



**“Special school”
satire set to open
at Arts House**

Writer Kath Duncan and director Tansy Gorman have created *Specials*—a fierce, funny work lifting the lid on “special education” that will play at Arts House over six nights in March. More on page 12. Photo: Hanna Komissarova.

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Kensington ghost
bike symbol of
human cost,
advocate says

Arden developer shortlist narrows as questions grow over secondary school and infrastructure

“
Planning for Melbourne’s future Arden precinct has entered a new phase, with Development Victoria confirming it has narrowed the field of developers competing to deliver the project’s central district from four bidders to two.”

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The state government agency revealed that proposals from two shortlisted consortia are now being assessed to determine who will become the master developer for Arden Central, the key mixed-use heart of the emerging inner-city neighbourhood.

The two remaining bidders are Hamton Group and Hostplus, working with construction firms Icon and Symal and architects Woods Bagot, Populous and Nelson + Koo; and Lendlease Development, partnering with Assemble, NH Architecture and Prior + Partners.

Each consortium has submitted detailed proposals outlining their approach to masterplanning, staging, development timelines and financial arrangements for the precinct.

Development Victoria said both bidders brought extensive experience in delivering large-scale urban projects and had demonstrated a commitment to high-quality mixed-use development.

“A competitive market process is under way to identify a master developer for Arden Central,” DV said on its website.

“Proposals from two shortlisted bidders are now being assessed and a decision on the successful proposal is expected in 2026.”

The confirmation that the field has been reduced to two marks a significant development in the long-running planning process for Arden, which sits two kilometres north-west of the CBD and is expected to house up to 20,000 residents by 2051.

Arden is one of the city’s most ambitious urban renewal projects, anchored by the new Arden Metro Tunnel Station.

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Hyperlocal News launches podcast exploring the city’s big issues

A new podcast exploring the ideas, debates and decisions shaping Melbourne’s future has launched this month, with the first episode focusing on one of the city’s most iconic institutions: Queen Victoria Market.

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Pizza*
BY SILO NO.9

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NEWS

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Vale Simon Harvey: a generous voice for Kensington

Kensington has lost one of its most thoughtful and generous advocates.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Simon Harvey, a passionate local resident, former chair of the Kensington Association and a regular contributor to *North West City News* since its establishment in 2021, passed away suddenly on February 26, 2026.

He was a longstanding Robertson St resident and a deeply respected community leader whose quiet determination and careful words helped shape local conversations for years.

Simon served as chair of the Kensington Association from 2019 to 2023, guiding the group through a period of rapid change in the suburb. He was a tireless champion for community voices and good planning, particularly in the Macaulay urban renewal precinct – a fast-growing part of Kensington that he believed demanded both ambition and balance.

In column after column, Simon returned to the question of how to “get it right” in Macaulay. He was neither reflexively anti-development nor blindly supportive. Instead, he asked difficult questions about affordable housing, public open space, building height, liveability and the long-term character of the neighbourhood. He understood that growth was inevitable – but that good growth required scrutiny, participation and care.

His advocacy was grounded in detail. He read planning amendments, logged into consultation sessions, and showed up – always prepared, always measured. He



wanted residents to understand what was at stake and to feel empowered to contribute. His writing on the Macaulay Structure Plan, the pursuit of more open space, and the push for affordable housing was as informed as it was accessible.

But Simon was far more than a planning voice.

He was an active member of the Kensington Community Network and the Kensington Reconciliation Action Group, and he cared deeply about Kensington’s role in reconciliation with First Nations Melburnians. He believed community was built not only through buildings and parks, but through relationships and respect.

As Lord Mayor Nick Reece noted in a condolence statement at the March 3 Future Melbourne Committee meeting, Simon was a “tireless champion for his neighbourhood” and a strong advocate for green space, particularly along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor. His long efforts are reflected in the forthcoming Chelmsford St park and ongoing discussions about expanding open space in Stubbs St and beyond.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, Simon went above and beyond, setting up themed online programs to help people stay connected. It was typical of him – thoughtful, creative and community-minded.

For *North West City News*, Simon’s contribution was immeasurable.

Since 2021 he penned dozens of columns, each one crafted with care. He wrote with a historian’s curiosity and a neighbour’s warmth. In his final column, “Reflecting on the Kensington Story,” he traced the suburb’s transformation from a “struggle town” to a multicultural community still in transition. He had a gift for connecting past and present, reminding us that so much of what we enjoy today rests on the hard work of those who came before.

Editing Simon’s columns was always a pleasure. You could tell he loved writing. There was rhythm in his sentences, thoughtfulness in his structure and generosity in his tone. Even when tackling contentious issues, he did so without rancour. He invited readers in rather than pushing them away.

He was also always available – ready to provide context, background or a steady voice when we were exploring a local issue. It is through the support of contributors like Simon that community newspapers like ours exist. He believed in the value of local journalism and gave his time freely to strengthen it.

On a personal note, I am grateful for my last happy memory of Simon – sharing breakfast at The Premises café on Macaulay Rd in his beloved Kensington. We talked widely and warmly about planning, politics, history and the future of the suburb he loved. It was the Simon I had come to know: engaged, curious and hopeful.

Simon cared deeply about people and place. Kensington is stronger for his commitment, and poorer for his absence.

He will be greatly missed by his partner Moira, his family, friends, colleagues and the many residents whose lives he touched through advocacy, conversation and connection.

Vale Simon Harvey – a reliable voice, a generous neighbour, and a great guy. ●

SEE WHAT'S ON AND COMING UP AT THE EAST END THEATRES WITH SOME OF OUR TOP PICKS BELOW



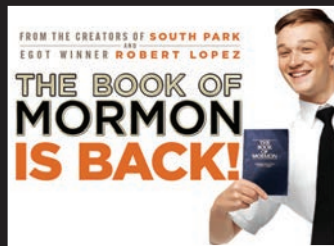
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North & West Melbourne Precinct Association

Architect Anna Castles: practicality is making smaller inner-city homes work for families

“

"I just love working with families and helping them get the best out of their home and project is the best thing for me," says North Melbourne-based architect Anna Castles.

”

WORDS BY
CHRIS JACKSON



Anna thrives on finding solutions for families who want, or in many cases need, to make the most of their living space. Particularly as families grow, realising the full potential of an inner-city home can present unique challenges.

Anna has worked in the industry since she was 20 years old, beginning her career at Harmer Architecture. From there she continued to practise and hone her craft, developing a talent and enthusiasm for layering spaces that suit the needs of modern life while meeting the demands of busy family households.

After several years in the business, Anna took a well-earned break to raise her own

family. Over time she began reconnecting with the profession, initially offering advice and insight to friends and family before gradually returning to practice.

"It's definitely evolved organically," she told *North West City News*.

Her earlier experience, combined with her own lived experience of raising a family in an inner-city home, has shaped her approach to residential design.

"Having a young family in a North

Melbourne house really challenges you to get the best out of the space," she said.

Anna has a keen interest in ensuring spaces are not designed for just a single purpose.

"It might be a bedroom now, but it can also be an office, a guest room, a study or a recreational space," she said.

This lived experience has given her a strong understanding of the modern needs of families navigating smaller homes,

particularly when thinking about how spaces will function over the long term, rather than just for the next few years.

During consultations Anna works closely with clients to understand how they currently use their homes and where improvements can be made.

Having purpose-built cabinets and spaces for sports equipment or musical instruments may work well in the short term, she says, but it's important to consider how those spaces might need to evolve over time.

"Living with good, well-thought-out design really does change your life."

Examples of this flexible approach can be seen in Anna's work online, including the Errol Street House project, which features integrated shelving and an adaptable upstairs space that can be used for reading, as a cubby for children or simply somewhere to escape the general bustle of family life.

Anna also places a strong emphasis on collaboration throughout the design process.

"I try to involve the client throughout the process and work with preferred contractors," she said.

"I love being on site and watching the process, we all have so much to learn."

Anna Castles Architect has recently moved into a new studio at 128 Errol St, North Melbourne, a space that will also showcase local artists from the area.

You can view Anna's work at annacastles.com.au or follow her on Instagram @castlesanna ●

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EVERLASTING LOVE IN THE GARDEN CITY

Melburnians have cast their vote for their favourite flower

The people have spoken, and Melbourne has a new floral emblem – the endangered swamp everlasting has won our hearts and the popular vote.

Melburnians cast almost 25,000 votes for our floral emblem, making it our most popular community engagement campaign ever. They chose from a field of 9 floral finalists.

After trailing behind billy buttons for most of the vote, the swamp everlasting rose up at the last minute to win by a paper-thin margin of just 200 votes. As it does in nature, the swamp everlasting defied all odds.

“Swamp everlasting is a beautiful flowering endangered species which was once abundant in our swampy wetlands,” our First Nations Garden City Ambassador, Margaret Parisi said.

When picturing a ‘swamp’, your mind may not conjure a field of paper daisies – but this formidable flower is a wonder of the wetlands.

“Seeing a flower which automatically says ‘Melbourne’ is a great way to create an immediate, recognisable identity ... grounded in place, respectful of Country, and distinct from any other city,” Margaret said.

HOW WILL WE USE OUR FLORAL EMBLEM?

With the winner now chosen, we’re rolling up our sleeves to embed the swamp everlasting into Melbourne’s identity. It’s all part of the plan to make sure Melbourne is known as the garden city – a city where nature is never far.

We’ll make sure the swamp everlasting is planted in our parks and gardens, and when in flower it will feature in planter boxes outside Melbourne Town Hall. Community plantings will be timed with the weather to help this local stunner thrive again.

We’ll also honour the swamp everlasting in paint, in print and maybe even on Melbourne merch.

Newly minted Aussies will receive swamp everlastings at our citizenship ceremonies, which according to Royal Botanic Gardens seed ecologist Megan Hirst is a beautiful way to show we care.



Melbourne’s floral emblem: swamp everlasting

“I’m rather fond of the idea that flowers can express our feelings. If someone were to give me a posy of everlastings well that would be saying quite a lot, florally speaking. Don’t you think?”

Megan is a self-confessed swamp everlasting superfan who is committed to finding ways to save the species from extinction.

“It’s likely the swamp everlasting was once common across our wetlands – some of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet – and since colonisation it has been pushed into small, scattered pockets.

“And yet, it’s still here, holding on with steady resilience,” Megan said.

Like other Australian flora and fauna, the swamp everlasting responds deftly to unpredictable weather.

The plant will go dormant after flowering in summer in drier conditions, but continue to grow through summer if kept moist.

The swamp everlasting needs full sun and a well-watered garden bed or pot. It’s also the king of cut flowers. If picked when freshly opened, they can hold onto their vibrant colour for many months or even years.

You can find the swamp everlasting and other indigenous seedlings at specialist nurseries such as Bili Nursery in Port Melbourne – which is preparing to move into new digs in the City of Melbourne – and bring the floral emblem into your home.



Garden city ambassadors Margaret and Paul

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Labor Cr Davydd Griffiths to challenge Ellen Sandell for Melbourne

City of Melbourne councillor Davydd Griffiths has announced he will run as a Labor candidate for the seat of Melbourne at the upcoming state election in November.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The 51-year-old, who was elected to the council in 2020, has been a member of the Labor Party for 30 years, and said there had been "a long, slow fuse" to his upcoming tilt at parliament.

He had put up his hand for Labor pre-selection because of the opportunity it offered to address issues that he was passionate about, Cr Griffiths said. "And obviously the lessons and things I've seen, being a local councillor have helped inform that," he told *North West City News*.

The Flemington resident will face a significant challenge lining up against incumbent Ellen Sandell, who has held Melbourne since she won it for the Greens in 2014.

In 2022 Ms Sandell received 37.29 per cent of the primary vote compared to Labor candidate Rebecca Thistleton's 30.65 per cent, and after preferences were distributed had 60.19 compared to Labor's 39.81 per cent.

The seats of Melbourne and Prahran were the first Greens lower house wins in Victoria.

Before that Melbourne had been held by the ALP since 1955 and for much of the first half of the 20th century.

Cr Griffiths said he wasn't motivated by the idea of winning the seat so much as a belief in the "real need for a strong local voice".

He sees "services for residents and locals, particularly as our population grows locally" as the key issue for the electorate.

While every level of government worked together, he said, "certainly some of those big things, like schools and hospitals and public transport, obviously fall into the bailiwick of the state government".

Born and raised in Bendigo, Cr Griffiths moved to Melbourne when he was 18 to study teaching and spent six years working at Glen Waverley Secondary College and Mac. Robertson Girls' High before moving into politics – first as an electorate officer, then a policy advisor in health, mental health and education to ministers in the Victorian parliament.

After leaving policy work and spending a few years as a stay-at-home dad, he made the unusual shift to hospitality, setting up a beer and burger bar in Macaulay Rd with a friend, which they operated for just under two years, before buying and running the Royal Mail Hotel on Spencer St for another two-and-a-half years.

As a councillor he has been involved in a broad range of areas, including education, infrastructure and economics, and is currently the portfolio lead for environment and deputy for community, health and city services.

Cr Griffiths said his family – wife, former councillor and former Labor member for Melbourne Jen Kanis, and 14-year-old son, Blake – had played a genuinely meaningful role in the council work he had done, with Blake also providing a constant, very real link to the future.

As for the unusual Welsh spelling of his first name, Davydd, "it doesn't cause me any grief at all," Cr Griffiths said.

"It makes you stand out, so people don't forget you, and that's why you've got to make sure that you're always delivering, because they can track you down pretty easily."



Asked if he would remain on the council until the state election in November, Cr Griffiths said he would be following the appropriate protocols.

If there is a need to replace him, it's highly likely that his fellow Labor candidate at the 2024 election Zainab Abdi Sheikh – who ran second on the group's councillor ticket – would replace him on council.

With the 2024 Labor ticket having received more than 0.5 quotas and preferences from other teams, it's anticipated that if Cr Griffiths were to defeat Ms Sandell, Ms Sheikh would become the first woman of African descent to serve on the City of Melbourne.

Ms Sheikh is a dedicated and passionate senior community development worker who currently serves as operational manager at Somali Women's Development Association Inc. and as a community

advisory committee member at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

And there could be more appetite for change in Melbourne. Cr Griffiths will take a lot of heart from last year's federal election, where new Labor MP Sarah Witty claimed the seat of Melbourne from Adam Bandt, who had held the seat for the Greens since 2010.

A beer lover and the president of the Flemington and Kensington Bowling Club, Cr Griffiths said that being pre-selected for the Labor Party was an opportunity "lots of really good people don't get" and was something he was "genuinely really honoured" by.

"To have that chance is really meaningful to me, it's meaningful to my family and I want to make every post a winner now that that's happened," he said. ●

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Future Melbourne podcast explores the city's big issues

A new podcast exploring the ideas, debates and decisions shaping Melbourne's future has launched this month, with the first episode focusing on one of the city's most iconic institutions: Queen Victoria Market.

Produced by Hyperlocal News, the publisher of North West City News and its network of local newspapers across the City of Melbourne, Future Melbourne aims to provide a platform for deeper conversations about how the city is evolving and what lies ahead.

Hosted by publisher and editor Sean Car, the podcast will feature interviews with key voices from across Melbourne's civic, planning, business and cultural sectors, unpacking the challenges and opportunities facing the city.

The first episode turns the spotlight on Queen Victoria Market, with CEO Matt Elliott joining the program to discuss the historic precinct's ongoing renewal and the future of one of Melbourne's most recognisable public spaces.

Mr Car said the podcast was created to extend the role Hyperlocal News has long played in covering local issues and community conversations across the municipality.

The series is supported by Good One Creative, with episodes set to cover a wide range of topics affecting Melbourne's future.

Upcoming discussions will explore issues including Docklands, the evolving city economy, housing, and major urban renewal areas such as Arden-Macaulay and Fishermans Bend. Other episodes will look at the Melbourne Arts Precinct transformation, the future of Lygon St, the Yarra River, city safety and the role of public space in shaping community life.

The Future Melbourne podcast is available online now (scan QR code), with new episodes to be released weekly on a Wednesday. ●



Community group questions cohealth decisions ahead of government review

A community advocacy group has raised concerns about the actions of inner-city health provider cohealth, questioning how recent government funding has been used as an independent review into the organisation's services nears completion.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



Save Our Community Health, a grassroots campaign advocating for local clinics, says recent service changes at cohealth sites in Kensington, Collingwood and Fitzroy are causing confusion and harm for vulnerable patients.

The group's comments come after the federal government provided up to \$1.5 million late last year to keep cohealth's general practice services operating until July 31, 2026, while an independent review examines the organisation's GP model, governance and financial sustainability.

According to Save Our Community Health, despite the funding intended to maintain services during the review period, cohealth has reduced several programs.

The group claims counselling staff have been dismissed, a pharmacy dispensing service has been closed, and access to GP appointments has been restricted.

"Despite the \$1.5 million to continue to keep doors open at Collingwood, Fitzroy and Kensington, cohealth sacked counselling staff, closed the cost neutral pharmacy dispensing service and are restricting General Practice appointments," the group said in a media release.

"Where has the \$1.5 million gone?"

Save Our Community Health spokesperson and psychiatrist Dr Brian Stagoll said the situation was creating significant concern among patients and the broader health sector.

"The closure by cohealth of critical community health services is causing significant harm and much confusion. The situation is critical," Dr Stagoll said.

He warned that disruptions to services could have wider implications for the healthcare system.

"Public hospitals are being impacted, with patients who would have received vital medications in the community now relying on acute care services," he said.

"It is very dangerous for patients receiving psychotropic medications to have these suddenly stop. We also hear that not-for-profit counselling services are feeling growing pressure on waiting lists for urgent counselling services."

The group is also urging governments to prevent any further reductions in services while the review process is under way.

"We call on governments to stop cohealth from further service closures and any attempt to sell the Collingwood site," Dr Stagoll said.

The Collingwood centre has long been a key community health facility in Melbourne's inner north, and campaigners argue it should remain a public health asset.

In response, a cohealth spokesperson said the organisation continued to provide general practice services at Collingwood, Kensington and Fitzroy, supported by a joint funding commitment from the federal government and cohealth that allowed services to remain open until July 31, 2026 while the independent review was under way.

The spokesperson said cohealth continued to work closely with clients and community partners to support continuity of care while the review was being finalised.

"Cohealth is grateful to the many community members who have shared with us what matters most in their health service," the spokesperson said.

They said three community and client engagement events were held in December and January to hear directly from communities about their care and priorities, and that the voices and experiences of clients and community had informed cohealth's submission to the review.

The spokesperson added that cohealth supported efforts to identify "sustainable, long-term solutions for primary care that are compassionate, coordinated and grounded in trust".

While confirming changes to some services, cohealth said general counselling services at its Collingwood, Niddrie, Footscray, Fitzroy and Kensington sites concluded on December 19, 2025, following changes to how funding is claimed under the Victorian Department of Health's Community Health Program.

According to cohealth, clients needing counselling support were assisted to access other wellbeing services delivered by the organisation, while local providers were

also engaged to ensure safe and supported transition arrangements.

Cohealth also confirmed that the pharmacy at its Collingwood site, independently operated by Integrated Pharmacy Services, permanently closed on January 30, 2026.

The spokesperson said cohealth and IPS had spent the past decade trying to identify sustainable ways for the pharmacy to remain available, but that "a long-term solution could not be secured".

They said pharmacists and cohealth staff had worked with clients to transition their medications and support to nearby pharmacies.

The concerns emerge at a sensitive moment for cohealth.

As previously reported by sibling publication CBD News, the organisation is currently the subject of a joint Commonwealth and Victorian government review examining its general practice service model, clinical operations, governance and financial viability.

The review was launched after cohealth announced plans late last year to close GP services in Fitzroy, Collingwood and Kensington, sparking concern among patients, clinicians and health advocates.

The independent panel, led by health economist Professor Stephen Duckett alongside Professor John Furler and community health leader Jane Seeber, is expected to deliver its findings to governments soon.

In January, cohealth also appointed former Scope chief executive Kate MacRae as its new board chair, replacing Kerry Thompson after nine years on the board.

Health sector observers say the review's findings will be crucial in determining whether cohealth's inner-city GP services can be sustained beyond the current funding extension.

Save Our Community Health says it will closely examine the review's conclusions once they are released.

"The community eagerly awaits the public release of the findings of the Independent Review," the group said.

"We will respond to the findings once they are known." ●

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Arden developer shortlist narrows as questions grow over school and infrastructure

Continued from page 1.

The precinct is intended to become a major mixed-use neighbourhood combining housing, employment, public spaces and community infrastructure.

However, the narrowing of the developer field also comes amid new scrutiny over one of the shortlisted consortium partners.

Lendlease's proposal includes affordable housing developer Assemble Communities, which has recently faced criticism following reports it is seeking to revise affordable housing commitments at two projects in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

According to reporting in *The Age*, Assemble has applied to reduce the affordable housing component at developments in Brunswick and Coburg that were originally fast-tracked on the basis that 60 per cent of apartments would be offered through its "rent-to-own" model.

The company has instead proposed converting the projects to a build-to-rent model with 20 per cent of apartments offered as discounted affordable rentals.

While critics have described the change as a significant scaling back of the original proposal, Assemble maintains the revised model still delivers meaningful affordable housing outcomes and responds to changing market conditions.

The government says the 20 per cent affordable rental component remains above the minimum 10 per cent requirement that would typically apply under government planning frameworks.

Nevertheless, the controversy could potentially have implications for the Arden tender process, particularly given the precinct's emphasis on delivering a substantial affordable housing component.

North West City News has asked the Victorian Government whether the recent developments involving Assemble could affect the evaluation of the Lendlease-led proposal.

In response, a Victorian Government spokesperson said, "Arden is one of Melbourne's most significant urban renewal opportunities – well-connected, centrally located, and ready to deliver for a growing city."

"A competitive market process is underway to select a master developer for the Government-owned land near the new Arden Metro Tunnel Station, with proposals currently under assessment."

The government reiterated that it had planned a minimum of 10 per cent affordable housing across the Arden Central site

within the broader Arden Priority Precinct.

It said shortlisted bidders offered extensive experience and a strong commitment to delivering quality mixed-use development, and that a decision on the successful proposal was expected this year.

If the Lendlease consortium's bid was to be impacted, industry observers say it could strengthen the position of the Hamton-led proposal in the final selection process.

Beyond the developer competition, the Arden project also continues to raise broader questions for the surrounding community – particularly around the delivery of critical infrastructure.

One of the most pressing issues is the long-awaited Arden Secondary School, which residents and education advocates say is urgently needed to support the area's rapidly growing population.

Families in North Melbourne, West Melbourne and Docklands currently rely heavily on University High School, which has been operating beyond its intended capacity for several years.

Parents say a new high school in Arden is essential to relieve pressure on the inner city's education system as new housing developments bring thousands of additional residents into the area.

Last year the Victorian Government allocated \$1 million to begin identifying land for a future Arden high school, but no site or timeline has yet been confirmed.

The Arden Structure Plan, released in 2022, identifies a potential site for a government primary school within Arden Central along Laurens St, close to the new Arden Metro Tunnel Station. The land in this area was used extensively for construction of the Metro Tunnel and is already in government ownership.

However, while the structure plan earmarks land for a primary school in Arden, it does not reserve land for one in the planning controls.

More notably, the plan does not identify a specific site for a secondary school at all.

Instead, it includes a broad policy statement supporting the future delivery of secondary education in the wider North Melbourne–Macaulay area.

"Support development of the proposed government secondary school and non-government school(s) in the North Melbourne/Macaulay area to serve the needs of the current and future Arden community and surrounding areas," the strategy states.

It's understood that the land required for a government high school – currently owned by VicTrack – must be purchased at market rate between government departments.



Recent correspondence between the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) and local resident Gemma Gooding illustrates the uncertainty surrounding the project.

Ms Gooding, whose son has just started prep at North Melbourne Primary School, asked whether land acquisition for the school could be fast-tracked given that parts of the precinct were already used for Metro Tunnel construction works.

She also pointed to enrolment pressure data suggesting University High School had previously been operating at around 110 per cent capacity.

"Will we still be waiting for a new secondary school in 2033 when he starts Year 7?" she asked.

In response, VSBA executive director Jo Wandel said planning for future schools in the inner city was ongoing and that the authority was continuing to investigate potential sites within the Arden precinct.

However, the response did not include a timeline for land acquisition or construction.

A spokesperson for the VSBA told *North West City News* that "every student has the right to attend their local government school" and that it was "actively working to secure a site for the proposed secondary school in Arden, to cater for increasing enrolment demand and population growth in the inner-city precinct."

Behind the scenes, infrastructure planning challenges are understood to be complicating the situation.

Drainage remains one of the biggest technical barriers to development in Arden, with major upgrades required before large parts of the precinct can be built out.

Sources familiar with the project say negotiations with the eventual development partner could determine how key infrastructure – including the drainage system and potentially the school – is delivered.

One scenario being discussed is that the government could offset the cost of building the school against the sale price of development land.

"Maybe what the state's trying to do is get a school built in exchange for reducing the sale price for the land," one source told *North West City News*. "That way none of the capital costs are on the state's books."

For residents and families, however, the concern is that the timing of the school could become tied to broader development negotiations rather than being treated as a priority piece of community infrastructure.

Advocates say the government must ensure education planning keeps pace with the rapid growth already occurring across Melbourne's inner north.

As the Arden developer selection process moves towards a final decision in 2026, the question now facing the state government is whether the precinct's long-promised school will move forward alongside the housing and commercial development – or remain an unresolved piece of the city's planning puzzle. ●

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Viva Gibb, 'Mason', 64 Capel Street,
West Melbourne, c.1975–80,
silver gelatin print, 21.5 × 16.5 cm.
© Courtesy of the Estate of Viva Gibb.



North Melbourne local David Rose to feature at Comedy Festival

A local comedian skewering our markers of moral superiority is just one of hundreds of performers at the upcoming Melbourne International Comedy Festival, which marks its 40th anniversary this year with its biggest-ever event taking in more than 800 shows.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



North Melbourne comedian David Rose is going after sacred cows.

"The absurdity of strong opinions is funny," he told *North West City News*.

"We've all put ourselves into separate camps – we think of ourselves as anti this or pro that."

"It could be politics, religion, diets, or people who are animal rights protesters."

The 31-year-old seems fearless and is unfazed by having close family members in the crosshairs.

"I have some jokes about my wife doing things she thinks are progressive," he says.

In a clip online he refers to his sister being a coeliac, "which means she can't have gluten or friends."

Whereas the comic, who has degrees in philosophy, law and German, once thought people were acting out of moral duty, however he now believes otherwise.

"Everyone's just really jockeying for status in the end I think," he says.

But the cynicism, he reckons, is good for comedy.

His festival show *Meet Me in the Middle* promises to "unpack our collective insanity and prove that really, we're all in this together".

It is playing at Bar 1806 in Exhibition St, a small cocktail bar being run as an independent festival venue by a "co-op" of comedians.

At the same time Rose is staging a second show, *Nepo Great-Grandbaby*, about his great grandfather, a Jewish standup comedian in the vaudeville era.

While he was good friends with the Marx Brothers and Charlie Chaplin, he died in 1935, making his success difficult to cash in on, Rose explains.

He plans to donate the takings from this show, performed for four nights at Ballers Clubhouse in the CBD, to environmental charities and the victims of the Bondi terrorist attack.

David Rose is just one of hundreds of performers hitting the stage for the Melbourne International Comedy Festival (MICF) from March 25 to April 19, in venues all over the city.

According to festival director Susan Provan, North Melbourne's Club Voltaire is a good local one to check out.

Also on her list of tips are internationals: Malaysian "weirdo" Phil Wang, New York "toxic optimist" Zainab Johnson, English animal lover Josie Long, "delusional queer icon" Sam Nicoresti and "spikey and splenic" American Rich Hall.

Well-known and up-and-coming locals include Denise Scott, Geraldine Hickey, Lizzy Hoo, Celia Pacquola, Lano & Woodley, Bron Lewis, Melanie Bracewell, Nazim Hussein, Ray O'Leary, Tom Cashman, Reuben Kaye and Chris Ryan.

But for all the allure of the big names, there is a lot of joy to be had in taking a chance on someone new, Provan says.

"We always urge people to go and see some acts they haven't heard of," she says.

"Just take a punt. The tickets are not that expensive compared to big music concerts or big theatre shows – our average ticket price is somewhere around \$35."

"You just never know what you're going to see – comedy is constantly surprising, which is great, and we need it at the moment!"

The festival is marking its 40th anniversary this year with the staging of its biggest

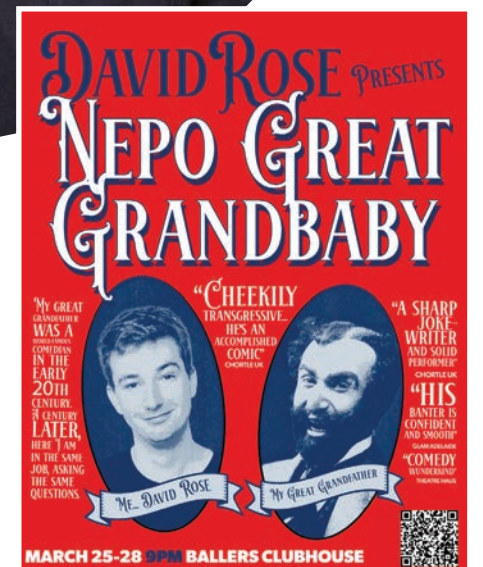
ever event, incorporating nearly 800 shows – an increase from last year of more than 100.

According to Provan, who has directed MICF since 1994, the festival just grows organically each year, and it's the scale that makes it exciting and "something people want to be a part of".

"That's why artists flock from all over because there's a great sense of camaraderie. People want to go and see each other's shows and they wind up striking creative partnerships and things like that," she says. "And, of course, the audience feed off that."

"We've got a really enthusiastic, comedy-loving audience who are up for an event."

While there might be a lot of other entertainment around, "nothing can replace that sense with a live audience that you're sharing a unique experience," Provan says. "Be-cause that audience will never be the



same, that show will never be done exactly the same again.

"So, every show, is a special one." MICF runs from March 25 to April 19. comedyfestival.com.au ●

River Nile Block Party promises joy

Organisers are hoping a rich mix of music and dance at the second annual River Nile School Harmony Block Party in North Melbourne will draw locals into the celebration along with the school's diverse community.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



Afghan, Burmese and South Sudanese dance groups will be among those busting a move on the big stage at the River Nile School Harmony Block Party on Friday, March 27.

Also on the bill is a fashion show featuring traditional outfits paired with traditional moves and student dance group Spiced Up.

Among those bringing the beats will be Nigerian DJ and dance teacher Dagogo, Lebanese DJ Sanaa and Kenyan rapper Elsy Wameyo.

"We've really tried to get as many diverse identities as we could represented in the music and performances," Francine Sculli from the school told *North West City News*.

"Quite a few students had put their names down to perform and there would also be opportunities to spontaneously jump on stage and share something," she said.

The Capel St school, which is opening its parking lot to the public for the event, is an

extraordinary institution that empowers young women from refugee backgrounds by supporting them with wraparound services focused on their wellbeing while providing education.

Last year it won the City of Melbourne's annual award for community.

In staging a big party, the school aims to celebrate its students' identities, promote itself as a safe space and spread a message about anti-discrimination.

For the students – who hail from Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, the Congo and Columbia, and travel from around Melbourne – it is an opportunity to have family members around them at the school and to share their culture and their strengths, according to Francine.

It is also, of course, a chance to dance and have fun.

And "moments of joy" such as those you can get dancing at a party can "give you enough spring in your step to keep moving forward in life," according to Francine.

That sort of boost is especially important for the River Nile school students, many of whom have experienced significant trauma.

Other potential sources of joy promised on the night are refugee-owned food stalls and trucks, art displays and an Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

The school's inaugural Harmony Block Party last year saw a small, appreciative crowd of 150 to 200 people, including students, turn out for the celebration.

Among them was a woman who didn't



Videographers for the event – students Nisha, Yusra, Parwana. Photo: Hanna Komissarova.

know anyone at the school but had heard about the event and turned up to dance.

"By the end of the night, she was hand in hand with the girls, and spinning around happily," Francine said.

Encounters like this helped "break down the walls" between the students and broader community, and the school hoped to encourage more of them.

"We welcome everyone to come along," Francine said.

"And if there's anyone who wants to bring something to share [on stage] with our students and community as well, we welcome

that.

"Come and have a boogie, eat some nice food and learn about the amazing community organisations that will be here."

The school was a "really special place" with a "beautiful community", Francine said. "It's servicing a really incredible and diverse community of groups."

"And we want to share that with everyone."

"We want people to be a part of our community as well."

River Nile School Harmony Block Party is happening from 4-8pm, Friday, March 27 in the car park at 117 Capel St, Nth Melbourne. ●

Council pushes to lock in land for parks and path in fast-growing Macaulay

The City of Melbourne is seeking stronger planning protection over a series of sites in Macaulay as it tries to secure land for future parks, drainage works and a key walking and cycling corridor in the rapidly growing precinct.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



prevent works that could undermine those long-term plans.

A report to councillors for the March 17 Future Melbourne Committee meeting recommends the city advocate for a Public Acquisition Overlay across 17 sites in Kensington and North Melbourne identified in the Macaulay Structure Plan as needed for future public infrastructure.

In simple terms, a Public Acquisition Overlay, or PAO, is a planning tool that flags land the council may need to acquire in future for a public purpose, such as open space. It does not mean the council must buy the land immediately, but it puts landowners and developers on notice and helps

The issue has become increasingly urgent in Macaulay, where more than 1300 dwellings have been completed, are under construction or are planned, adding pressure on open space and supporting infrastructure.

The council says the precinct is growing quickly, but while funding mechanisms for new parks already exist, there is still no firm planning mechanism to actually secure the land. At present, that often relies on negotiations through individual planning applications, which can create delays and uncertainty.

The report says the overlay should

be pursued for land needed to expand Robertson Street Reserve, create the future Stubbs St open space, deliver the Macaulay Terraces drainage open space and establish an active transport corridor along the eastern side of CityLink between Racecourse Rd and Macaulay Rd. It also recommends applying the overlay to the full site at 296-304 Macaulay Rd, with officers arguing the property is already so constrained by the proposed corridor and setback requirements that broader public realm outcomes should be considered around Macaulay Station.

The recommended sites include private land, Crown land and land owned by VicTrack. That is where some of the main complications arise.

According to the report, some of the VicTrack land needed for open space is currently leased for commercial and rail-related uses, while one key site at 11-23 Stubbs St is also affected by a Registrar Caveat linked to its permanent reservation for railway purposes.

Officers say a PAO can still be applied to public land, but it would not by itself solve that transfer barrier. The council instead wants those issues elevated through an upcoming roundtable involving the Lord

Mayor and state ministers.

The latest move comes only weeks after the state government sidelined the city's long-running amendment process for Macaulay and replaced a planned independent panel with the new Macaulay Structure Plan Advisory Committee.

As reported by *North West City News* last month, that decision sparked frustration among residents worried about further delays and less certainty around the precinct's future.

Now, council officers are recommending the PAO issue be folded into that same advisory committee process, with hearings due to begin on April 7. They say this offers the fastest pathway to resolving the matter.

The report notes that applying the overlays carries financial implications. The land under investigation is estimated to be worth about \$42.8 million, mostly to be funded through development contributions and public open space levies, although some compensation costs may require separate future budget decisions.

For residents, the debate goes to the heart of a long-running Macaulay question: as thousands more homes are built, can the public land needed to make the precinct liveable actually be locked in before it is lost? ●

Love Letters to North Melbourne Pool

A crowd-sourced history of North Melbourne Pool launched last month is "a rich tapestry of a book" and "a great artefact of the community", according to its local not-for-profit publisher.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



More than 100 people attended, including many of the book's 23 contributors and activists involved in the 1990s campaign to save the pool from permanent closure.

Also celebrating was Katrine Green, Kerry's changeroom collaborator and co-editor for the first 18 months of the project.

Opening with an essay by Monash University planning academic Dr Liz Taylor on the importance of urban swimming sites, the collection moves from local history into personal reflections on the pool's place in community life.

Maureen Yeates first swam there in the 1940s, when North Melbourne was a working-class suburb of large families that rarely went on holidays.

She recalls "the baths" being "a big part of our lives".

"We always called it 'the baths', which came from the time when people went there not only to swim but also to bathe," she writes. "Back in the day, many homes didn't have bathrooms."

"There was no shade, no sunscreen, and I remember getting terribly sunburned. The chlorine was strong, and my fair hair often turned green."

Despite that, she says her days at the pool with friends and family remain among her fondest memories.

A key chapter by community activist Angela Williams recounts the campaign to save the pool. Angela also painted the swimming-themed watercolours featured



throughout the book.

Galvanised by a 1992 report recommending the closure of the North Melbourne and Kensington pools, Angela, then a devoted swimmer and mother of two, began lobbying to save the facility.

Unlike the short and intense campaign against the closure of Fitzroy Pool, this one lasted four years, playing out through faxes, landline calls, placards, petitions, plywood cut-out art and appeals to the media.

One highlight came in December 1994, when 500 people rallied in support of the pool, joined by local celebrities Sigrid Thornton and Jane Clifton, as well as television cameras.

A rebuilt and repaired North Melbourne

Pool finally reopened in February 1996.

"The book was launched pretty much 30 years to the day of the pool reopening after the campaign and rebuild," Kerry said.

"Most of us didn't know that history of the pool, but if it wasn't for all those campaigners, none of us would be swimming there today and the book wouldn't exist."

Brendan Gleeson from Shiel Street Press attended the launch and described *Love Letters* as "a beautifully produced coffee table book" and "a great artefact of the community itself".

According to Kerry, any money raised once costs are covered will go towards funding swimming lessons for those who need them. ●

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Hawke St residents petition council over preferred greening plan

West Melbourne residents have formally presented a petition to the City of Melbourne calling for changes to the council's preferred concept for greening Hawke St, arguing the current proposal would worsen living conditions for those along the south side of the road.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



The petition, signed by 269 people, was presented to councillors at the March 17 Future Melbourne Committee meeting and calls for the council to reconsider how the long-awaited Hawke St greening project is designed.

Residents are urging the council to retain the existing centre median and mature shade trees while relocating traffic lanes further away from the terrace houses along the south side of Hawke St between Spencer and King streets.

Their proposal, which they say would deliver more greenery and improved amenity, has emerged after months of frustration over the redesign of the Hawke Street Linear Park project.

According to the petition summary, residents support greening the street but oppose a configuration that would move traffic closer to their homes while pushing new landscaping further away.

"With the recent opening of the West Gate Tunnel, the council is planning street greening, but their plan is to put the traffic closer to our homes and remove the mature shade trees in the centre of the road," the petition states.

Residents say the change would expose homes to increased noise, fumes, heat, vibration and light pollution, particularly as vehicles travel through the curved section of Hawke St.

"The new traffic plan means as cars travel the curve in the road, we will have headlights shining into our front rooms – where we live and sleep," the petition says.

Instead, residents have proposed retaining the central median and mature shade trees, relocating traffic lanes further north, and expanding greening between the median and the southern footpath.

They argue this layout would create a more effective buffer between traffic and homes while increasing the amount of landscaping.

According to residents, their concept would deliver around 600 square metres more greenery than the council's proposal while maintaining the existing street infrastructure.

Residents also point to nearby Roden St as an example of how greening could be

achieved between homes and the roadway. "The greening in Roden St last year proves that landscaping can be done between our homes and the median – we have the exact same infrastructure as exists in Roden St," the petition states.

"We just want the same consideration." The petition also highlights the broader benefits of urban greening, including improved air quality, reduced traffic noise and mitigation of the urban heat island effect.

Residents argue that trees and landscaping could filter pollutants, reduce nitrogen dioxide from vehicle emissions and provide shade that lowers temperatures along the street.

"These conditions deteriorate our quality of life," the petition says, describing the increasing traffic volumes along Hawke St.

"This is a call to action for the Melbourne City Council to listen to its citizens and take prompt and strategic actions to green Hawke St's south side."

The Hawke St greening project has been under discussion for more than a decade as part of the West Melbourne Structure Plan and the city's broader Transport Amenity Program linked to the West Gate Tunnel.

However, plans for the linear park were thrown into doubt late last year when council officers revealed the 2023 endorsed concept design was no longer viable due to a high-pressure gas main running beneath the street.

The discovery meant strict exclusion zones would prevent tree planting above the gas infrastructure, forcing the council to redesign the project and shifting much of the new greening into the central median.

Under the revised concept, Hawke St would be reduced to one traffic lane in each direction while retaining on-road bike lanes and delivering new trees and landscaping along the corridor.

Council officers have previously said the updated design could still deliver more than 2000 square metres of new greening and expand the Hawke and Curzon Street Reserve.

But residents say the redesign would remove large existing shade trees along the southern side of the street and bring traffic closer to homes.

The petition now asks the council to reconsider the configuration before finalising the concept design.

Councillors formally received and noted the petition at its Future Melbourne Committee meeting on March 17, referring it to the council's general manager of infrastructure and amenity for consideration.

A written response to the first signatory is expected in due course outlining the council's position.

Consultation on the revised Hawke St greening plans concluded earlier this year, with a final concept expected to return to councillors in the coming months as the city continues planning for the long-delayed transformation of the corridor. ●



Sky rail proposal over Park St moves forward with limited impact on Royal Park

Plans to elevate the Upfield rail line over Park St at the northern edge of Royal Park are progressing, with early design work suggesting relatively limited impacts for nearby Parkville residents.

WORDS BY SEAN CAR



The project forms part of the Victorian Government's level crossing removal program, which aims to eliminate the congested crossings at Park St in Parkville and Brunswick Rd in Brunswick.

Together, the two crossings carry around 71,000 vehicles each day, with boom gates currently down for up to 30 minutes during the morning peak, causing significant traffic delays and disruption for commuters.

Under the emerging concept, trains will run on an elevated rail bridge over Park St before descending into the existing rail corridor through Royal Park.

For Parkville residents, one of the most notable design features is the proposal to slightly lower Park St itself, allowing the rail bridge to begin descending earlier as it approaches the parkland.

This adjustment is expected to reduce the visual impact of the structure and allow the railway to transition into the natural gorge within Royal Park sooner than originally anticipated.

Another potential change involves restricting heavy vehicles from using Park St, with a proposed bridge clearance of 4.8 metres. If implemented, this would limit the ability of larger trucks to travel along the route.

While that change could alter traffic patterns in surrounding streets, some residents see it as a positive outcome that may reduce heavy vehicle movements through the area.

A Victorian Government spokesperson confirmed that Park St would have a designated clearance of 4.8 metres, in line with state regulations, providing sufficient clearance to allow most heavy vehicles, including trucks, garbage trucks and other typical service vehicles, to safely use the road.

Vehicles that need higher clearance will be able to use the nearby Brunswick Rd, which will have a 5.4-metre clearance.

Local community group the Parkville Association has indicated it is broadly comfortable with the direction of the project, noting that the latest concept appears to have minimal impact on residents living along The Avenue.

However, environmental concerns have

been raised by the Friends of Royal Park group, particularly around the potential loss of trees and vegetation within sections of the parkland where the railway will descend back to ground level.

Despite those concerns, early reactions from residents and Royal Park stakeholders suggest the design may represent a relatively balanced outcome between transport improvements and neighbourhood impacts.

The project reached an important planning milestone earlier this year.

In January, the level crossing removal authority referred the project to the Minister for Planning to determine whether a full environmental assessment would be required under the Victorian Environment Effects Act 1978.

In March, the minister determined that a full Environment Effects Statement would not be required for the project, allowing the planning and design process to continue without further environmental review at that level.

The authority says feedback gathered through community consultation in 2024, along with technical and engineering requirements, will help shape the project's final concept designs.

Public information sessions were also held in February, giving residents an opportunity to review early planning ideas and ask questions about the project.

Detailed concept designs are expected to be released next year as the authority continues refining the proposal.

Once complete, the elevated rail section will remove two of the most heavily congested level crossings in Melbourne's inner north, improving traffic flow and reducing delays for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

For Parkville residents, the key question in the coming stages will be how the project integrates with the surrounding parkland and whether the final design minimises impacts on Royal Park's landscape.

While the project remains in the design phase, the latest updates suggest the Park St crossing removal may ultimately have less direct impact on nearby residential streets than initially feared.

A Victorian Government spokesperson told North West City News that the project would "unlock two MCGs worth of open space, plant new trees and is an important first step to delivering further enhancements to the Upfield Line."

It added that the 2.1km rail bridge would rise near Tinning St in Brunswick and lower near Park St in Parkville, with investigations to determine the exact location it will return to grade north of Royal Park Station.

While it said it was undertaking careful planning to minimise impacts on surrounding vegetation, some trees and vegetation in the project area will need to be trimmed or removed to safely complete the works.

"As the project is in the early development stage, we'll work to minimise these impacts and retain as many trees as possible," it said.

"We will plant two new trees for every one required to be removed, as well as planting shrubs and grasses across the project area." ●



Kensington ghost bike symbol of human cost, advocate says

The disappearance of a white-painted “ghost bike” memorialising Kensington crash victim Will Richter has prompted a message from a cycling advocate to the City of Melbourne about the importance of remembering the victims of fatal bike crashes.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The council has been challenged on its handling of ghost bikes – decommissioned white-painted cycles left at the site where a rider has died – in the wake of the recent disappearance of one such street memorial – to Melbourne university student Will Richter, who died after being hit by a truck in Kensington last year.

Cycling advocate Aaron Moon raised the

issue at a Future Melbourne Committee meeting last month, telling councillors the ghost bike commemorating the 19-year-old at the corner of Macaulay and Rankins roads in Kensington had disappeared.

Other ghost bikes, in particular one in Swanston St, had been removed by City of Melbourne workers and ended up in lost property, he said.

Mr Moon asked whether, given the council’s commitment to protecting memorials – which it discussed at a meeting earlier this year – it would recognise “informal road death memorials such as ghost bikes as legitimate memorials worthy of protection and respectful treatment”.

“Much like flowers, these white bicycles mark a life lost and serve as a quiet reminder of the human cost with our road trauma,” he told the council.

“For grieving families, friends and the broader cycling community these memorials are deeply meaningful.”

“These bikes are an act of remembrance for them.”

In response, Lord Mayor Nick Reece said there was an informal council policy of leaving ghost bikes in place for “a period of time”

before removing them.

This was due to a requirement to balance the needs of pedestrians, cars, bikes, street life and visitors, Cr Reece said

He added that the bikes couldn’t be approved as memorials because they didn’t fall within the scope of a council “plaques and memorials” policy.

However, the Lord Mayor seemed to decide on the spot that the treatment of the bikes ought to be reviewed.

“At the very least we should have a position at the City on something as important as this,” he said.

Speaking to North West City News after the meeting, Mr Moon reiterated that the ghost bike phenomenon was part of a longstanding global movement, whose primary purpose was “to highlight that the roads people ride on are not safe enough at the current time”.

The council’s argument that footpaths were too crowded to accommodate them felt like “a bit of strawman argument,” Mr Moon said, pointing to the use of bikes by “a lot of businesses”, which locked them to metal bike hoops in the street to display advertising material – a practice he claimed the council



Flowers and photos at crash site and messages left for Will. Photos: Olivia Ball.

wasn’t clamping down on.

The ghost bike on Swanston St which the council had removed memorialised Parkville resident Carolyn Rawlins, who was “crushed by a tourist bus” in 2008, he said.

“It’s devastating for everyone when a 33-year-old 12-week pregnant woman dies on Swanston St. It should be remembered by everyone.”

Likewise, Will Richter’s tragic death, en route from a birthday celebration to university on September 22, should be remembered and should provide impetus for improved road safety, he said.

Mr Moon said the council had started well with its Transport Strategy 2030 policy of building 50km of divided bike lanes on council roads with about 25km now installed. However, he claimed it had “shied away” in recent times from progressing it.

The month after Will’s death, dozens of cyclists took part in a Critical Mass ride that paused at the Macaulay Rd crash site before continuing on to Melbourne University to complete the 19-year-old’s intended journey that day – an action Mr Moon described as positive but extremely sad. ●

Curtain set to fall on Witches in Britches site as councillors weigh office plan

A prominent West Melbourne corner long associated with the iconic Witches in Britches theatre restaurant is set to face a major transformation, with councillors next week to consider plans for a new four-storey office development on the site.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The proposal for 78-86 Dudley St, at the corner of King and Dudley streets, is due to go before the City of Melbourne’s Future Melbourne Committee on March 17, with planning officers recommending that a permit be granted.

If approved, the development would require the demolition of the existing building, best known for housing Witches in Britches, the long-running theatre restaurant that has occupied the site for decades and became a distinctive local landmark through its gothic, castle-like appearance.

The application, lodged by JD 78 Dudley

Pty Ltd and designed by architecture firm Carr, proposes a four-storey commercial building comprising 1683 sqms of office space and 715 sqms for a ground-floor food and drink premises.

Plans also include two basement levels providing 22 car parking spaces, accessed via the rear laneway. The development has an estimated construction cost of \$13.5 million.

In December 2022, the building was sold for \$7.288 million following an expressions of interest campaign, ending nearly three decades under the same ownership. At the time, JLL agent Tim Carr said the purchaser had been drawn to the site’s location within what he called a “true growth precinct within Melbourne’s fringe”.

That sale cast uncertainty over the future of Witches in Britches, which first opened as a family-run business in 1990 and built a loyal following over many years. The venue had also survived both the COVID-19 pandemic and a 2006 fire that caused around \$600,000 worth of damage but left no-one injured.

Speaking at the time of the sale, business owner Maurizio Termine said the new owners had made clear “they’re not interested in the building, they’re interested in the land”.

While the current application does not dwell on the cultural history of the site, council officers acknowledge that the proposal would replace the theatre restaurant use with new office and hospitality spaces considered more aligned with the strategic direction for the area.

According to the council’s planning report, the site sits within a mixed-use zone and is affected by several heritage and design-related planning controls. Officers say the proposed use and built form are appropriate, subject to conditions requiring further refinement to upper-level setbacks and rooftop elements.

The building is proposed to rise to the mandatory height limit of 14 metres, with rooftop structures including a terrace, open pergola and service rooms extending to 17.4 metres.

Council officers concluded that, with conditions, the development responds appropriately to the Melbourne Planning Scheme.

“Subject to permit conditions addressing transitional built form and rooftop setbacks, the proposed use and development respond appropriately to the relevant provisions of the Melbourne Planning Scheme,” the report states.

One of the key matters examined during assessment was overshadowing of Flagstaff



Gardens, located to the east of the site. According to officers, the proposal would cast some shadow over the park, but only for a limited period between 2.30pm and 3pm on the winter solstice.

The report found that the extent and duration of the overshadowing would not unreasonably affect the use of the gardens. Public notice of the application attracted two objections.

If the project proceeds, it would mark the end of an era for one of West Melbourne’s more unusual and recognisable buildings, while adding another commercial development to the western edge of the CBD near Flagstaff Gardens. ●

“Special school” satire set to open at Arts House

“

A fierce, funny work lifting the lid on “special education” will play at Arts House in North Melbourne, which has commissioned the piece, over six nights in March.

”

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



On the eve of the premiere of her play about the horrors of “special education” Kath Duncan confesses it feels “a bit like revenge”.

The show, *Specials*, is based on the 64-year-old’s lived experience of the “special ed” system in NSW in the 1960s supplemented by research and a licence to “invent freely”.

Its heinous villain, for instance, is modelled on her former headmistress, who “was just hideous, everyone was scared of her”.

Even so her qualities have been heightened for comic effect.

What the playwright is enjoying most at the moment, though, is the young disabled cast’s connection with her script.

“There’s this beautiful understanding that even though those guys didn’t go through the same thing, we all know where it comes from,” Duncan says.

The play is also about advocacy, although the label doesn’t sit well with its flamboyant creator.

“I’m an artist foremost but I’m fascinated by impairment and discrimination and the sort of worlds that we have to exist in to survive as disabled folk,” she says.



For more than half of her first decade of life, that world was special schools in outer western Sydney, one of them literally built on a former garbage dump, where she was subject to confinement, objectification, paternalistic control and low expectations.

She would be timed to put on and take off the prosthetic limbs she used to wear, Duncan says, was “X-rayed ‘til [she] glowed in the dark” and was earmarked for progression to a sheltered workshop.

She still remembers the surprising “movement and colour and light” of seeing kids during recess at “normal school” when she joined her siblings there at the age of nine.

Movement at the special school had been “effectively kind of banned,” she says.

As an adult Duncan felt she had left it long behind, having had her world changed by meeting her “first cool disabled person” at age 25.

“I got to see everything very, very differently

and ended up reading disability theory,” she says.

She went on to work as a journalist, writer, performer and arts access officer among other things.

The genesis of *Specials*, though, was the rage she started to feel, in her forties, about her old special school.

It led her into three years of PhD research on segregated schools, and her own school in particular, that involved interviews with former students, teachers and family members.

The most confronting material was actually the official Department of Education records, Duncan says.

For one thing, they revealed that a doctor had been testing drugs on students with muscular dystrophy at her school in the 1960s.

In fact, Duncan believes that similar practices to those she experienced are still going on in special education, although they

“target” kids with intellectual, behavioural or psychiatric issues or who are “severely physically incapacitated”.

“The same practices are still going on because there isn’t a lot of governance or oversight,” she claims.

Over time Duncan’s PhD project morphed into a dramatic piece.

Following the 2023 report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, which challenged the continued existence of “special ed”, it became a hot topic for the first time ever, Duncan says, and her play won development funding.

Cut to March 2026 and eight performers are rehearsing a visually arresting and darkly comic scene upstairs at the North Melbourne Town Hall, in the leadup to a week-long season of the play commissioned by Arts House as part of its Warehouse Residency program.

In the scene, former special school friends Simon and Cheryl meet by chance while waiting to give evidence at the royal commission as, meanwhile, royal commissioners modelled on the witches from *Macbeth*, recite their invocations.

Despite the gravity of its subject matter, *Specials* “reaches great heights of comedy and silliness,” according to director Tansy Gorman, who has been working with Duncan on the show’s development over several years.

“One thing this community is pretty good at is gallows humour, and laughing at the absurdity,” Gorman says.

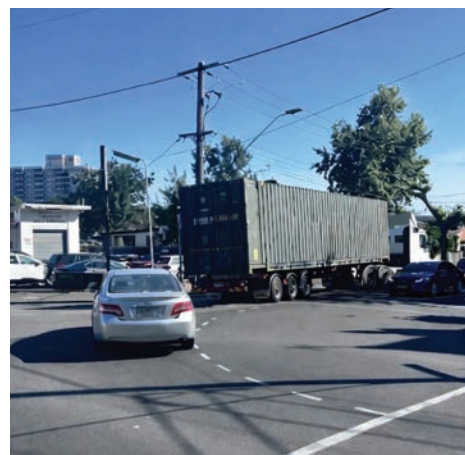
But in addition to a dose of silliness, the director would like the audience to go away from the play with an understanding of the “depth of horror, absurdity and resilience” revealed by the royal commission.

And also an awareness that “people have the ability to do amazing things if we work within a strengths-based model as opposed to a deficit-based one”.

Specials opens at Arts House on Tuesday, March 24 and runs until Sunday, March 29. ●

Kensington residents call for truck ban as petition gains traction

A growing number of Kensington residents are calling for heavy trucks to be banned from Kensington Rd, arguing that increasing freight traffic through residential streets is putting safety and amenity at risk.



WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The local campaign group Kensington Trucks has launched a petition urging authorities to rezone Kensington Rd between Epsom Rd and Hobson Rd as a No Truck Zone, a move supporters say would redirect heavy vehicles away from residential areas and onto major freight routes.

The petition had already attracted more than 900 signatures at the time of publishing, reflecting mounting concern among residents about the impacts of truck traffic in the inner-north neighbourhood.

Campaign organisers say truck movements have increased in recent years as freight routes have shifted across Melbourne’s inner west, with nearby truck bans and changing traffic patterns pushing heavy vehicles through Kensington’s residential streets.

“Kensington and Epsom Rd are vibrant residential areas, but trucks in our area have become a safety concern for many residents,” the petition states.

“The installation of no truck zones in surrounding suburbs has unfortunately diverted heavy truck traffic through what is primarily a

residential area.”

Residents say the problem is particularly acute along Kensington Rd, which passes close to schools, childcare centres, parks and community facilities.

The road runs alongside the Kensington Community Aquatic and Recreation Centre and within walking distance of several schools and playgrounds, areas where residents say large freight vehicles pose heightened risks.

“As a parent and community member, it’s heartbreaking to see little children and families navigating their way around speeding trucks,” the petition states.

“The constant thrum of heavy vehicles reverberating through the neighbourhood is both jarring and dangerous.”

Campaigners argue that trucks are inherently more dangerous in residential environments because of their size, weight and longer stopping distances.

They are calling for heavy vehicles to be redirected to major arterial roads and freight corridors instead.

One option proposed by the group is to rely more heavily on the West Gate Tunnel, the \$10 billion road project designed in part to shift freight traffic away from inner-west residential streets.

“Rezoning Kensington Rd as a No Truck Zone is not only sensible – it’s necessary,” the petition states.

“By taking this action, we can redirect truck traffic to more suitable roads such as the West Gate Tunnel, which was designed to handle such vehicles.”

The group has also released a proposed traffic map outlining how truck access could be maintained to industrial areas near the Maribyrnong River while restricting through-traffic on residential streets.

Under the concept, trucks would continue to access local industrial sites via designated routes while through-traffic would be diverted away from Kensington Rd.

The issue comes amid ongoing monitoring of traffic patterns following the opening of the West Gate Tunnel, with governments seeking to understand how freight and commuter traffic is redistributing across the inner-city road network.

Up to \$100 million has been allocated to manage traffic impacts associated with the project through the Transport Amenity Program (TAP), a joint initiative between the Department of Transport and Planning and the City of Melbourne.

The program is intended to improve local streets and discourage motorists from using residential roads as shortcuts once the tunnel opened.

In September and October last year, interim traffic measures were installed at several intersections across North and West Melbourne to test how changes might influence traffic flow.

Authorities are now monitoring traffic patterns and collecting community feedback to help shape permanent traffic solutions.

As part of that process, residents have been invited to complete a survey through the Engage Victoria platform outlining how recent intersection changes are affecting their neighbourhood.

The survey is open until 11.59pm on March 16, with the government expected to return later this year with proposed long-term traffic management measures.

Despite the program’s ambitions, it has also attracted criticism from some community groups and residents who say the promised funding has been slow to translate into meaningful changes on the ground.

Local advocates argue the Kensington truck issue highlights the need for clearer freight management planning across the inner west.

They say that while major infrastructure projects like the West Gate Tunnel are designed to improve freight movement, local streets can still bear the brunt of unintended traffic diversion if appropriate restrictions are not put in place for trucks avoiding the toll route.

The Kensington Trucks campaign is encouraging residents to both sign the petition and provide feedback through the Transport Amenity Program survey.

Organisers say demonstrating strong community support will help ensure the issue receives serious attention from decision-makers.

“Let’s stand together for the safety of our children and our community,” the petition states.

“By urging authorities to zone Kensington Road as a No Truck Zone, we can make Kensington a safer and more peaceful place for everyone.” ●

John Jones 1836-1909: West Melbourne builder

David Evans is a long-time member of the Hotham History Project.

WORDS BY
FELICITY JACK

David's interest in local history was aroused when, in 1995, he moved into his home in Hawke St and discovered a note stating the house had been built in 1881 by local builder John Jones.

John Jones was born in March 1836 in North Wales. His father died when he was three years old and he was brought up by his mother. He learnt the trade of stone masonry, a skill in great demand in the developing Australia.

At the age of 20 he, and four other local young men, decided to seek their fortunes on the other side of the world. John had been preceded by an uncle and cousin who had both established themselves as builders within Victoria. John initially worked with his uncle at Portland but was lured to the goldfields. After a stint there he returned to Melbourne where he continued in the building trade with his cousin, David Hughes. He



John Jones c.1890.

later became an independent builder.

In 1867 John lodged an application with the City of Melbourne to build two cottages for himself in Hawke St. It was in one of these that John started his married life when, in January 1874, he married Margaret Jones in the Welsh Church. Margaret came from Bala, Merionethshire and she had arrived in Melbourne three years earlier.

The couple had six children but only three survived – two daughters and a son. As the following list shows, John built several local houses around West Melbourne ...

- 1873: 112 Hawke St
- 1874: 179 Adderley St, 44 and 46 Hawke St
- 1875: 114 Hawke St
- 1877: 82, 148, 152 Roden St
- 1879: 80 Roden St, 76 and 78 Hawke St
- 1880: 80 Hawke St
- 1881: 74 Hawke St
- 1882: 220 Adderley St
- 1883: 218 Adderley St
- 1884: 93 and 94 Roden St, 218A Adderley St
- 1887: 136 Adderley St
- 1889: 131 Hawke St

John had been able to purchase four blocks of land in Hawke St in 1875 and 1878. He first built terrace houses on numbers 76 and 78 that he sold, and a further house at number 80 that he also sold.

Then in late 1881 or early 1882 the

family moved into his newly-built home at number 74. It was named *Bodiwan*, literally *House of Evan* from the Welsh: *bod* means house and *Iwan* is Welsh for Evan.

The house had six principal rooms. Downstairs was a front drawing room with a white marble mantelpiece, a separate dining room with a black marble mantelpiece, and a kitchen at the rear. Upstairs there were three bedrooms and a bathroom. The backyard held an outhouse and washhouse and a loft above that was accessible from the back lane.

While there are no original plans for the building it appears to be similar in design to a two-storey house that John built in 1882 at 220 Adderley St for Mr William Clarke. The contract for this house specifies some of the details matching those of his own house. There was a damp course of tar and sand to prevent damp rising in the walls with one course of hard bricks on top of the tar. And "run cornice to two front rooms and hall to arch and fix buttress to same".

A fuller account of John Jones' life and work is contained in a chapter by David Evans included in the book recently published by the Hotham History Project *West Melbourne: A Sense of Place*.

The book, available to purchase for \$39.95, is available through the website: hothamhistory.org.au ●



PARKVILLE GARDENS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Parkville Gardens host women's safety workshop

It was a beautiful autumn evening in Parkville Gardens on Thursday, March 5; perfect for the first session of the Women's Safety Workshop hosted by the Parkville Gardens Residents' Association (PGRA) and funded by the City of Melbourne.

More than 20 women (along with a few friendly dogs) joined the circle at the children's playground on Galada Ave. They engaged actively with the two presenters, Leading Senior Constable Janie Lambert (and colleague David) from Victoria Police and Kirrilee Liston from the City of Melbourne's City Safety, Security and Amenity team.

There was plenty of good advice and discussion about how to deal with potentially dangerous situations, plus helpful information about resources. A key message: always report incidents to the police.

Kids had fun on the reserve while the serious business was conducted, then most of the group accepted the invitation to enjoy light refreshments and each other's company. All in all, it was a very successful occasion.

The second session will feature a twilight walk in the Trin Warren Tam-Boore Bellbird Wetland area of Royal Park led by members of the Friends of Royal Park, followed by a short address from the Labor Upper House MP Sheena Watt. Sheena is a member of the Victorian Legislative Council for the Northern Metropolitan Region, the first indigenous woman to represent Labor in that chamber, and current Parliamentary

Secretary for Climate Action and Emergency Services. That will be in the Ross Straw pavilion. Sheena will be well worth hearing. Light refreshments will round out the event.

As before, all local women are invited. We'll meet in the car park across Oak St at the pedestrian lights, adjacent to the Ross Straw playing field. Please note the starting time and date: 7.30 pm Wednesday, March 25. See you there!

This will be followed a few days later by our popular children's Easter egg hunt. This will be held on the Galada Ave Reserve at 11am on Sunday, March 29. Be on time – once it starts, the hunt is over like a flash!

In the meantime, the City of Melbourne is launching a Healthy Ageing initiative in Parkville Gardens. This is a free five-week program of Tai Chi. All seniors welcome to come to the Galada Ave Reserve on Wednesday afternoons from 4pm to 4.45pm. The first session is scheduled for March 18 and will be preceded by afternoon tea at 3pm. Fingers crossed for fine weather!

Some local residents may be interested in an upcoming nearby event. The 38th Australian Sikh Games will take place from April 3 to 5, 2026 at the State Netball and Hockey Centre. There'll be sporting and cultural activities. For more information go to asgmel2026.com ●

Tom Knowles
PRESIDENT
PRESIDENT@PGRA.ORG.AU



NORTH & WEST MELBOURNE ASSOCIATION

We need a secondary school in Arden

The North and West Melbourne Association continues to strongly advocate for a secondary school in Arden.

WORDS BY
MARY MASTERS

Our new train station has recently opened, yet large paddocks of land remain vacant while the government completes a development tender process that will deliver more than 20,000 new homes.

The 2025–26 State Budget included funding for the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) to purchase land for a new secondary school within the ~12-hectare Arden Central site. This is in addition to the primary school already included in the Arden Masterplan. Ridiculously, the land required for a government high school – currently owned by VicTrack – must be purchased at market rate between government departments.

Despite this budget commitment being made in June 2025, we have been left without transparency about whether the funds have been spent or the land secured. The VSBA will not provide updates on the acquisition process, while the Department of Transport has referred enquiries back to the VSBA. This bureaucratic loop is deeply frustrating.

University High School cannot be expected to continue carrying the consequences of planning failures across the inner city. While the school community has worked extraordinarily hard to manage enrolment demand, no single school should absorb the population growth projected for a city recently named "Best City in the World" by *Time Out* magazine.

It was therefore with great enthusiasm that we welcomed the recent call for



another inner city public high school at Victoria Barracks on St Kilda Rd, Southbank. We add our voice to the Southbank community, which is advocating for long overdue secondary school infrastructure in a rapidly growing neighbourhood.

The federal government has recently indicated its intention to divest a number of under utilised Defence sites nationwide, including inner city sites in Carlton and Victoria Barracks. This presents a rare, once in a generation opportunity to repurpose large, centrally located public land in a way that delivers lasting community benefit.

Support for a high school at Victoria Barracks does not diminish the case for a new school at Arden. New public high schools in both locations would help rebalance enrolment demand across the inner city, ease pressure on University High School, and provide families with realistic, local options.

We thank Sean Car, publisher of *North West City News*, for his continued advocacy on these issues and for also seeking answers from the VSBA.

Inner city school enrolment pressures have not emerged by accident. They are the predictable outcome of years of high density development without the timely delivery of new public schools and supporting infrastructure.

Arden and Victoria Barracks represent opportunities to correct past mistakes. ●

WHAT'S ON March



Experience the north west city buzz this month with workshops, festivals, exhibitions and more.



DAVID ROSE: NEPO GREAT-GRANDBABY

David Rose humorously explores family legacy, Jewish identity, and comedy, following his great-grandfather's footsteps while questioning his own place in the world.

Ballers Clubhouse, 2 Coverlid Pl, Melb

25 – 28 MARCH, 9PM



NGV TEENS ART PARTY

NGV Teens Art Party celebrates fashion with music, art activities, performances and exhibition access, inspired by designers Vivienne Westwood and Rei Kawakubo.

National Gallery of Victoria

SATURDAY 29 MARCH, 6PM – 9PM



AFRICA FILM FEST AUSTRALIA

Africa Film Fest Australia premieres in Melbourne, featuring acclaimed African and diaspora films, including award-winning Ghanaian feature *The Fisherman*.

Cinema Nova, 380 Lygon St, Carlton

27 – 29 MARCH, 2PM – 8.30PM



LUCY BEST: UNBELIEVABLE

Lucy Best's one-woman show shares unbelievable real-life stories from her unconventional life, blending intimate storytelling with clowning, impressions and plenty of laughs.

Central Club Hotel, North Melbourne

26 – 28 MARCH, 6PM – 7PM



BAKERY HILL WHISKY DISTILLERY TOUR AND TASTING

Bakery Hill's 90-minute tour features whisky production insights, tasting six single malts, exploring barley and peat, plus exclusive distillery bottle purchases.

Bakery Hill Distillery, Kensington

UNTIL 29 MARCH, 12.30PM – 2PM



SCHOOL HOLIDAY STREET ART WORKSHOPS

School holiday workshops for ages 10+ teach spray-painting with a street artist. Kids create freehand graffiti, stencil art, or design a custom skateboard deck.

The Blender Studios, West Melbourne

UNTIL 17 APRIL, 10.30AM – 3.30PM



MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL COMEDY FESTIVAL

Celebrating 40 years, with a month-long, citywide program featuring favourites, rising stars, international acts, family shows and hundreds of performances.

Melbourne Town Hall

25 MARCH – 19 APRIL



HARMONY BLOCK PARTY 2026

River Nile School's free 2026 Harmony Block Party in North Melbourne celebrates refugee and asylum seeker youth through performances, art, food, culture, and community connection. Visit events.humanitix.com for tickets.

River Nile School Carpark

FRIDAY 27 MARCH, 4PM – 8PM



YOUNGHUSBAND MARKET

Youngusband Market brings Rose Street Market's creative vibe to a historic woolshed, transforming it monthly into a lively hub of local makers, art, workshops, music, food and community.

Youngusband, Kensington

SATURDAYS UNTIL 16 MAY, 10AM – 3PM



ENGLISH READING CIRCLE

Read along with others and practice pronunciation. Improve your English comprehension and vocabulary. Meet new people in a safe, welcoming environment. The program welcomes both native and EAL speakers.

Hotham Room, North Melbourne Library

UNTIL 17 APRIL, 10.30AM – 12PM



SONGBIRDS

Engage newborns to 18-month-olds with songs, rhymes, and stories, fostering early language development and rhythm. Programs run only during school terms, pausing for school holidays.

North Melbourne Library

UNTIL 9 DECEMBER, 10.30AM – 11AM

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Get expert, affordable help for your pet's behaviour – and support animals in need at the same time.
dogshome.com/behaviour

POLITICIAN



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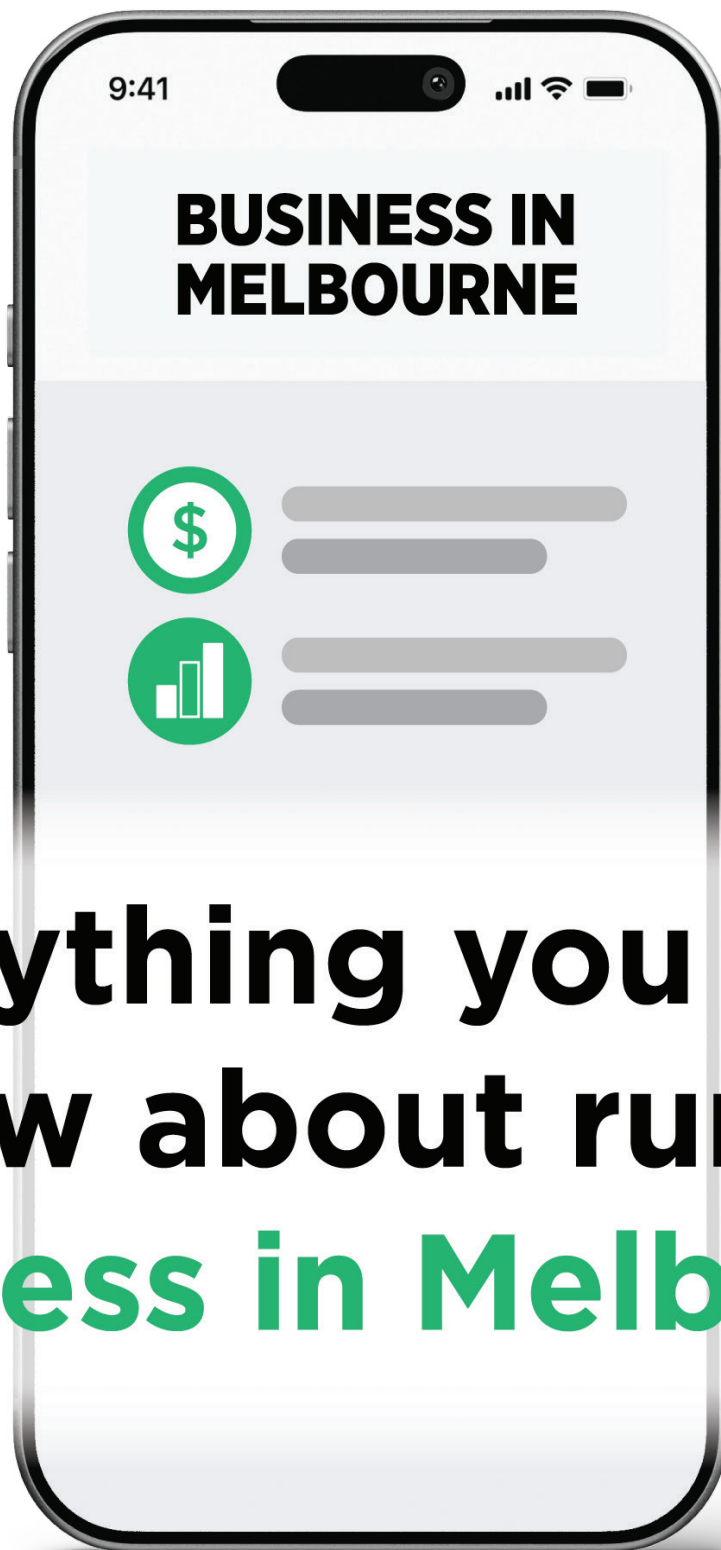
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