



Changed Landscapes

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In the last newsletter several articles were awash with the jargon of the landscape architect. When plain language isn't used to talk about something I become very suspicious about what is going on - I'm on high alert for 'the gap' - the credibility gap between what is being said and the actual reality. Without visiting the sites we are in a poor position to judge. The article on design called 'Super Natural' by Beverley Johansen may have an unfortunate gap in it; from p7 to p8 of our newsletter it does not flow on, but I think there is enough content combined with pictures for us to get an idea of the project. Are we really to believe that these terraces and maze relate the contemporary house to the Australian landscape! The un-Australian poplar lined driveway is an idea 'borrowed' from the changed farmed landscape where poplars are used commonly as wind-breaks. But if that isn't enough poplars, 'another twenty-four', are used against some walls. To top it off there's a set of antique Buddhist temple gates at the main courtyard entrance, which opens to an olive grove! I'm confused, but not as culturally confused as this design appears to be.

At present in the city of Knox where I live the local Council is in the long process of attempting to have local and specific variations on building and development guidelines changed at the interface of land zoned rural and land zoned for residential development. As a generalization Council is trying to mount an argument to the State Government for transition zones to be established. Interestingly Council is arguing for retaining the visual appeal of open farmland as well as forested slopes of the ranges. Furthermore they think that the solution for both these landscapes is to insist on 1000m² minimum block size! Which brings me to the point I've been pondering since reading the newsletter article, mentioned above, and Council's proposal - is there value in retaining the aesthetic of a changed landscape, and if so how can you achieve this in the sprawling metropolitan area, let alone more outlying areas where land is rapidly being sliced up for housing development?

Recently Council lost a fight at the Appeals Tribunal against a large development of 89 house lots in part of a sparsely treed valley previously farmed. I can't say I'm surprised as I really do think it is hard to mount an argument against development in areas of cleared land. Now the property in front of us is in the process of subdivision. (Last year it was the property to the west.) It forms part of the northern slopes of the Lysterfield Hills and has some valuable remnant vegetation - particularly understorey plants such as grasses. The developer has made at least one major concession in 'giving' Council a 17m deep strip of land bordering the street but several of the proposed allotments will not be large enough to allow for reasonable size gardens and height restrictions allow for 2-storey buildings which are a common choice in the area. So it is back to the Appeals Tribunal for us to see if we can gain anything, particularly with regard allotment size and building heights. While we stand and fight both of us toy with the option of flight.