

## 8.8 Chris Gahan Centre - Future Options

Director Environment & Infrastructure: Simon Holloway

### Linkage to Council Plan

#### Direction 1: A thriving and unique place

- 1.1 Identity and destination
- 1.3 Pride of place and character

#### Direction 2: An inclusive and healthy community

- 2.2 Diverse, inclusive and safe
- 2.3 Public and green spaces

### Purpose of Report

To seek Council endorsement to demolish the Chris Gahan Centre building, located within Grattan Gardens, to create additional high value open space, improve safety and amenity in the park, and enhance permeability and linkages with Prahran Square and Chapel Street via the new pocket park at 15 Izett Street.

The report proposes the relocation of residual services at the centre to suitable alternative locations.

### Officer Recommendation

#### **That Council:**

1. ***NOTE the historic strategic intent of Stonnington City Council to create an open space linkage between Prahran Square and Grattan Gardens - including through the acquisition of 15 Izett Street, Prahran, in 2016 from Council's open space reserve for Windsor/Prahran to create a pocket park linking Izett Street and Grattan Gardens and the consideration of the future of the Chris Gahan Centre.***
2. ***NOTE that it is timely to reconsider the future of the Chris Gahan Centre given its low utilisation, current condition, issues with its location within Grattan Gardens and the significant opportunity to create additional high value open space within Grattan Gardens, improve safety and amenity in the park, and enhance permeability and linkages with Prahran Square and Chapel Street via the creation of the new pocket park at 15 Izett Street.***
3. ***COMMIT to the demolition of the Chris Gahan Centre building and associated infrastructure and management of any contaminated soil in line with EPA regulations, followed by the reinstatement of the land to open space and establishment of a suitable connection with the Izett Street pocket park.***
4. ***COMMIT to the following actions as part of the project planning and delivery:***
  - a. ***Development of a transition plan to relocate residual services delivered from the facility to a suitable alternative location, including engagement with existing service providers.***

- b. Undertaking community and stakeholder engagement on the design of the reinstatement of the land to open space connection with the Izett Street pocket park.***
- 5. NOTE the total estimated cost of \$1.2m, excluding asset write-off (non cash expense)***
  - 6. NOTE the proposed funding source for the project is savings from the 2023/24 capital works program that have been identified and carried forward to 2024/25.***
  - 7. AUTHORISE officers to work with the family of (late) Chris Gahan regarding the proposed demolition of the facility that bears his name from his time as Mayor of the City of Prahran in 1970. This would include giving consideration to an alternative memorial.***

### Executive Summary

1. This report recommends the demolition of the Chris Gahan Centre, located with Grattan Gardens at 50 Grattan Street, Prahran.
2. It notes the significant under-utilisation of the centre and its age, design and current functionality. It notes the need to invest significantly in an upgrade of the facility if retained.
3. The report notes the strategic value of demolishing the building in order to:
  - Create additional high value open space within Grattan Gardens;
  - Improve safety and amenity in the park; and
  - Enhance permeability and linkages between Chapel Street, Prahran Square, the new Izett Street pocket park, Grattan Gardens and the railway line to the west.
4. The report notes the historic strategic intent of Stonnington City Council to create an open space linkage between Prahran Square and Grattan Gardens - including through the acquisition of 15 Izett Street, Prahran, in 2016 from Council's open space reserve for Windsor/Prahran to create a pocket park linking Izett Street and Grattan Gardens and the consideration of the future of the Chris Gahan Centre.
5. The report notes that options exist to relocate the limited number of residual services currently delivered from the centre to other suitable locations within the area.
6. Finally, the report proposes that officers engage with the family of (late) Chris Gahan regarding the planned demolition of the facility that bears his name from his time as Mayor of the City of Prahran in 1970. This would include giving consideration to an alternative memorial.

### Background

7. The Chris Gahan Senior Citizens Centre is located at 50 Grattan Street, Prahran and was purpose-built in 1970 as an elderly citizens' centre. Following the laying of the

foundation stone for the new elderly citizens club on 11 August 1970 by the then Mayor of Prahran, Councillor Chris Gahan, the Council received a petition signed by more than 200 Prahran elderly citizens requesting the Council to name the club-rooms after Councillor Chris Gahan in appreciation of the services rendered by him to the elderly of the City of Prahran, although himself only 28 years of age. On 17 August 1970 the Council unanimously passed a resolution naming the clubrooms the "Chris Gahan Elderly Citizens Club".

8. The Council envisaged that the Chris Gahan Elderly Citizens Club would be used by all the elderly citizens of Prahran as a common meeting place, rest rooms and a central point for holding social events and in future the provision of midday meals and would remain open daily, and because of its parkland setting it enabled those so able to participate in recreations such as Trugo.
9. The Chris Gahan Elderly Citizens Centre underwent building improvements as part of the Grattan Gardens redevelopment in the mid-1980s and was officially reopened in 1987. The facility is known today as the Chris Gahan Centre and continues to provide a community meeting place to the present day.
10. The Gahan family, namely George Gahan and his son Chris Gahan, have had a long association with the municipality. George Thomas Gahan was working as a contractor and lived in Cromwell Road South Yarra. He was a Prahran Councillor from 1958/59 to 1972/73 and Prahran Mayor in 1965/66 and 1970/71. His son Christopher Charles E. Gahan was a Prahran Councillor from 1966/67 to 1971/72 and again from 1979/80 to 1993/94. He was Prahran Mayor in 1969/70 and 1981/82. He was a Stonnington Councillor from 1996/97 to 2007/08 and Stonnington Mayor in 1998/99. In appreciation of their services to the community, previous Councils have named buildings and open spaces in their honour.
11. The 15 Izett Street, Prahran, property was purchased by Council and served as the site compound and construction office while Prahran Square was being built. This property was one of several properties that have been purchased as part of Creating Open Space Strategy to realise the opportunities to provide better permeability and links between Chapel Street, Prahran Square, Grattan Gardens and the railway line. The site is now currently under construction as the Izett Street pocket park. These works are within the FY2025-26 capital budget and will provide opportunity for a future direct connection with Grattan Gardens.

#### Historic strategic intent to create an open space linkage between Prahran Square and Grattan Garden

12. It is understood that the City of Stonnington has long considered an opportunity to create a pedestrian and open space linkage between Prahran Square and Grattan Gardens in the vicinity of 15 Izett Street including consideration of the future demolition of the Chris Gahan Centre.
13. In the Confidential Business section of its Council Meeting on 8 February 2016, Council considered a report on a potential property purchase for 15 Izett Street, Prahran, and resolved to authorise the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate and

purchase the property up to an agreed financial amount. Refer to **Attachment 1** for the Report and **Attachment 2** for the Minutes of that meeting.

14. The report, whilst confidential due to the financial provisions for the potential property purchase, noted the following in various sections of the report:

- *An opportunity has been highlighted to investigate acquiring the land at 15 Izett Street, Prahran to add to Council's open space network.*
- *Chapel reVision Structure Plan has been adopted by Council for the Chapel Street Activity Centre and is informed by a number of background documents. The 'Chapel reVision Greville Village Neighbourhood Framework Plan' and 'Chapel Street Masterplan' identifies opportunities within the Greville Street Precinct, in particular opportunities to provide better permeability and links. The purpose of implementing these opportunities is to achieve the adopted vision for the Chapel Street activity centre as outlined in the Structure Plan.*
- *The strategic objective for the Cato Street car park, Wattle Street, Izett Street location is to define and establish a village square which is well connected, pedestrian friendly, green, flexible and community oriented. To improve the integration of this space with Grattan Gardens, a new east/west strategic link opportunity is identified by Chapel reVision in the vicinity of 15 Izett Street.*
- *Important to this project (Cato Street Car Park Project / Prahran Square), is links to surrounding areas and connecting existing key areas of public realm and open space.*
- *It is considered that a green link through Izett Street to Grattan Gardens will connect two large open space areas, further enhance east-west connectivity and compliment a revitalised Greville Street and new public open space at the Cato Street car park.*
- *Attachment 4 (of the 2016 Council Report) summarises the strategic context in which a potential purchase of 15 Izett Street sits. A new link/public open space in this location would create a strong green connection between two of Prahran's most significant open spaces; Grattan Gardens and the upcoming Cato Street redevelopment project. Currently, the Chris Gahan Centre forms an obvious barrier to achieving an integrated connection through the link to the Gardens, however any opportunity to connect the two large open spaces should be seriously considered. There may be an opportunity in the future to consider the function of the Centre.*
- *The redevelopment of the Cato Street car park into a significant new public open space, improving east-west connectivity, slowing traffic, and providing a safe, comfortable, green and flexible place for the use of the community has long been the vision for this area. The purchase of this site will help to contribute to this.*
- *The creation of a green east/west local link between two large areas of open space is an opportunity to improve and extend the open space system having regard to the adopted Chapel reVision Structure Plan. It would also assist*

*Council in providing for an improved diversity of open spaces, including formal and informal, natural and urban space.*

- *The purchase of 15 Izett St is an opportunity to realise the strategic objectives of the Chapel reVision Structure Plan through the connection of two large open space areas, Grattan Gardens and the future Cato Street space. Currently, the Chris Gahan Centre forms an obvious barrier to achieving a completely integrated connection, however there may be an opportunity in the future to consider the function of the Centre.*

15. It is understood that Council was reluctant to explicitly foreshadow a potential demolition of the Chris Gahan Centre in 2016 as this was premature at the time, though the strategic opportunity to improve open space and linkages through this site were evidently foreseen and pursued through the acquisition of the 15 Izett Street property for open space.

1.

### Current Utilisation

16. The current utilisation of the Chris Gahan Centre is noted in the table below.

2. Monday	3. No bookings
4. Tuesday	5. No bookings
6. Wednesday	7. No bookings
8. Thursday	9. Alcoholics Anonymous (5:00pm – 7:00pm)
	10. Narcotics Anonymous (7:00pm – 9:00pm)
11. Friday	12. Narcotics Anonymous (7:00pm – 9:00pm)
13. Saturday	14. Narcotics Anonymous (3:30pm – 5:30pm)
	15. Alcoholics Anonymous (5:30pm – 7:30pm)
16. Sunday	17. Stonnington Ballroom (1:45pm – 5:00pm)
	18. Alcoholics Anonymous (6:30pm – 8:30pm)

17. In summary, the centre is used for a total of 15.25 hours per week for the following activities:

- Alcoholics Anonymous – 6 hours
- Narcotics Anonymous – 6 hours
- Stonnington Ballroom – 3.25 hours

18. All current users of the centre could be accommodated in other City of Stonnington facilities. Options include Prahran Town Hall, Prahran RSL and other locations.

### Key Issues and Discussion

19. The Chris Gahan Elderly Citizens Centre has been operating in Grattan Gardens since 1970.

20. Whilst Council has not previously formally resolved a position on the Chris Gahan Centre, it actively foreshadowed benefits of an open space connection through this site to Prahran Square and Chapel Street via the acquisition of the 15 Izett Street

property and creation of open space. There are many clear benefits in converting the area currently occupied by the Chris Ghan Centre to high quality open space and improving amenity and safety in the park and enhancing connectivity through the new Izett Street pocket park.

21. The key issues considered in this report are as follows:

- The opportunity to create additional open space and link two key open spaces, Prahran Square and Grattan Gardens, as part of Council's Creating Open Space Strategy.
- The current condition and utilisation of the facility and costs to continue operating the building.
- The need for significant investment to upgrade the facility to improve functionality if retained.
- The scope and estimated cost to demolish the building, reinstate the land to open space and establish a connection to the new Izett Street pocket park.
- Options to relocate the limited number of residual services currently delivered from the centre to other suitable locations within the area.

22. A review of community facilities across the municipality highlights that there is an approximate equal distribution in the western, central and eastern parts of the city, as follows:

- **West Precinct:** South Yarra, Windsor, Prahran (14 facilities)
- **Central Precinct:** Armadale, Toorak, Kooyong, Malvern (15 facilities)
- **East Precinct:** Malvern East, Glen Iris (14 facilities)

23. For the West Precinct, the majority of these facilities in the area are concentrated within the suburb of Prahran. This is the only precinct in the municipality that has Youth and Middle Years Services. There are currently no Council-run or operated long day care or kindergarten within South Yarra. There are no Men's Sheds or U3A within this precinct.

24. Most facilities are performing satisfactorily, except for community spaces (including Chris Gahan Centre), that are experiencing significant underutilisation. This suggests a potential misalignment between their current offerings and community needs. Council must assess underutilised assets and explore ways to enhance access and usage or alternatively rationalise unrequired assets.

#### Overview of the Chris Gahan Centre

25. Current asset management community infrastructure data shows that the Chris Gahan Senior Citizen Centre building is in good structural condition, fit for its intended purpose and has good travel accessibility. There are minor functionality issues that could be addressed to improve indoor/outdoor activities, storage constraints, and flexibility of spaces. In addition, the building is dated and requires upgrades. The main concern is the current utilisation, which is very low.

26. The building's current asset replacement value is \$802,642.50, and it is rated Good condition overall (building asset condition audit). The super structure has around 85

years life expectancy with fittings and fixtures estimated useful life at approximately 17 years. It is estimated that roof replacement will be needed within 36 years.

27. The site on which the Chris Gahan Centre is located is zoned as Public Use and Public Park and Recreation. The site is covered by a Heritage overlay requiring a permit to demolish or remove a building and Special Building overlay for flooding (that doesn't affect the area covered by this building).
28. It is noted that sale of the building/land is not an option that can be considered. The reasons for this are associated to the zoning of the site, and also that the building is fully contained within established parkland. The building does not have a street frontage.
29. Should the facility be retained for continued operation, the side of the building that abuts the laneway could be converted into an entry point. This would require some renovation work and civil work to the laneway. This would enable the Izett St pocket park to still function as a thoroughfare that leads directly to the centre.
30. In recent public consultation for the Izett Street pocket park numerous members of the public noted that they would like the opportunity to have the park as a thoroughfare to Grattan Gardens from Prahran Square.
31. The table below provides advantages and disadvantages for various key consideration of the Chris Gahan Centre.

<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Building Access and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good access to public transport within walking distance</li> <li>- Current building provides suitable accessibility for occupiers with automatic doors and all features located on one level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access is into park area leaving blind spots in laneway at side of building for anti-social behaviour and/or rough sleepers to congregate.</li> </ul>
Condition of Asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minor refurbishment will further improve the building condition and maximise opportunities for utilisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Large write off cost of asset if building is demolished as it still has usable life</li> </ul>
Flexibility and adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can currently be used for small community groups with no need to refurbish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The building was purpose built to house elderly citizens.</li> <li>- Refurbishment may be required to increase flexibility of the space.</li> </ul>
Functionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building is fit for purpose for an elderly citizen centre</li> <li>- The current usage of the site could be relocated to other facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Works may be required to ensure the building could be fit for purpose for other uses.</li> </ul>
Open space considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase to usable open space by approximately 470 square metres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of a community facility</li> </ul>

	- Opportunity to create a direct linkage from Prahran Square to Grattan Gardens through the Izett Street pocket park	
Public Safety		- There is a considerable safety concern for the blind spots in laneway at side of the building for anti-social behaviour and/or rough sleepers to congregate. There are sheltered areas that are appealing

### Option A – Retain and Repurpose

32. This option would involve the retention of the Chris Gahan Centre and repurpose or expansion of the utilisation of the building.
33. The facility is currently only used for 15.25 hours per week, with the potential to be used for approximately 84 hours (based on 12 hours per day, e.g. 9:00am – 9:00pm).
34. There are a range of services that could potentially be relocated to the Chris Gahan Centre, though these could also be accommodated in other facilities across the city.
35. The key implications with retention of the site are:
  - Limited current utilisation with minimal services operating from the facility, making it less valuable as a community resource compared to other options.
  - Significant costs associated with refurbishment to address adaptability and safety concerns, with no guarantee of increased usage or improved public value.
  - Significant costs to address the public safety element. This can potentially be addressed with the creation of an additional access point to building from Izett Street side. This would provide access to the building from the laneway.
  - Maintaining a dated facility that no longer aligns with broader Council strategies for optimising open space and enhancing community connectivity.
36. Retaining the site involves substantial costs for refurbishment and renovation to ensure it meets current standards and usability requirements. Given the building's current under-utilisation and limited public value, the benefits of retaining the facility are outweighed by the advantages of converting the site to open space.

### Option B – Demolish and Convert to Open Space

37. This option would involve the demolition of the existing Chris Gahan Centre building and associated infrastructure, including services and hard stand driveway access.
38. The residual land would be converted into open space and form an integrated part of Grattan Gardens.
39. A linkage between Grattan Gardens and the new Izett Street pocket park would be established through the site of the current building.



40. It is noted that upgrading the laneway connection between 15 Izett Street and Grattan Gardens is essential for enhancing pedestrian access and integrating two open spaces.
41. Transitioning to parkland would significantly enhance public value, providing much needed green space and improving community connectivity, which aligns more effectively with Council's strategic goals.
42. There are several key benefits noted with this proposal:
- **Improved Connectivity and Open Space:** Demolishing the building would increase usable public space by approximately 470 square metres, creating a direct linkage between Prahran Square, Grattan Gardens, and the new Izett Street pocket park. This enhanced integration would improve pedestrian flow, increase accessibility, and create a seamless network of public spaces for the community.
  - **Enhanced Public Safety:** Removal of the building would eliminate blind spots in the adjacent laneway, reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping. This would improve safety for park users and the surrounding area.
  - **Optimised Land Use:** The current building, while accessible and fit for small community groups, could have its services relocated to other facilities, freeing up valuable land for open space and public use.
  - **Strategic Open Space Objectives:** The conversion aligns with Council's long-term strategies for creating open space, providing a well-connected, high-value park area that meets community needs.
43. The Chris Gahan Centre is no longer essential for community service provision, as the services it once housed have declined in recent years. Many of the functions previously provided from this facility can be effectively redistributed to other Council buildings, such as the nearby Prahran Town Hall and Grattan Gardens Community Centre. By consolidating services into these more appropriate facilities, Council can optimise resource utilisation while freeing up valuable land for public open space.
44. As part of this proposal, a program of works will need to be developed. This would include:
- **Transition Plans for Residual Services:** Officers will coordinate with service providers to ensure minimal disruption to users during the transition.
  - **Demolition Timing and Methodology:** This includes establishing a timeline for the demolition process, including key milestones and deadlines. Additionally, there will be consideration around the methodology for safe and efficient demolition, including waste management and site preparation.
  - **Parkland Reinstatement Options, Design and Cost Estimates:** Consideration will be given to exploring and evaluating different design options for the parkland reinstatement. Detailed plans will be developed for landscaping, amenities, and public facilities. Detailed cost estimates for all phases of the

project, including demolition, parkland design, and any necessary infrastructure.

- Integration with Izett Street Pocket Park: The integration of the new parkland with the Izett Street pocket park to the east will need to be carefully considered. The interface along the laneway servicing the rear of Izett Street properties will need to be assessed to ensure smooth connectivity and functionality.
- Project Planning and Scheduling: A project schedule that includes deadlines, milestones, and dependencies to ensure timely completion will be developed.
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement: A communication plan to inform and consult Councillors, centre users, service providers, and the Stonnington community will need to be developed and implemented.

## Governance Compliance

### Policy Alignment

45. This proposal aligns with Council's Strategy for Creating Open Space.

### Financial and Resource Implications

46. The estimated costs to retain and repurpose the facility is noted in the table below. It is further noted that retention of the building will incur ongoing operating costs. The operating costs are currently approximately \$100,000 per annum. This includes security, minor maintenance, utility costs, waste removal, cleaning, IT and corporate overheads.

Estimated Cost to Retain and Repurpose (Option A)		
Item	Description	Cost
1	Internal Refurbishment. The range of cost is subject to proposed use.	\$100,000
2	External Refurbishment	\$100,000
3	Option to provide additional access to building from Izett Street/laneway side. The range of cost is subject to proposed shared zoning of the laneway, subject to Department of Transport and Parking approval. This cost option would assist with addressing the public safety risk and increase versatility for usage of the building.	\$350,000 to \$600,000
4	Public consultation	\$30,000
5	Project contingency	\$40,000
<b>Total Cost</b>		<b>\$620,000 to \$870,000</b>

47. The estimated costs to demolish and covert the site to open space is noted in the table below. Ongoing costs to maintain the newly created open space will be

managed within Council's current operating cost for maintenance of Grattan Gardens.

<b>Estimated Cost to Demolish and Convert to Open Space (Option B)</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Cost</b>
1	Demolition of Property	\$130,000
2	Design costs	\$60,000
3	Reinstatement of parkland to match surrounding area. The range of cost is subject to the type of park/open space features. Some allowance is also made for potential contaminated soil.	\$450,000 to \$700,000
4	Upgrade connection between 15 Izzet Street and Grattan Gardens. The range of cost is subject to proposed shared zoning of the laneway, subject to Department of Transport and Parking approval.	\$350,000 to \$600,000
5	Public consultation – on future open space design	\$30,000
6	Project contingency	\$80,000
7	Allowances for third-party authorities (e.g., modifications to utility assets not owned by Council)	\$100,000
<b>Sub-Total</b>		<b>\$1,200,000 to \$1,700,000</b>
8	<b>Non-cash component:</b> Write off of asset (rounded from \$802,642.50)	\$800,000
<b>Total Cost</b>		<b>\$2,000,000 to \$2,500,000</b>

19.

48. The proposed funding source for the project is savings from the 2023/24 capital works program that have been identified and carried forward to 2024/25.

20.

#### Conflicts of Interest Disclosure

49. No Council officer and/or contractors who have provided advice in relation to this report have declared a conflict of interest regarding the matter under consideration.

#### Decision Making Connection Disclosure

50. No external parties were engaged for the direct purposes of this report.

#### Legal / Risk Implications

51. There are no legal / risk implications relevant to this report.

#### Community Consultation

52. To date, there has been no formal community consultation undertaken regarding the proposed demolition and conversion of the site to open space.
53. It is proposed to undertake community and stakeholder engagement on the design of the reinstatement of the land to open space and the connection with the Izett Street pocket park.
54. It is proposed to engage existing service providers based at the centre on the relocation to a suitable alternative site.
55. It is proposed to engage with the family of (late) Chris Gahan regarding the planned demolition of the facility that bears his name from his time as Mayor of the City of Prahran in 1970. This would include giving consideration to an alternative memorial.

#### Human Rights Consideration

56. Complies with the Charter of Human Rights & Responsibilities Act 2006.

#### Attachments

1. Council Meeting 8 Feb 2016 - Report - Potential Property Purchase [**CONFIDENTIAL**]
2. Council Meeting 8 Feb 2016 - Minutes - Potential Property Purchase [**CONFIDENTIAL**]