

STONNINGTON CITY COUNCIL  
**STUDENT HOUSING STUDY**

OCTOBER 2006



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# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared in response to an increase in proposals for student housing over the last twelve months. There have been five planning applications over this period, in contrast to an average of about one a year for the previous ten years. Several of the recent applications have highlighted concerns about parking, amenity, and neighbourhood character and the Council is keen to ensure that future proposals will be considered fairly and consistently and in the best interests of the whole community.

At its meeting on 19 September 2005, the Council resolved that a Student Housing Policy be prepared to guide its decision-making<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.2 Student Housing

Accommodation for tertiary students is traditionally provided through a number of housing types to meet different student needs and different budgets. Apart from those who live at home, the main options are as follows:

- Private rental shared (\$90-130)
- Private rental on own (approx \$140-170)
- On campus residential building (\$165/175 pw)

Full board including meals is provided as follows:

- Homestay accommodation (approx \$190pw with board)
- Rooming houses (approx \$190pw with board)
- University residential colleges (up to \$350pw)

These types of accommodation will usually not require planning permission except for larger rooming houses (ten or more habitable rooms) and large-scale university accommodation. There have been very few examples of these in recent years.

The focus for this paper is on a further option for purpose built (or converted) student housing. Typically for Stonnington this will be in a complex of at least 40 units offering self-contained rooms for overseas students in a secure and managed environment. Rents are high - typically from \$180-230pw - and hence are outside the budget of most local students and are targeted at the small number of students who can afford it - about 15% of the overseas student market<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.3 The Overseas Student Market

There has been major growth in the overseas student market in the last ten years and in particular in the last five years when the numbers of international students has doubled<sup>3</sup>. There is an ongoing debate as to whether this growth is sustainable and whether

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<sup>1</sup> "That Council prepare a Student Housing Policy for possible incorporation into the Stonnington Planning Scheme" (Minutes of Council meeting 19<sup>th</sup> September 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Extrapolated from Survey of International Students' Spending in Australia; AEI July 2005

<sup>3</sup> International Student Enrolments grew from 153,000 to 323,000 (AEI Market Indicator Data 2000-2004)

numbers will now plateau or drop. This will be affected by factors such as the value of the Australian \$, the building of new universities in Singapore and Malaysia which might intercept student markets in China and India, and the building of new campuses in Asia by Australian universities<sup>4</sup>.

A further consideration is shifts in the "market" away from Singapore and Malaysia whose students typically come from wealthier backgrounds and can afford high rents for suitable accommodation. The new source countries are China and India (20% and 11%<sup>5</sup>) which have lower standards of living and whose students are less likely to be able to afford high rents.

The question cannot be answered with certainty because there are so many variables. However, this background indicates that student housing is a fluid and unknown market where future growth and demand cannot be predicted with any certainty - there are many who believe the market is now saturated. Hence we cannot know whether development proposals in Stonnington will be commercially viable in the long term, or even whether they will be constructed in the first place.

#### **1.4 Overseas Students in Stonnington**

Stonnington had 7,810 university students<sup>6</sup> at the 2001 Census which comprises 9% of the total population and this is double the proportion for Melbourne as a whole. In addition, a further 2,105 attend TAFE Colleges making a total of 9,915 for the whole municipality. Moreover, one in three of Stonnington's residents have been university students themselves as this is the proportion of the population with a university qualification. This is a very similar profile to our neighbours in Glen Eira.

Many of these students go to one of four tertiary institutions which are located within or immediately adjoining Stonnington (refer Map 1):

- Deakin University, Toorak Campus (Glenferrie Rd)
- Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, Chadstone Campus (off Warrigal Rd)
- Monash University, Caulfield Campus (off Dandenong Rd)
- Swinburne University of Technology, Prahran Campus (off High St)

##### *Deakin University*

The Toorak Campus is only small with a total of 1,052 students in 2004 (out of 21,076 EFT<sup>7</sup> for Deakin as a whole). There were some 454 overseas students at the Toorak campus (43% of campus total). The Toorak Campus is due to relocate to the Burwood campus of Deakin University in 2007 and so local demand for student housing will decline when this occurs.

##### *Holmesglen Institute of TAFE*

Holmesglen is Australia's biggest TAFE Institute with some 50,000 students overall, of which 95% are part-time. Of these, 40,000 students are based at the Chadstone campus including 816 overseas students. Their presence there will impact on student

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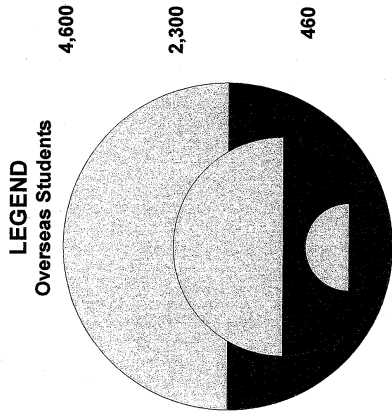
<sup>4</sup> Both Monash and Holmesglen for instance are building new campuses in Beijing.

<sup>5</sup> IDP Education Australia Limited, 2004

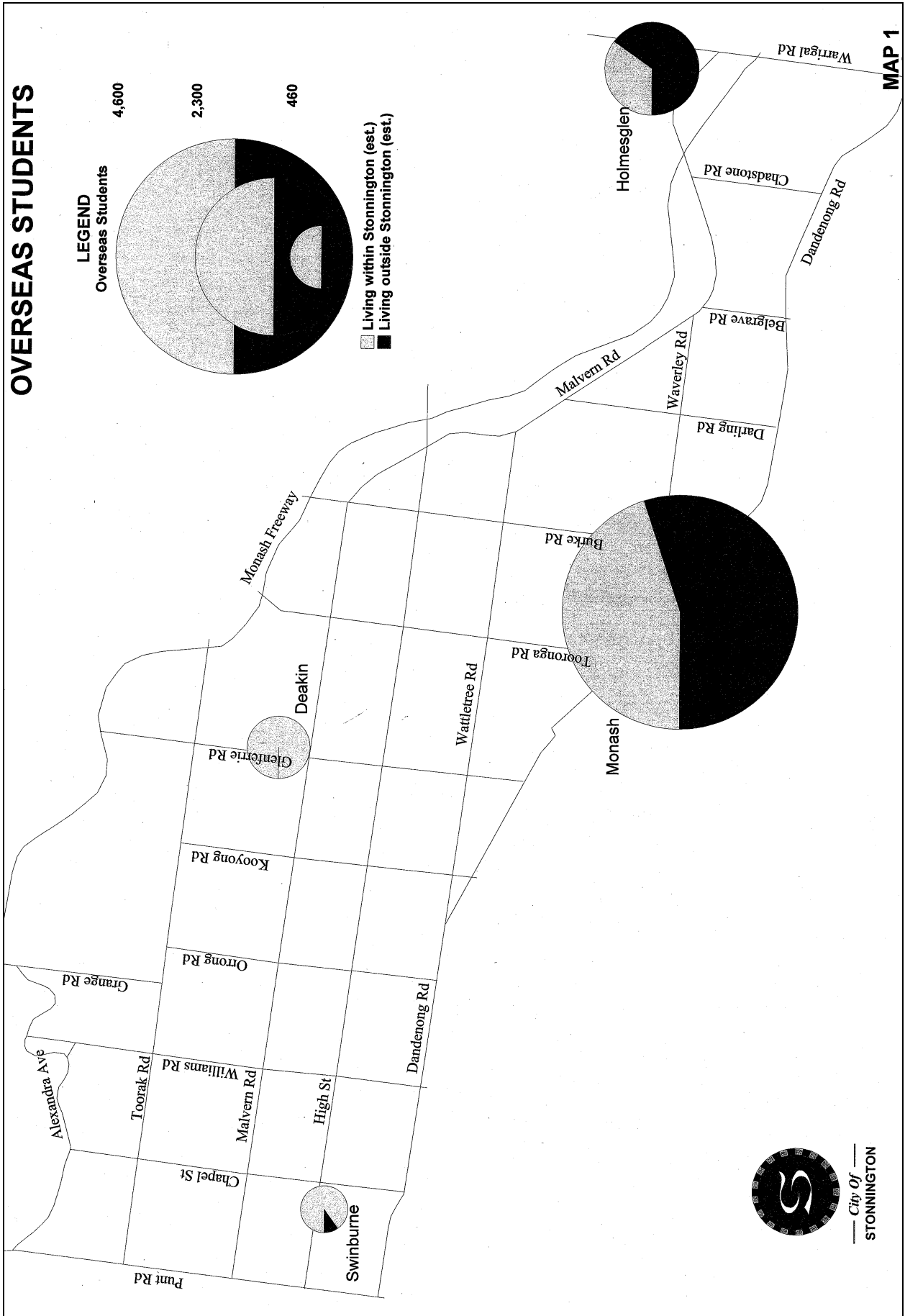
<sup>6</sup> Residents "... attending a tertiary institution"

<sup>7</sup> Equivalent Full-Time

# OVERSEAS STUDENTS



Living within Stonnington (est.)  
 Living outside Stonnington (est.)



City of  
**STONNINGTON**

**MAP 1**

housing requirements in Stonnington even though the Institute is located at one corner of the municipality.

#### *Monash University*

There are a total of 12,861 students at the Caulfield Campus of Monash University of which 4,600 (36%) are overseas students. This compares with a total of 53,000 for the whole university (2005) of which 29% are overseas students. Even though it is located just outside Stonnington's boundary, the Caulfield Campus has by far the greatest impact on student housing because of its size and its high proportion of overseas students. The Campus is particularly attractive to overseas students because the courses on offer - IT, economics, and business - attract high numbers of students from countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and China.

#### *Swinburne University of Technology*

The Prahran Campus has 3,770 students of whom 300 (8%) are overseas students (2005). This compares with 23,000 students for Swinburne University as a whole (Higher Ed and TAFE).

Table 1 below summarises the picture in terms of overseas students in Stonnington:

**Table 1: Overseas Students**

STUDENTS	STUDYING		LIVING IN STONNINGTON		
	Total No Students	No Overseas Students	% Share in Stonnington <sup>8</sup>	Overall Demand in Stonnington	Est Demand for \$200pw Housing <sup>9</sup>
Deakin - Toorak	1052	454	100%	0 <sup>10</sup>	0
Holmesglen - Chadstone	40,000	816	35%	286	43
Monash – Caulfield ( <i>adjoins Stonnington</i> )	12,861	4600	45%	2070	310
Swinburne - Prahran	3770	300	90%	270	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57,683</b>	<b>6170</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>2655</b>	<b>393</b>

Table 2 below compares this demand for overseas student housing beds (~\$200+pw) with the current and future provision of beds (~\$200+pw) as follows:

<sup>8</sup> This is an estimate of the proportion of students who will look for accommodation within Stonnington. For instance, since the Monash campus is located in Glen Eira but immediately abutting Stonnington, it is assumed that just under half (45%) will look for accommodation within Stonnington.

<sup>9</sup> Based on 15% total demand as explained previously in "Student Housing" section.

<sup>10</sup> Relocating out of Stonnington in 2007 but formerly might have generated need for 68 students.

**Table 2: Provision of Purpose Built Student Beds in Stonnington**

<b>PURPOSE BUILT STUDENT HOUSING</b>	<b>No Beds</b>
Current Provision ie \$200+pw	190
Additional "In the Pipeline"	362
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>552</b>

As can be seen from these tables, the supply of student housing beds (552) will far exceed demand for beds if all of the current applications go ahead.

### 1.5 Supply of Purpose Built Student Housing

The Table below shows that there have been spaces (beds) for 190 overseas students provided and constructed in recent years in purpose built accommodation. This does not include the rooming/boarding houses which are much cheaper and provide for a different market. These beds have all been provided within walking distance of Monash University Caulfield Campus and broadly reflect the estimated demand in Stonnington from that campus.

What is of concern however, is that there are a further 362 beds approved or pending and it is difficult to see where the demand from these beds will come from. This suggests that these proposals may never be built, or if built they may not be successful. Subsequently they may be the subject of a further application to change the use of the property to something more viable.

**Table 3: Planning Applications x No Units/Beds (Purpose Built)**

<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>NO UNITS</b>	<b>BEDS</b>
<b>DECISION PENDING</b>		
7-8 Porter St, Prahran	56	56
1-5 Donald St, Prahran	44	44
7-13 Simmons St/12 Ellis St, South Yarra	84	84
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>APPROVED BUT NOT BUILT</b>		
1015-19 Dandenong Rd, Malvern East	39	52
51 Garden St, South Yarra	21	21
72-6 High St, Prahran	63	67
24 MacQuarie St, Prahran	32	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>APPROVED AND BUILT</b>		
58, 60, 62 Waverley Rd, Malvern East	50	85

141-7 Waverley Rd, Malvern East	54	62
315 Waverley Rd/75 Darling St, Malvern East	43	43
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>490 units</b>	<b>550 beds</b>

## 1.6 Planning Applications in Stonnington

There have been fifteen<sup>11</sup> applications for student housing in Stonnington over the last eleven years with five of these occurring within the last twelve months. The locations of these applications are shown on Map 2 which indicates two clusters of applications:

- Seven applications in the vicinity of the Caulfield campus of Monash University
- A further eight applications in the vicinity of Swinburne University and Chapel Street

All of the recent applications are in the Chapel Street area and may be speculative proposals only loosely connected with Swinburne University<sup>12</sup>. As mentioned above, Swinburne has only some 270 overseas students of whom only about 40 can afford the required rents of around \$200pw. So if these are all approved, there will be 308 local beds for a market of only 40 local students.

Six applications have been refused following numerous objections and all were appealed against. The three cases that have been to appeal to date have been overturned (to be approved) by VCAT<sup>13</sup> and three decisions are pending.

**Table 4: Planning Applications x Year**

YEAR	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>APPLICATIONS</b>	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	3	1	5

The Council's grounds for the four applications it has refused have been as follows:

### *Neighbourhood Character and Amenity*

- Detrimental to the character and amenity of the surrounding residential area x 2
- Overdevelopment of the site with regard to height and scale
- At odds with the scale and character of the area
- Does not respect the character and streetscape and surrounding neighbourhood
- Height, bulk and design unacceptable in this locality
- Height is inconsistent in the immediate area
- Site coverage and mass a significant departure from the neighbourhood
- Insufficient setback

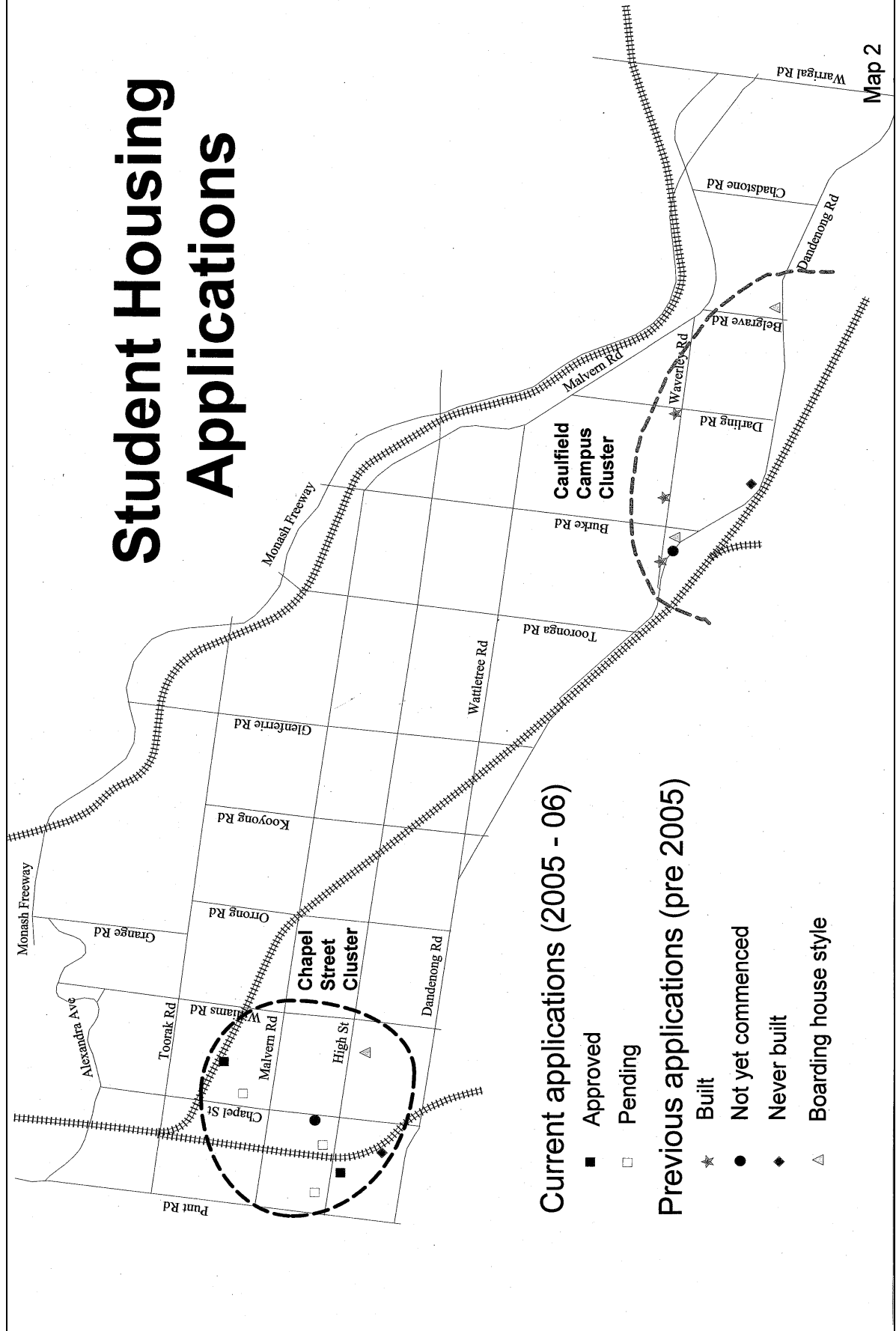
<sup>11</sup> This includes applications for boarding house accommodation (3) and those which did not proceed (2).

<sup>12</sup> These appear to be a developer response to a suppressed residential market and prompted by high rates of return on small student housing units yielding returns of \$7-8,000/m<sup>2</sup> compared to \$5-6,000/m<sup>2</sup> for more conventional residential development.

<sup>13</sup> The Victorian Civil & Administrative Tribunal



# Student Housing Applications



### *Parking*

- Car parking dispensation is unacceptable x 2
- Inadequate on site parking
- Adversely affect traffic and parking
- Off street car parking inadequate
- Parking demand to the detriment of the surrounding neighbourhood

### *Internal Amenity*

- Poorly designed and inappropriate levels of internal amenity
- On site open space is inappropriate and insufficient
- Disability access provisions do not apply

### *Zoning*

- Contrary to the purpose of the Business 2 Zone

These matters are explained further in Section 2.

## **2 KEY ISSUES & OBJECTIVES**

From this analysis the following appear to be the key issues relating to student housing in Stonnington:

### **2.1 Need**

There is considerable uncertainty in both the local and the wider markets which make it difficult if not impossible to predict demand for this type of student housing. On the macro level, the intake of overseas students into Australian universities will be affected by factors such as the value of the Australian dollar, the development of new universities in intake countries such as China and Singapore, and the growth of new markets in other countries and among Australian students. At the local level, there have been a number of recent speculative proposals and it is not possible to judge if all or any of these will proceed to construction.

The planning implications of this uncertainty need to be recognised although "need" is a difficult issue to raise in Planning Schemes. If developments are unsuccessful or if new markets cannot be found, then investors will no doubt come forward with new proposals. Alternatively investors may look at ways to get around the requirements for occupants to be students which has implications for enforcement and local amenity in terms of car parking.

### **2.2 Location**

Glen Eira CC has approved Amendment C42 to its planning scheme which supports student housing as follows:

- Walking distance of Monash and Holmesglen (Zone 1)
- Walking distance of railway stations that feed directly to these campuses (Zone 2)
- Other Housing Diversity areas (Zone 3)
- Minimum Change areas (Zone 4)

Student housing in Zone 1 and 2 locations will be “given preference”, proposals in Zone 3 will “not be given preference”, and Zone 4 proposals will be “discouraged”.

This approach is sound and was supported at the Panel Hearing which was appointed to consider submissions to the amendment. Although it does not translate directly to Stonnington’s circumstances, it provides the conceptual basis for the draft policy.

The most successful developments have been those close to and linked with a tertiary campus, and in particular the Monash Caulfield Campus. This proximity is an asset for serious and hard-working students as they can walk easily to and from their campus. Ten minutes’ walking distance is generally recognised as an acceptable and reasonable distance criteria and this translates into 800m on the ground. For public transport, a reduced walking distance is justified because the overall trip is longer, and a 5 minutes/400m criteria to railway stations and tram routes is proposed.

This approach would reinforce the provisions of Clause 21.07-3 of the Stonnington Planning Scheme which specifically encourages student housing “... *close to large institutional uses such as Swinburne, Deakin, Holmesglen, and Monash*”.

A further consideration is to encourage easy access to suitable services such as convenience stores, community facilities, and appropriate services. Ideally, student housing will be within easy walking distance of basic facilities such as shops, health services, and banking which can usually be found in the “activity centres” which are scattered across the City.

#### *Proposed Objective*

Guide purpose-built student housing into locations which have good access to the tertiary institutions which generate the demand for this type of housing, and to the shops and other services which are needed by students.

### **2.3 Parking**

Unsurprisingly, car parking requirements for student housing have consistently been shown to be much lower than for conventional housing. Standards of more than 0.25 spaces per student bed have consistently been rejected by VCAT and sometimes the parking requirement has been waived completely. These levels have been supported by surveys from applicants, from Melbourne City Council surveys, and from on the ground evidence of student parking demands in Waverley Road<sup>14</sup>. It would be difficult to challenge these standards further without strong evidence to the contrary.

The City of Melbourne's Parking & Access Strategy addresses this issue by not allowing residents of student accommodation to participate in their Resident Parking Scheme. Hence occupants who own cars which cannot be accommodated on-site are faced with the near-impossible task of parking on the streets without resident concessions. This approach could be applied in Stonnington as a further measure to limit car ownership among student tenants.

#### *Proposed Objective*

Provide on-site car and bicycle parking to meet anticipated needs.

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<sup>14</sup> For instance refer Ratio Consultants' submission in support of Application 1011/05 for 13 Simmons Street pp 9-11.

## **2.4 Neighbourhood Character and Amenity**

The Council and local residents have had major concerns with some applications for student housing in the last twelve months. They have had particular misgivings about the impact of proposals on neighbourhood character, the design and height of proposals, provision of car parking and on-site management.

Where justified, an application can be refused and the Council has taken this course of action on several occasions. Sometimes however, issues can be addressed through negotiations with the applicant and through appropriate permit conditions. There are already provisions in the planning scheme which directly address these issues and these can be applied to minimise any adverse impacts. They include for instance:

- Urban Design Controls (Clause 22.02)
- Special Provisions for Development in Commercial Areas and Retail Centres (Clauses 22.05/09)
- Other Provisions regarding Heritage, Character, and Amenity (Clauses 22.03-10 and 22.04/06)

Requirements such as these will be applied robustly to ensure that proposals meet the Council's standards and expectations.

### *Proposed Objective*

Ensure that the design, mass, scale, and character of student housing is appropriate to its location and sensitive to its impact on surrounding properties

## **2.5 Internal Layout and Facilities**

Student accommodation is customised housing which is specifically designed and tailored for student occupants. This generally means that the units are small and compact and have basic facilities such as:

- Kitchenette in each unit
- Desk space and book shelves in each unit
- Communal facilities to support social interaction and a sense of community
- Disability access
- On-site open space
- Limited car parking but higher standards of bicycle provision

Acceptable standards for privacy, internal amenity, functionality, and communality should therefore be achieved. In this respect, Melbourne City Council's guidelines - *Student Housing: Development & Management Controls(1999)* - are a useful advisory guide for standards of provision, design, and layout to achieve these objectives.

### *Proposed Objective*

Ensure that the layout, standards, and facilities for student housing provides a positive living experience for residents

## 2.6 Management

Good management is the key to responsible student housing and maintaining local amenity. A management plan and on-site supervision enable good management to occur and are sought as a condition of permit. On-site management can be provided through an on-site manager or “lead tenant” who can be a point of referral and support for tenants.

There is a framework of social and cultural support provided for overseas students at these purpose built developments. This includes guidance to the full range of university services through the on-site manager and an intranet service, “meet & greet” events to welcome tenants, and a trained on-site manager or lead tenant who has responsibility to be a point of referral and support for all tenants.

There is also an at-call service available to neighbours and the general public if there is an amenity or behavioural issue which needs to be acted upon. However there is no known history of enforcement action associated with student housing in Stonnington.

### *Proposed Objective*

Ensure that appropriate management is in place to create a positive and safe living environment for students and to minimise negative impacts on surrounding properties

## 2.7 Keeping Student Housing for Students

A continuing concern is that student housing will revert to non-student occupation if sufficient tenants cannot be found to fill the rooms available. This could result in greater impacts on local amenity and the housing may not be suitable for the new occupants. This appears to be a realistic scenario given the uncertainties in the overseas student market.

Stonnington's permits will usually require a Section 173 Agreement which stipulates that the accommodation "... must only be used for the purposes of student accommodation". Although these agreements are generally supported by applicants, the requirement has been omitted from at least one permit which has been issued by VCAT following appeal<sup>15</sup>.

That lack of reference to student housing on a S173 Agreement is a shortcoming<sup>16</sup>. It can result in buyers not knowing at sale of the limitations on the permit and there is anecdotal evidence that units are being purchased unknowingly as low-cost "apartments". If this is the case then there are enforcement and change of use implications which will impact on Council's resources, as well as the ethical and code of practice issues which would need to be addressed.

### *Proposed Objective*

Ensure that student housing is only occupied by bona fide students

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<sup>15</sup> Appeal Ref P1020/2004

<sup>16</sup> The permit is still issued for "... use of the land for student accommodation" but purchasers are not necessarily notified of this.

### **3 DRAFT POLICY FRAMEWORK**

Stonnington's approach to student housing should therefore be adaptable to take account of the vagaries of the overseas student market. The key features of this approach are recommended as follows:

#### **Policy 1**

**Guide development to areas with an identified need for this type of student housing, and locations with a high degree of accessibility to public transport and shopping and other services (refer Map 3)**

Proposals within 10 minutes' walking distance of the Monash Caulfield Campus will be encouraged. Proposals within 5 minutes' walking distance of Swinburne and Holmesglen, and within 5 minutes' walking distance of tram and train routes leading to Monash, will also be given preference if they also have good access to facilities such as shops and other services.

Within these areas, proposals will be expected to locate within:

- Business and Mixed Use Zones, or
- Land beside selected arterial roads which has been allocated for medium density housing as shown on the Strategic Framework Plan, or
- The Residential Zone bounded by Burke/Waverley/Dandenong Roads adjacent to Monash University.

Proposals outside these areas would be discouraged.

#### **Policy 2**

**Require car and bicycle parking to meet student needs**

Parking standards of 0.25 spaces per student bed are generally accepted as adequate and are recommended. A lower rate may be considered in exceptional circumstances for proposals immediately adjacent to the Monash University Caulfield Campus, or where special arrangements such as car sharing can be shown to significantly reduce demand.

Higher standards would be expected of development outside the preferred areas.

#### **Policy 3**

**Ensure that development fits in with the local neighbourhood**

It is paramount that student housing should be a good neighbour to local residents in terms of both physical design and day to day operations. The design and character provisions of the Planning Scheme would be applied robustly and in particular those which relate to urban design, neighbourhood character, and development within commercial and retail areas.

#### **Policy 4**

**Require a layout and facilities which promote a positive living experience for residents**



Developments should be designed and laid out to provide a positive living experience for student residents to pursue their studies. As such, they should achieve reasonable levels of privacy and amenity, rooms should be safe and work well, and there should be opportunities for communal living and social interaction. Guidelines produced by the City of Melbourne provide useful direction in this area<sup>17</sup>.

#### **Policy 5**

#### **Ensure that student housing is well-managed and that operations do not impact negatively on the neighbourhood**

A management plan will be required with an on-site manager to oversee house rules and to minimise any adverse impacts on the neighbourhood. The management plan would be required as a condition of permit and would need Council's approval. It would thus be enforceable if for instance, there were problems with noisy behaviour or rubbish disposal although there is no history of this occurring in developments to date.

#### **Policy 6**

#### **Ensure that student housing is occupied only by bona fide students**

Student housing has been designed and laid out specifically for students with communal areas, desk space, and minimal car parking which would probably be inappropriate for general residential use. It has not been designed or approved as affordable housing and this would require a further application for change of use if it were to occur<sup>18</sup>. With this in mind, the Council will require a Section 173 Agreement to stipulate that the accommodation must only be used for the purposes of bona fide student accommodation and will introduce a definition so that this aspect can be enforceable.

### **REFERENCE DOCUMENTS**

- *Commercial Strategy Background Paper*; Stonnington CC, June 1999
- *Commercial Strategy Discussion Paper*; Stonnington CC, August 1999
- *Glen Eira Planning Scheme Amendment C42*; Panel Report, June 2005
- *Student Housing Policy*; Glen Eira CC 2005
- *Student Housing - Development & Management Controls*; City of Melbourne, 1999
- *Survey of International Students' Spending in Australia*; AEI, July 2005

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<sup>17</sup> *Student Housing: Development & Management Controls*; City of Melbourne 1999

<sup>18</sup> *Given the vagaries of the student housing market, developers may wish to consider whether the design and layout is sufficiently flexible to accommodate such a change of use in the future.*



**APPENDIX 1  
PLANNING APPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT HOUSING, SEPTEMBER 2006**

No	ADDRESS	DATE	COUNCIL DECISION	APPEAL?	No UNITS	PARKING	No LEVELS	OBJEC-TIONS	STATUS
1163/95	1015-19 Dandenong Rd (Motel)	11/1995	Approved	No	39 units/52 beds	16	1	7	Never built
1026/96	102 Union St	10/1996	Approved	No	36 units/beds	13	2	7	Never built
208/99	60 The Avenue*	3/1999	Approved	No	29 rooms/32 beds	8	2	4	Boarding house
399/99	911 Dandenong Rd*	5/1999	Approved	No	12 rooms	5 on site	1	0	Boarding house
754/01	141-7 Waverley Rd	7/2001	Refused	Yes Approved	54 units/62 beds	22	3	38	Built
449/01 460/02	58, 60, 62 Waverley Rd	5/2002	Approved	No	50 units/85 beds	22	4	7	Built
1155/03	903 Dandenong Rd	11/2003	Approved	No	42 units/46 beds		4	1	Marketing but not built
1193/03	1219-25 Dandenong Rd*	11/2003	Approved	No	17 rooms/25 beds	9	2	0	Boarding house
1185/03 1278/04	315 Waverley Rd/75 Darling St	12/2004	Refused	Yes Approved	43 unit/beds	17	3	160/4	Built
721/04	24 MacQuarie St	7/2004	Approved	No	32 units/beds	9	4	4	Not commenced
529/05	51 Garden St	6/2005	Approved	No	21 units/beds	5	4	0	Marketing but not built
580/05	72-6 High St	6/2005	Refused	Yes Approved	63 units/67 beds	32	3	46	Marketing but not built
827/05	7-8 Porter St	8/2005	Refused	tba	56 units/beds	15	3/4	14	Approved
878/05	1-5 Donald St	8/2005	Refused	Yes (Failure)	44 units/beds	8	3	18	Approved
1011/05	7-13 Simmons St/12 Ellis St	11/2005	Refused	Yes (Failure)	Mixed - 84 stud units/beds	21	7-12	2	Approved
	<b>DECISION PENDING</b>								
	32 St Edmonds St	6/2006	na	na	44 units	6	5	na	Pending

\* Boarding houses ie not strictly purpose-built student housi

