

# PORT MELBOURNE

**DESIGN EXCELLENCE, AIR-RIGHTS  
DEVELOPMENT & RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY  
OPPOSITION BY HOUSING FIRST**



Source: JSA, 2019

This case study was developed by Judith Stubbs & Associates for CHIA Vic based on CHIA NSW's *Building Community Support for Community Housing* toolkit.

## The 'Treehouse' at Kyme Place is lauded for its design excellence that responds to its Port Melbourne neighbourhood and its innovative use of air space over a Council-owned car park for the creation of affordable housing while retaining public car parking.



Source: JSA, 2019

It wasn't always this way.

The proposal for 27 affordable housing units to be constructed in the air space above a public car park was put forward in 2007 by the (then) Port Phillip Housing Association (now HousingFirst) and Port Phillip Council. Despite careful consideration and planning, the proposal generated a 'high level of antagonism' that culminated with 600 highly organised objectors with a well-funded legal team.

The opposition was mainly directed at Port Phillip Council over the decisions to carry out the development in the air space above the Council car park and transfer ownership of the site to the Port Phillip Housing Trust. Some in the community felt that these decisions were made without adequate or appropriate consultation.

In response to these concerns, the Council deferred transfer of the land until the planning permit was determined. Council also established the independent and 'arms-length' Port Melbourne Affordable Housing Planning Assessment Panel to assess the planning permit application. To restore community trust in the transparency of the process, the Panel only met in public. Throughout the planning permit assessment process community opposition persisted, with Panel members 'subjected to levels of intimidation not expected' and negative characterisations of future residents as 'miscreants', 'vagrants' and 'sex offenders'.

Despite extensive community consultation and design modifications to respond to concerns raised by neighbours, objectors lodged an appeal with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to review the decision of the Panel. The appeal was unsuccessful and a planning permit was granted in 2009. In time, ownership of the land was successfully transferred to the Trust and the development was completed and rented in 2012.

The experience changed the way HousingFirst consults with communities about its developments. The organisation uses an 'early and open' approach with many opportunities for information and consultation prior to the planning stage with Councils, neighbours and local communities.

The 27 fully self-contained units and studios at Kyme Place are an example of innovative design and use of air space. The development retained public car parking underneath and provides high quality affordable housing for a high need group in the local area - very low income singles (men and women of all ages).

Kyme Place has had very low turnover since completion, with many original residents that still call it home. Turnover is largely related to ageing as residents need to move into care or upon their passing. HousingFirst reports that while there may be some in the community who still oppose the development or the process through which it was developed; there have been virtually no issues or complaints from neighbours or community over the years.

**[HousingFirst] uses an 'early and open' approach with many opportunities for information and consultation prior to the planning stage.**

As of 2020, HousingFirst has developed 133 apartments above Council owned car parks in Port Melbourne, Balaclava and Moorabbin. In each development, the car parking was retained for public use. HousingFirst continues to explore opportunities for similar air space developments in order to grow the supply of quality, well-designed affordable housing in high value areas of Melbourne.



Source: JSA, 2019