhaps some may argue that the market area is currently a treeless environment, however

- the low rise nature of the area,
- the air space,
- the natural light and
- the open environment

provide key ingredients for shopper wellbeing and the sense of being in a space which is conducive to community gatherings. It is a place for people to meet and enjoy an experience that is part of our culture and history. These are important functions and deserve serious attention. Yet the only information available addressing the new space proposed - distributed in the past week - consists of a handful of visuals and a pamphlet of artist impressions of a proposed development of one part of the site plus, tellingly a disclaimer stating that all information is subject to change without notice. This is at best tokenistic and certainly does nothing to allay our fears that our community asset will be lost or at least so seriously compromised that it will no longer be the hub of vibrant cultural exchange and the genuinely distinctive shopping experience that we all currently enjoy.

This signifies the kind of disregard for existing culture to which we also object.

One criticism that has been made towards those who object is that *they are just afraid of change*. This old chestnut is most commonly used to veila one-eyed approach to development where the commercial interests of the few are allowed to subordinate the broader interests of the community. For a community centrepiece such as the Preston Market we cannot idly stand by while this criticism is trotted out. So we would say to this criticism – we are afraid. We are afraid of the loss of something integral to the community, we are afraid that the intention is to change the precinct of the Preston market such that its very nature is destroyed, and it becomes just another soulless place where you can buy stuff. And this speaks to a difficult argument – about the intangible value of a community space.

There are important issues around liveability. They are of a higher order than the motivations to conquer land, build structures and make money. It is hard to quantify what a place like the Preston Market can mean to people but all of you here today understand exactly what it feels like to experience the qualities of a sense of shared heritage, belonging, familiarity and cultural identity - and that's what we have to keep talking about and explain until we are heard.

It's harder to be heard however, when a strategy exists to ignore a voice. It seems to us as if the current strategy by the development consortium to split the whole development site into stages, is connected to a recognition of this development potentially threatening something out of the ordinary. The splitting of the development into stages is a way of drip-feeding us with information, which is a well-known method to both avoid and wear-down likely community opposition.

Stage one of this split, is the recently announced 4 million dollar upgrade which we see as having been offered as an enticement, but as others will expand upon, much of this upgrade is essentially redressing long-neglected health and safety requirements in the market. This of course is an important task which is very welcome. We are somewhat cynical however about the timing of this work – why now? These infrastructure maintenance tasks are long-overdue and are part of any landlords responsibility – lets not confuse them with protection of the essential and defining features of the Preston Market site, some of which I mentioned a little earlier.

The ultimate aim of the consortium in their detailed original plans as submitted to the council is for a 28 storey building with up to 1500 dwellings - although we would suggest that the term dwelling is an overly romantic description of what will amount to an excessive number of 1 and 2 bedroom places essentially catering for the come and go population.

This consortium's plan is one example – a major example – but one example of a broader issue, that is, our council's lack of vision or a masterplan for the city of Darebin. It seems as if unfettered development is the name of the game. Development is occurring anywhere within the city rather than in liveable, well-planned well-designed and amenity-rich zones. Originally the North-South major corridors were targeted for development, with the East-West major roads not forming part of the plan and other in-fill areas being clearly restricted in terms of allowable development.

Now it seems that development is occurring in a more chaotic manner in which the push for individual developments are determining where developments happen, rather than the developments being determined by an overriding sense of how Darebin should progress into the future. In other words private developers are being allowed to lead the changing shape of our city.

The reality here is the evidence of what we have to live with. When we look around us, our suburbs are not better off and our major corridors are already looking tawdry with new, poor development. We don't want a reoccurrence of this continuing pattern and we certainly don't want our beloved community asset, the Preston market, degraded beyond recognition.

In the South and South-Eastern suburbs of Melbourne there are many examples of better designed buildings, than those of Darebin. So, is the apparent unwillingness of developers to design well, something to do with demographic differences in the community residents or does it actually reflect a fundamental difference in councils with regard to their motivation to drive higher standards.

Something needs to change to give us a better deal. Perhaps future councillors will treat community concerns more sensitively and be more concerned with driving the agenda with regard to higher standards from developers. After all, the council is set up to represent the interests of the public, and it should at least recognise that its interests are not always aligned to developers.

And finally we believe that saving the Preston Market is an issue of social responsibility and that the development consortium and the council must accept the social responsibility incumbent on them. If they are not prepared to accept this responsibility, we say step aside and relinquish that responsibility to someone else.

Thank you for your time, your attention and your commitment to this vital cause.