

19 October 2016

The Honourable Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
Office of the Premier
1 Treasury Place
MELBOURNE VIC 3002



**Beaumaris Conservation
Society Inc.**

Association Number
A00348878

PO Box 7016

Beaumaris Victoria 3193
95895428, 0429176725

info@bcs.asn.au

www.bcs.asn.au

Dear Premier,

Impending removal of over 229 trees at Beaumaris Secondary College

It is with some exasperation, but hope, that I find myself having to resort to writing to you directly in relation to the above matter. It is of significant and rapidly growing concern to our local community.

I do so on behalf of a much respected conservation group which is somewhat of an institution after 63 years, and which has provided expert advice to government at all levels and, through working with government had a real input and effect upon changes in law and policy (including planning law) over its long history. That includes the vegetation protection overlays which are so heavily relevant in this unique area of Melbourne which is identified with its vital remnant indigenous bushland.

Given the urgency and seriousness of the matter this is also a letter expressed in perhaps more robust terms than has been our policy in the past, which we trust you will understand.

This matter comes before you at a time of extensive media coverage of public anger on the issues of level crossings removal and even the illegal destruction of the Corkman Irish Hotel in Carlton in recent days.

However, it differs from both of those matters in two very important respects. In the case of the level crossings removal, they have been accompanied by considerable effort on the government's behalf to interact, information share, to engage and meeting face to face with concerned citizens all over an extended period and importantly with a genuine attempt to disclose detailed plans and reports. In short, to inform and consult properly and prior to the works commencing so as to bring the community on board. In the case of the illegal destruction of the hotel in Carlton, it was not the government moving with obscene haste to wreak such permanent and irreparable destruction. Such behaviour would clearly not be worthy of this administration.

Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc (BCS) and the local community campaigned long and hard, and support wholeheartedly the very welcome construction of a new government school on the site of the initial Beaumaris High School. Equally, there is appreciation of the need to progress this project quickly to allow opening of the school on time (Term 1 2018). Indeed, many of us intend to enrol our children at the school.

What has gone horribly wrong however is that the consultation process has been non-existent, secretive, and after much effort - against intransigent reluctance to provide *any* information on the issue at all - a small group were informed (as of 4:47 PM yesterday) that **229 trees** (and there will be additional trees which are under 2 m in height) are to be cut down on one school property commencing Monday next, 24 October 2016.

That represents a virtual “moonscaping” of this very significant centrally located, highly visible and loved property. Amongst schools, its setting is unique, beautiful and vital to the local natural ecosystem.

On invitation, last Friday 14 October I on behalf of BCS together with representatives of two other local conservation groups, attended a meeting with representatives of the Victorian School Building Authority and some of the firms who have worked on the plans for the school. Five days prior to that meeting and having regard to the subject matter, in order to enable proper preparation I had written accepting the invitation (which was our very first communication) and requested information including a copy of the arborist report and the landscape architects plans. Suffice to say that all requests from that time for those documents have been refused outright, to myself and all others. Indeed there was a refusal to tell us how many trees were to be removed, which ones, and why - thereby actively preventing any consultation to seek agreement on that aspect of the project. It was during that Friday meeting that it was casually announced there would be a letterbox drop to surrounding properties on the Monday that and “vegetation clearing” would follow the following Monday, 24 October.

Ultimately even that promised last-minute letter drop was not made to a number of properties which are directly proximate to the school site, and the rest of the community was told nothing.

It must be said that the timing of such events within local council elections is also not without relevance.

Clearly, it is impossible to retain all the trees which previously existed on the site. BCS and the community understand and accept that. However, there has been a distinct lack of candour and information-sharing and an active refusal to engage with the community other than through three individuals representing local conservation groups. In fact the figure of 229 trees to be removed and mentioned in correspondence only yesterday afternoon did not even appear on the document posted around the same time to the VSBA website late yesterday. Not a good look!

All this, when an arborist of over 30 years experience at multiple schools, golf courses et cetera assured us (yesterday) that the majority of the trees on the site (which are in the main spread around the boundaries of the property) are structurally sound, entirely appropriate for school grounds, are not in ill health (or that minimal maintenance work would restore those whose care has been abandoned recently back to robust health), and importantly given the context, safety for children.

Even more tellingly, the trees on the property have been assessed by an arborist on behalf of the Department of Education and Training within the past 12 months as being healthy (resulting in the removal of only one tree, which wasn't assessed as healthy).

In the interests of concluding this correspondence, for time is short and the matter is most urgent, and though there are other concerning aspects and even apparently inaccurate information being disseminated. Out of respect for the “lungs of Beaumaris”, the wildlife corridor which exists including for the rare Golden Whistler bird and, calling a spade a spade, respecting the significant number of people who altered their historic voting pattern in this seat at the last state election in order to achieve your government's decision on such a school, BCS and our community implores you Premier, to bring *your* leadership to this issue.

The obscene amount of destruction planned for next Monday *must* not be allowed to occur. The community must be accorded the opportunity it is screaming out for, meaningful and urgent consultation - with plans and reports disclosure - with the relevant government

representatives and those (such as the arborist, landscape architects, the architects etc) retained to deliver the project so that the community can be brought back on board to achieve an outcome we can all be proud of and involved in.

Bayside City Council is we understand of a similar disposition on this matter, has been likewise frustrated by the lack of openness and consultation on this aspect of the project, unanimously passing an urgent resolution on the issue last night when informed of the threat.

Please act urgently Premier to recapture the community's goodwill, and trust, and allow us to work with the government, on an *informed* basis.

Gregory Mier

President

Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc.