The Age 16/05/2002

Minister topples 70-metre tower

Royce Millar

Planning Minister Mary Delahunty has refused to approve a 70-metre residential tower that would have overshadowed the Queen Victoria Market.

Developer Australian Super Developments had proposed to build a $60 million tower on the corner of Victoria and Leicester Streets, the site of the former CUB headquarters.

The proposal would have been twice the recommended height limit under the City of Melbourne planning scheme.

In a letter to the developers, Ms Delahunty said the tower would overshadow important pedestrian areas.

The project, designed by architects Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, drew opposition from market traders, Carlton residents and the Melbourne City Council.

The council's planning committee chairwoman, Catherine Ng, welcomed the decision. "We have to preserve some of these important places in our city," she said. "We can't have people shopping in the dark."

The president of the Queen Victoria Market Retail Traders Association, Michael Presser, also welcomed the decision. "I'm hoping that the developers will come back with something more appropriate," he said. "This is a sensitive area and requires sensitive handling."

Carlton Residents Association president Sue Chambers said Victoria Street should be seen as a visual boundary between South Carlton and the CBD.

ASD is the development arm of construction industry superannuation fund Cbus. It would not comment on the refusal. Cbus and ASD are believed to be working with construction group Multiplex on a new nine-level office building for the site.

■ The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal has upheld Melbourne City Council's rejection of a plan to redevelop the MCG Hotel in Wellington Parade, East Melbourne. PCH Melbourne planned to demolish the hotel's rear and build 65 apartments and a six-level car park. VCAT found that it was too high, too bulky, and detrimental to nearby heritage buildings.

The Melbourne Times 02/06/2004

Footy pub fans a tower of strength



By **SIMON KIDD**

RESIDENTS have vowed to protect an East Melbourne hotel – thought to have had a major role in the early development of Aussie Rules – from the threat of development.

East Melbourne Residents Group (EMRG) president Margaret Wood said the group would continue its efforts to have the MCG Hotel, on Wellington Street, added to the state's heritage register.

Heritage Victoria last month turned down the group's bid for the building to be recommended for inclusion on the register. Ms Wood said the est heritage authority, the Heritage Council, decide whether the building was significant to the state.

The group argues that the pub's role as a pre- and post-match meeting point for footballers, who played games in the paddock between the MCG and Wellington Parade during the 1850s, makes it an important social and historical link to the earliest days of the game. The pub, previously known as the Parade Hotel, is also believed to be the place where the earliest set of football rules was drafted.

The moves come as Thakral Holdings, which owns the pub and the neighbouring Hilton Hotel, finalises its plans for a major development of the site.

Thakral development director - Dan Kolomanski said the group intended to demolish the newer rear sections of the pub to build a 40-metre tower. The company respected the historical importance of the original front portion of the hotel, which it would refurbish and continue to operate as a hospitality venue.

However, Ms Wood said the tower would overwhelm the pub and detract from its historic importance.

Melbourne City Council and the appeals tribunal rejected development plans for the site in 2002. Mr Kolomanski conceded that the new

The Age 24/10/2004

Footy hotel' fights for heritage listing

Nassim Khadem
Urban Affairs

It is the most important document in the history of Australian sport, for some as valuable as a biblical record.

In 1859, almost 150 years ago, a group of cricket lovers reportedly met in a pub and devised the first rules for a game we now know and love as "Aussie rules" football.

The pub was Parade Hotel, now called the MCG Hotel, on Wellington Parade in East Melbourne. And the group included the founder of Australian rules football, Tom Wills.

The hotel was also where two of our most treasured sporting clubs — Victoria's first football club, the Melbourne Football Club, and the East Melbourne Cricket Club — were founded and where its players used to drink before and after a game.

These submissions were put before the Heritage Council on Friday afternoon by author and football historian Robin Grow. The submissions are based on newspaper reports at the time, but the historical accuracy of the submissions was disputed at the hearing.

Mr Grow was commissioned by the East Melbourne Group to provide a report on why the MCG Hotel is of historical, cultural and social significance. The group is hoping that the Heritage Council will revisit its decision not to include the hotel on the state heritage register.

"Its most significant feature is that it was where the codification of the game (Australian rules football) took place," Mr Grow says. "It's really unusual to find a known significant site where the guys actually got together and wrote the rules."

Developer, Thakral Holdings Limited, also made submissions to the Heritage Council, arguing that the hotel itself does not have significant heritage value.

Thakral's proposal for a 14-storey (46 metres) apartment building at the site of the hotel has been rejected by Melbourne City Council for being too high.

Thakral had wanted to build 89 apartments and has now appealed the matter to VCAT.

Melbourne City Council's planning spokeswoman Catherine Ng said council last week agreed on introducing a 24-metre height limit on any developments in Wellington Parade.

The Heritage Council is likely to make its decision late this week.

The Age 11/07/2004

Locals don't want a bar of the new-look MCG Hotel

Nassim Khadem, Royce Millar

A proposal for a 14-storey apartment building at the site of the MCG Hotel in East Melbourne has angered residents and its football-mad patrons.

The developer, Thakral Holdings Limited, last month lodged an application with Melbourne City Council to partly demolish the rear of the 150-year-old hotel and replace it with 89 apartments.

Formerly known as Parade Hotel, the MCG Hotel is a popular meeting spot for football and cricket fans on match days. It sits opposite Jolimont Station, and adjacent to the Hilton Hotel on Wellington Parade.

Under the proposed development, the two-storey hotel would still trade as a licensed venue, but the front would be refurbished, with a new restaurant on the first floor.

Part of the Hilton Hotel's vehicle entry/ exit would be converted to 117 parking spaces.

Yesterday the hotel was filled with Richmond and Essendon supporters, some of whom have been performing the same ritual of meeting for pre-match beers with their mates over the past 30 years.

Pat Hooper, 65, is one of the regulars who is against renovating the hotel.

"I like it just the way it is," he said. "Let's keep a few of the old-style places around. Do we really need snazzy places? If the atmosphere changes too much, people won't like it."

David Kendall, 64, said too many of Melbourne's icons were being destroyed because of new developments. "The MCG Hotel is a cultural icon," he said. "It's the classic meeting place for footy fans."

He said although some of Melbourne's greatest architecture dated back to the 19th century, the city was in danger of becoming too modernised. "Places like this are of great cultural value and need to be reserved at all costs. Otherwise we lose our soul and our history," he said.

Margaret Wood, resident and member of the East Melbourne Group, said she opposed the development because it was too high and would compromise the historic character of the hotel. "We are very sensitive about anyone tampering with heritage buildings," she said.

A similar proposal designed by architects Bates Smart in 2001, was rejected by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal on height and design grounds.

While Thakral's proposal would be slightly lower at 14 storeys (46 metres), VCAT had advised in its May 2002 decision that the height of the building be no more than 24 metres — the maximum recommended in the planning scheme.

Melbourne City Council's planning spokeswoman Catherine Ng said she had not yet seen the planning application, but that the council would look into it.

The developer was not available for comment.





ABOVE LEFT: The MCG Hotel yesterday. ABOVE: The architect's drawing of the proposal.

Melbourne Times 24/11/2004

Bid to protect MCG pub fails because of 19th-century renovations

By SIMON KIDD

THE state's heritage umpire has called "play on" over an appeal to protect a threatened East Melbourne pub linked with the earliest days of football.

East Melbourne residents had hoped to convince the Heritage Council of Victoria that the MCG Hotel, on Wellington Parade, should be included on its heritage register.

Their main argument was its role in the development of Australian Rules footy. Early administrators are thought to have drafted the rules at the pub during the 1850s, when it was known as the Parade Hotel.

However, the Heritage Council found that the surviving building was not original, and therefore not of statewide significance.

"While the rules of football were written in May 1859, the hotel was being rebuilt in the period 1859-1863. The material that has been presented to us shows that the fabric that survives today is not associated with the event of May 1859," said chairman Chris Gallagher.

National Trust conservation officer Celestina Sagazio said that the body had independently reached the same conclusion as Heritage Victoria.

There was little doubt that the rules were drafted on the site, but council rates records clearly showed the building had changed from wood to brick, she said.

The decision appears likely to have little influence on plans by Hilton on the Park owners, Thakral Holdings, to build a 40-metre apartment tower on the pub site.

The plans, which would retain the front portion of the hotel building, are now before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal after Melbourne City Council failed to rule on them in time.

The council's planning committee chairwoman, Catherine Ng, said a new draft council policy imposing strict height limits in East Melbourne had boosted the council's chances of halting the development.

The Age 17/12/2004

Hilton upgrade before Games

The Government overrides Melbourne City Council to approve a hotel redevelopment.

By **ROYCE MILLAR**
CITYREPORTER



An artist's impression of the proposed apartment tower on Wellington Parade, next to the Hilton hotel, left.

PLANNING Minister Mary Delahunty has used the Commonwealth Games to justify the controversial approval of a $110 million redevelopment of the Hilton and MCG hotels in East Melbourne. Theproject includes a new apartment building almost twice the site's 24-metre height limit.

Yesterday Ms Delahunty approved restoration of the MCG Hotel and construction of a 15-storey apartment tower behind it and a refurbishment of the Hilton hotel — overriding the Melbourne City Council, which had rejected the proposal.

"This is an appropriate way to respond if we want this (project) finished for the Commonwealth Games," Ms Delahunty said.

But East Melbourne residents, the council and the State Opposition dismissed Ms Delahunty's claim that the project was of state significance and important to the 2006 Games.

"What possible connection could the construction of an apartment building have to the Commonwealth Games?" said East Melbourne (resident) group president Margaret Wood. "This is a back-room deal which compromises a heritage precinct in order to preserve the Hilton hotel."

High-profile resident and pollster Gary Morgan labelled the Commonwealth Games reason an "absolute red herring". "It would be better for the Commonwealth Games if they knocked down the Hilton and gave the land back to the Aborigines," he said.

At its first meeting last night, the newly elected city council condemned the intervention. "The minister's decision is not one we support as it does not conform to the council's adopted built form standards for this part of East Melbourne," Lord Mayor John So said.

Property and development company Thakral Holdings owns the Hilton and MCG hotels and surrounding properties. Managing director John Hudson said the Hilton was the closest premium hotel to the MCG, the main Commonwealth Games venue. He also said the apartment building filled in a gap on Wellington Parade between the Hilton and another high-rise.

The company stressed that the project also included restoration of the historic Mosspennoch House behind the Hilton. Thakral's Victorian development director Dan Kolomanski denied that the Hilton group was threatening to leave the East Melbourne hotel — built in the 1970s — because it was run down and not well located.

But he confirmed his company was considering selling the hotel if it did not win approval for the apartment tower.

Opposition planning spokesman Ted Baillieu said the project had nothing to do with the Commonwealth Games and council planning spokeswoman Catherine Ng said the Government had reneged on its promise to work more closely with the council on planning.Both the council and East Melbourne Group have sought legal advice.

Jonathan Green's Diary **NEWS 14**

The Age 17/12/2004

Tilting at the Hilton in Melbourne's eastern bloc

SOMETIMES, Planning Minister **Mary Delahunty** must have mused, it is necessary to govern for all Victoria and not just the residents of East Melbourne. Just sometimes and hang the consequences. East Melbourne is, however, not best pleased by the Government's decision to trump the normal processes and approve a planning scheme amendment allowing the refurbishing of the Hilton and MCG hotels and the creation of that most rare of entities in inner Melbourne, a new apartment and retail development between the two. The neighbours aren't happy, and two members of the East Melbourne Group Inc perched at a Wellington Street tram stop yesterday, hoping to attend the announcement of a project that will proceed despite the fact that it hasn't yet been approved by the Melbourne City Council and until yesterday was waiting on a VCAT arbitration scheduled for February. Peeved at this procrastination, property group Thakral secured the ear of State and Regional Development Minister **John Brumby,** who in turn whispered to Ms Delahunty and the deal was done, amid talk of petulance on the part of the Hilton owners and rumoured threats that if something could not be done to clear all that enterprise-inhibiting red tape and stultifying consultation they'd close the hotel and sell it off as flats. Sorry, apartments, with exciting retail opportunities. So there. As we waited on the minister yesterday, Thakral wasn't doing its best to look like a gracious winner, barring the resident activists from the function in the front bar of their MCG Hotel. One of them was **Margaret Wood,** failed number two candidate on the recent Monster Raving Ratbag mayoral ticket of fellow East Melbourne resident and Hilton objector **Gary Morgan.** She stated her group's considered and complex take on development in this most sedate, mannered and conservative of inner-city precincts: "We don't want any more," she said, suggesting that the scope for negotiation, had there ever been any, may have been limited. They got into the presentation in the end of course, thanks to a conciliatory gesture from a Delahunty adviser, and heard Thakral managing director **John Hudson** enthuse that the new development would "complete the urban landscape", which seems a bold call for 89 residential units. For her part the minister observed that the new work would "complete and improve an important corner of this arts, tourism and CBD interface precinct", so clearly she was working without notes. Ms Wood would not be silenced, and having been deprived of her day in VCAT, opted to badger the minister face to face, which Ms Delahunty endured with good grace and ultimate firmness. The residents will be briefed today by department officers, but the deal is done. The unspoken truth in all of it being that whatever they do next door, nothing could possibly be uglier than the Hilton hotel itself.

Herald Sun 1712/2002

MCG pub caught in legal war

Fiona Hudson
and Mark Moor

PLANS to build an apartment tower behind the historic MCG Hotel have put the State Government and Melbourne City Council on the brink of a legal war.

Last night the council was seeking urgent legal advice after Planning Minister Mary Delahunty stepped in and approved the controversial works.

Under the proposal, a 15-storey apartment and retail complex will emerge behind the hotel — considered by some the birthplace of Aussie rules, and now a popular pre-match watering hole.

Ms Delahunty revealed yesterday she had approved the development even though the matter was pending before VCAT.

East Melbourne residents and the city council opposed the works because the planned 45m tower exceeded the area's 28m height limit.

The $86 million plan by Thakral Holdings includes refurbishing the Hilton-on-the-Park and restoring a nearby mansion.

Last night Councillor Peter Clarke slammed the Minister's intervention, branding it disrespectful to the council and the democratic process.

He questioned the grounds on which Ms Delahunty had "called in" the project, and flagged a possible test case against the Government.



New heights: a plan of the new MCG Hotel development with the Hilton Hotel in the foreground.

"There was no need for the Minister to intervene," Cr Clarke said.

"This is the sort of circumstance where the (council) would question whether Mary Delahunty is the right woman for the job."

As well as resolving to seek legal advice, the newly elected council called on MPs to overturn Ms Delahunty's decision in Cabinet.

But a spokesman for Ms Delahunty said there was much community support for the project and her intervention aimed to streamline the process.

"The hotel refurbishment will be completed in time for the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games and will provide much-needed tourist accommodation right on the edge of Melbourne's sporting precinct," the spokesman said.

"We acknowledge it's been a difficult project for all parties but the minister's involvement is going to deliver for Melbourne a very thoughtful and well-designed complex."

Opposition planning spokesman Ted Baillieu said it was another strike on Ms Delahunty's record.

"This is just one more community you can add to the list of those that are disaffected by Ms Delahunty," Mr Baillieu said.

"It doesn't say much for her commitment to local decision-making. Melbourne City Council was right in the middle of establishing height controls for the area and now she's dumping on the very strategies and actions she has been promoting."

Ms Delahunty came under fire in November for failing to stop a controversial Mitcham high-rise development condemned by residents and the local council.

Footy pioneers first wrote down and formalised the rules of the game in 1859 at the MCG Hotel — then known as the Parade Hotel.

The Age 12/02/2005

Residents sue over Hilton hotel project

By **JEWEL TOPSFIELD**

A GROUP of East Melbourne residents yesterday launched legal action in the Supreme Court against former planning minister Mary Delahunty over her approval of a $110 million redevelopment of the Hilton on the Park and MCG hotels.

Last December Ms Delahunty intervened to approve the project — which includes a high-rise apartment tower almost twice the site's 24-metre height limit — on the grounds it was of state significance and important to the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

Anthony Southall, one of two QCs acting for the East Melbourne Group, said the primary basis of the legal challenge was Ms Delahunty's use of the Commonwealth Games as a justification for her decision.

He said the writ stated Ms Delahunty had "failed to accord natural justice by taking into account irrelevant considerations, namely the Commonwealth Games". The writ also alleged she failed to comply with her ministerial duties and failed to follow statutory procedures.

In December Ms Delahunty introduced a "site specific amendment" to fast-track a 44-metre, 15-storey apartment and retail tower behind the Hilton Hotel, the conversion of the historic Mosspennoch House on Clarendon Street as part of a 12-apartment complex and the refurbishment of the Hilton and MCG hotels. The site is owned by property and development company Thakral Holdings.

East Melbourne Group president Margaret Wood said residents were shocked to learn that Ms Delahunty had intervened after they had campaigned for four years to introduce low height limits in the suburb.

Planning Minister Rob Hulls said yesterday that the Government wanted to expedite the amendment process for the benefit of the Victorian economy.

The Age 21/02/2005

Thakral result first class as hotels make comeback

By STEPHEN DABKOWSKI

THAKRAL Holdings believes Melbourne's hotel market is picking up strongly after announcing a healthy profit increase on Friday.

Thakral announced a 15 per cent increase in underlying net profit of $18.5 million for the six months to December.

It said it was on track to record another 10 per cent increase in earnings this year.

Chief executive John Hudson said returns from the hotel sector in Melbourne exceeded expectations, despite an oversupply of hotel rooms after the completion of the Crown Promenade Hotel.

"We are strongly committed to the Melbourne market, especially following 'planning approval to proceed with a $100 million investment surrounding the Melbourne Hilton," he said.

Thakral is undertaking a $20 million refurbishment of the Hilton Hotel and an $80 million development to build 100 apartments in the Hilton precinct.

"We are working on our target to try and complete the refurbishment in time for the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006," Mr Hudson said.

Thalcral's results showed its development division was its most profitable, driven by the fact that it had presold its entire new development in Queensland, Air on Broadbeach.

Thakral chairman Ted Harris said: "Strong underlying profit growth has emerged in all areas of our operations."

The company recorded its second-highest result since the Sydney Olympics, which was the most profitable period for Thakral since it listed.

Mr Hudson said that the Melbourne hotel market was now in full recovery mode.

The Age 10/05/2005

Owner in secret threat to close Hilton, court told

A letter to the State Government reveals a "thinly veiled" ultimatum over a major redevelopment

EXCLUSIVE

By **JEWEL TOPSFIELD**

THE owner of the Hilton Hotel in East Melbourne secretly threatened to close it, shortly before the State Government approved a controversial $75 million redevelopment, according to documents before the Supreme Court.

In a confidential letter to former planning minister Mary Delahunty last October, Thakral Holdings said it was frustrated that Melbourne City Council had refused a planning permit. The project included a refurbishment of the Hilton and MCG hotels, a 15-storey residential and retail tower and conversion of the historic Mosspennock House in Clarendon Street into six apartments.

The letter was tendered in evidence yesterday after an East Melbourne residents' group, concerned about the height of the 45-metre tower, launched proceedings against the former planning minister.

In it, Thakral's Victorian development director, Dan Kolomanski, warned that unless the State Government intervened, the company would have no choice but to review its investment in the hotel.

"One very real option is the cessation of the Hilton on the Park in its current form," Mr Kolomanski said in the letter.

"Hilton Hotels are a world-renowned brand and the withdrawal of such a powerful and respected brand . . . would be a regretful but necessary commercial decision by Thakral, a major blow to the 328 hotel employees . . . and to the standing of Victoria in the international business community."

Mr Kolomanski said the site warranted Government intervention, particularly because Commonwealth Games events would be held at the nearby MCG and Olympic Park.

Two months later, Ms Delahunty introduced a "site-specific amendment" to allow the development, because it was of state significance and important to the Games.

Thakral was in the process of appealing against the council decision and it was scheduled to be heard in February at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

In his opening address to the court yesterday, Anthony Southall, QC, for the residents, said Mr Kotomanski's letter was a "thinly veiled threat" to the Government that Thakral would walk away from the Hilton if a permit were not granted.

The group is challenging the validity of the claims that the project was of state significance and there was an urgency because of the Games.

Mr Southall said most of the development was not scheduled to be completed until after the Games. "It is clear in our submission that no ministerial officer, let alone the minister, had an ample opportunity to independently review the plans for the development that were presented to them as a fait accompli by Mr Kotomanski," he said.

" ... this is a case where there has been a breach of every principle for the amendment of planning schemes."

The case, before Justice Stuart Morris, continues today.

THE STORY SO FAR

AUGUST 6, 2004 Thakral Holdings lodges planning application with Melbourne City Council.

OCTOBER 6, 2004 Application referred to vicar.

OCTOBER 13, 2004 Thakral threatens to close hotel unless project approved.

DECEMBER 16, 2004 Mary Delahunty approves plans.

MAY 9, 2005 Residents challenge that in Supreme Court.

The Age 11/05/2005

Bracks was warned on Hilton project

The Premier is forced into damage control over a controversial redevelopment of a major hotel site

By MATHEW MURPHY and JEWEL TOPSFIELD

PREMIER Steve Bracks received a personal warning last year from the owners of Melbourne's Hilton on the Park, threatening to shut the hotel if they did not win approval for a controversial $75 million redevelopment.

Hours after Mr Bracks yesterday denied any knowledge of the Hilton closure threat, his office was forced to admit last night that the owners had written to him about it in October — two months before the Government approved their redevelopment.

Further questions over the redevelopment were raised in the Supreme Court yesterday, with claims that it was never intended to be completed in time for the Commonwealth Games — a key reason cited by then planning minister Mary Delahunty for backing the project.

Mr Bracks' office was in damage control last night, releasing the text of a letter to the Premier from Thakral Holdings, owner of the Hilton on the Park, dated October 13 last year and explicitly raising the prospect of the group abandoning the site in the lead-up to the Games.

Mr Bracks told radio 3AW yesterday that the first he knew of a letter from Dan Kolomanski, Thakral's Victorian development director, to Ms Delahunty was a report in *The Age* yesterday. "I knew nothing about that letter or those details," he said.

Mr Bracks also said he had not been consulted by Ms Delahunty about the threat.

However, the Opposition produced a copy of a letter indicating Mr Bracks was aware of it and responded to Mr Kolomanski on December 23 after the development was approved.

Jane Wilson, a spokeswoman for Mr Bracks, said he did not initially remember the letter when he was asked about it on radio. "He does not have total recall of every letter that passes over his desk. He gets hundreds of letters every week," she said.

Ms Wilson last night maintained that there was no contact between Ms Delahunty and Mr Bracks about the threat by Mr Kolomanski.

But Opposition Leader Robert Doyle said he doubted that Ms Delahunty would not have discussed Mr Kolomanski's threat with Mr Bracks. "If your planning minister gets an implied threat that a major developer is going to walk away from a huge site, leaving a potential bomb site for the Commonwealth Games, wouldn't a responsible minister brief the Premier?" he said.

In the Supreme Court yesterday, Anthony Southall, QC, representing residents challenging the approval of the project, said there was never any prospect of it being completed in time for the Games in March next year.

He said the due date for completion, included in the planning scheme, was December 31, 2008 — 21 months after the Games.

Opposition planning spokesman Ted Baillieu said later: "Somebody, somewhere along the line has heavied the former planning minister to call this in and approve . . . a project in the name of the Commonwealth Games when the Commonwealth Games are not involved."

The redevelopment plan includes a 15-storey tower with 89 dwellings, refurbishment of the Hilton and MCG hotels and conversion of historic Mosspennock House into apartments.

The Age 11/05/2005

Bracks was warned on Hilton project

PREMIER Steve Bracks was warned by the owners of the Hilton Hotel in East Melbourne that they might close the hotel if an extension was not approved — two months before the Government approved the $75 million plan.

After yesterday denying knowledge of the threat, Mr Bracks has gone into damage control after his office last night admitted that the owners of the hotel had written to him last October.



Report **PAGE 5**

The Age12/05/2005

Brumby pushed Hilton decision

Documents released by the State Opposition show Victoria's Treasurer intervened to speed up approval for a controversial hotel redevelopment

By FARRAH TOMAZIN and JEWEL TOPSFIELD

A CONTROVERSIAL proposal to redevelop the Hilton on the Park hotel in East Melbourne was fast-tracked under the direction of state Treasurer John Brumby, documents have confirmed.

It was also confirmed yesterday that the Government knew all along that the redevelopment would never be finished before the Commonwealth Games — despite using the Games to justify its approval.

A day after Premier Steve Bracks admitted he know of a threat to shut the hotel if its owners did not win planning approval, Mr Brumby was forced to defend his role in the project before a parliamentary committee.

Documents released by the State Opposition show that Mr Brumby wrote to former planning minister Mary Delahunty in December last year requesting an amendment of the Melbourne Planning Scheme "to facilitate the redevelopment of the Hilton on the Park Hotel".

Questioned about the letter at a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing, Mr Brumby said it was not unusual for companies to request help when proposed developments get "caught up in red tape".

Mr Brumby said the Hilton was on a "prime site" and ought to be redeveloped, but the project had been getting bogged down. "That hotel is tired and it needs reinvestment," he said. "So it's the right decision to press ahead with it .. . people who don't like that decision are exercising their legal rights at the moment in the courts."

Opposition Leader Robert Doyle said this showed that Mr Brumby was the "puppet master" who was obviously running the show for the Government.

Meanwhile, in the Supreme Court yesterday, a lawyer for the then planning minister said the owner of the hotel only undertook to complete one element of the project — the hotel refurbishment — in time for the Commonwealth Games.

Ms Delahunty used the Games to justify a "site-specific amendment" to fast-track the $75 million project, which includes a 15-storey apartment tower, refurbishment of the Hilton and MCG hotels and conversion of Mosspennock House into apartments.

The lawyer, Michelle Quigley, SC, told the court that the $15 million interior refurbishment of the Hilton did not require a planning permit.

But she said the hotel's owner, Thakral Holdings, required commercial certainty for the remainder of its project before it would commit to the refurbishment of the Hilton in time for the Games.

A group of East Melbourne residents, who object to the height of the 45-metre .tower, are challenging the validity of Ms Delahunty's intervention.

Justice Stuart Morris said parts of some of the documents tendered to the court, including Ms Delahunty's reasons for the amendment and a media release, could be interpreted to mean that the minister was giving approval so that the whole development would be finished in time for the Games.

But Ms Quigley said this was simply a "looseness" in the language. 'Anyone who carefully looked at the document could not be so misled," she said.

OPINION Premier 'rent-a-fluff PAGE 27

The Age 12/05/2005

Opinion

Steve Bracks: a man of his word or our premier 'rent-a-fluff?

The Premier seems to be losing the plot when asked to tell it like it is.



PAUL AUSTIN

STEVE Bracks needs to stop fluffing his lines. The Premier has always displayed a gift for torturing the English language, but his recent record of mis-statements is something more serious.

Painted in the worst possible light, the Premier is exposed as a liar. Much more likely is that he is forgetful, ill-briefed, not on top of his game, or a combination of all three. Voters are entitled to start pondering the Premier's competence — and while the John Howard example might suggest voters will forgive a politician for playing fast and loose with the truth, they tend to adopt a more punitive attitude when it comes to incompetence.

Each of the Premier's recent comments that required clarification, correction or the issuing of an apology was made on 3AW's Neil Mitchell program, so let's go to the audio tape.

Fluffed Line No. 1 involved Andrew Phillips, the Orbost teacher who has lost his job under the Government's zero-tolerance rules relating to teachers implicated in child sex offences. Phillips, now 33, had a relationship when he was 20 with a girl not quite 16. He pleaded guilty but no conviction was recorded.

It's that last bit the Premier got wrong. Bracks told Mitchell on March 22 the tough new no-discretion approach applied "only where there's a conviction of a child sex offence".

Mitchell: There's no conviction recorded here.

Bracks: He pleaded guilty and there was a conviction.

Mitchell: There's no conviction recorded.

Bracks: There was a conviction .. .

Bracks respects Mitchell as one of Victoria's sharpest and most decorated journalists, but in this exchange the Premier just wouldn't get the hint. A few sentences later he declared: "We will has a convicted child sex offence being a teacher in our schools."

This surely wasn't a lie; it was a dispute about a verifiable fact. But Bracks was either not properly briefed or not fully across his brief. Either way, there was little excuse: this case had been on the front pages of the papers and Bracks had been questioned about it in Parliament.

Fluffed Line No.2 came exactly one week later — almost immediately after Bracks apologised on air to Andrew Phillips. This time at issue was what the Premier called protesters at the sod-turning ceremony for the Mitcham to Frankston freeway. "Julie", a talkback caller, asked the Premier about a report that he had labelled the protesters "rent-a-crowd from Sunbury".

Julie: Can you confirm that this was said by you?

Bracks: No, it wasn't .. . That's not correct .

Mitchell: So was there any reference to rent-a-crowd?

Bracks: No, there wasn't . I did not make any reference to rent-a-crowd . .."

Later, Mitchell returned to the issue. Again, the Premier did not take the hint.

Mitchell: The people are insisting you said it. But you say you didn't?

Bracks: Absolutely not.

Mitchell: Mmmm.

Bracks: Absolutely, categorically not.

Within minutes, Mitchell was playing a recording of the Premier at the sod-turning ceremony saying to the protesters: "It's the old rent-a-crowd from Sunbury who's here . .."

This too was surely not a lie; as Bracks himself observed, what he had said could be checked against numerous TV and radio tapes. But it was strange that the Premier appeared to forget a phrase he used at a red-letter event on his calendar only days earlier. And stranger still that such certainty in language — "absolutely, categorically not" — was employed by a premier who is famous for looking into things, for taking questions on notice.

Fluffed Line No. 3 came this week, and was altogether more serious. On Tuesday *The Age*'s Jewel Topsfield reported that the owners of the Hilton Hotel had threatened, in a letter last October to then planning minister Mary Delahunty, to close it if they were unable to get approval for redevelopment plans.

Mitchell, naturally, asked Bracks about the matter when the Premier fronted for his weekly interview later that morning. The reply: "I knew nothing about that letter or those details . First time I heard about that was today . . . I've never heard of that threat before ... You asked me was I ever aware of any threat; (the answer is) no."

But by day's end a version of the same letter, dated October 13, addressed to the Premier and stamped "Received, Premier's private office", was in the hands of the media. Not only that, but the Premier signed a letter in response, dated December 23 and beginning "I refer to your letter of 13 October . . ."

Once again, this surely was not a lie; after all, it was Bracks' office that eventually released the text of the letter to the Premier. But if the Premier didn't know about the threat, he should have. At the time the letter reached his office, his abundant personal staff should have alerted him to it, or Delahunty should have briefed him on it.

But let's be charitable and accept that hundreds of letters cross the Premier's desk each week and he can't be expected to commit each of them to memory, and that Delahunty chose not to burden the Premier with the issue. That still doesn't explain why the Premier's staff or department didn't alert him to the letter on Tuesday morning — after the *Age* story appeared but before he fronted Mitchell to be questioned about the issue.

The evidence suggests the Opposition is, as oppositions are wont to do, drawing a long bow by branding the Premier a liar. But the ALP, which relies so heavily on Bracks to "sell" its messages, must hope he lifts his game. Fluffed lines will only become more costly between now and next year's election.

Paul Austin is state political editor.

The Age 16/05/2005

Opinion

Hilton hotel row adds insult to planning injury

ROYCE MILLAR

Bending the rules to suit developers is not the way to plan Melbourne.

FORMER planning minister Mary Delahunty was asking for trouble last December when she over-rode the Melbourne City Council to approve the expansion of the Hilton Hotel in East Melbourne.

Last week cashed-up, influential locals took her on in the Supreme Court. Their action has embarrassed the Government, including Premier Steve Bracks, and raised serious questions about the handling of key planning decisions.

At the time, Delahunty said that she approved both the refurbishment of the existing hotel, and a 15-level (45-metre) expansion, in the name of the Commonwealth Games. This was done under a section of the Planning and Environment Act that allows the Government to exempt special projects from normal public planning. The link to the Games was the proximity to the sports precinct.

The decision was an eyebrow-raiser, especially among those in the building and development industry who knew it was ludicrous to suggest that a 15-level apartment block would be built in a little over a year. They were right, of course.

Documents tabled in court clearly show that the hotel owner and developer, Thakral Holdings, did not intend to finish the project until 2007.

Last week, the Government's lawyer claimed Delahunty really meant only that the $15 million hotel refurbishment, not the $40 million expansion, would be finished in time for 2006. Michelle Quigley, SC, blamed the "looseness" of the wording in Delahunty's statements for giving the wrong impression.

But in written documents explaining her intervention, Delahunty repeatedly clearly refers to both the refurbishment and expansion of the hotel as important to the Games.

So, as Justice Stuart Morris posited in the Supreme Court, the minister may have believed she was approving the entire project in time for the Games, or she may have wanted to "spin" her statements to imply that both projects were Games-related.

The first possibility points to sloppiness at best, the second to a conscious misleading of the Victorian community. But the refurbishment of the Hilton alone did not require a permit. So why intervene?

The developer Thakral, in letters to Bracks, Treasurer John Brumby and Delahunty, threatened that without an upgrade it may have to close the hotel, with the loss of hundreds of jobs.

To afford the revamp, said Thakral, it needed the economic certainty offered by an expansion of the hotel. The proposed tower would be twice the height allowed under rules proposed for the site by the city council. Brumby then asked Delahunty to intervene.

It would seem, therefore, that the Government fell for the oldest trick in the developer's handbook: political blackmail.

Melbourne is littered with the byproducts of governments and councils caving in to such threats. And Labor — acutely conscious of the old anti-business tag — is even more easily bullied than the Liberals.

In such situations planning ministers are not planning at all. They are making judgements about the capacity of developers to pay. All too often developers cry poor. And all too often governments give in to demands for a bit of special help.

Since its construction in the early 1970s on the site of one of Melbourne's grandest old buildings, Gliveden Mansions, debate has raged about whether the Hilton should have been built at all in the low-rise, light-filled streets of East Melbourne. It has since been used to justify an apartment tower of similar height at the other end of the block on Wellington Street. Thakral now argues their tower will fill in the gap.

Some, such as outspoken neighbour Gary Morgan, continue to campaign for the razing of the Hilton. The City Council argues that past mistakes should not be used as planning precedents; before long the Hilton will have had its day and governments should be planning for decades, not days, ahead.

Others are inclined to dismiss the arguments of well-heeled East Melbourne residents as self-serving. Yet because of its position on the fringe of the CBD and Melbourne's sports precinct, the streetscapes of East Melbourne are significant not just for locals. Walking through the Victorian-era streets on a spring evening after a game at the "G" is one of those small but special Melbourne experiences.

The Supreme Court will rule soon on whether the minister erred. Regardless of the outcome, the case has exposed the Government as either dumb or deceitful, and too willing to bend to pressure from developers. Good planning cannot be done that way.

Royce Millar is city editor.

Herald Sun 08/07/2007

Residents' group loses Hotel wins tower fight

A GROUP of Melbourne's wealthiest residents has lost a legal battle against a redevelopment of the Hilton on the Park.

The East Melbourne Group — including millionaire pollster Gary Morgan — claimed former planning minister Mary Delahunty had unlawfully approved the project last December because of its importance to the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

The group contended the Minister had erred in approving the hotel refurbishment and a neighbouring 15-storey apartment block when it was known the project could not be completed before the Games.

But yesterday Justice Stuart Morris dismissed

Kate Uebergang
tribunal reporter

the group's claim against the Minister and hotel owner PCH Melbourne Pty Ltd.

"No rational Minister could have believed that a building such as that proposed at the rear of the MCG Hotel was likely to have been completed in time for the Commonwealth Games," Justice Morris said.

"Indeed, neither of the defendants argued to the contrary.

"Rather, the defendants' case was that the Commonwealth Games only formed a basis of the minister's decisions in relation to the refurbishment of the existing Hilton Hotel and possibly the restoration of the MCG Hotel."

Justice Morris found Ms Delahunty had approved the development — thus over-riding the Melbourne City Council's jurisdiction — without being subject to the normal scrutiny involved in a planning appeal hearing.

"One explanation for this is that the minster regarded the development as economically important to Victoria and she wished to promote it by making development approval more certain," he said.

Justice Morris also rejected the East Melbourne Group's contention that the approval was invalid because there had been no consultation with nearby residents.

A counter-claim by the minister and PCH was also dismissed.

Judge questions minister's spin

By MARTIN BOULTON

A SUPREME Court judge has questioned the "spin" used by the State Government to justify its intervention to speed up approval for a 15-storey residential tower next to the Hilton Hotel in East Melbourne.

Justice Stuart Morris found that former planning minister Mary Delahunty had bypassed normal planning procedures and used the Commonwealth Games as a "politically desirable" way to justify her intervention.

But he found Ms Delahunty did not act unlawfully when she approved the project, which includes refurbishment of the Hilton and the adjacent MCG Hotel.

The judge's decision, delivered yesterday, is a defeat for a group of East Melbourne residents who had launched a legal challenge to the minister's move.

When she approved the tower last December, Ms Delahunty said the entire project, including the Hilton refurbishment, was of state significance and important to the Commonwealth Games.

A coalition of residents, the East Melbourne Group, challenged the decision, saying it had robbed them of the right to object to the residential tower.

Justice Morris found there was "a gloss or spin" put on the Government's decision by referring to the Commonwealth Games. He said "no rational minister could believe that a building such as that proposed at the rear of the MCG Hotel was likely to have been completed in time for the Commonwealth Games".

East Melbourne Group president Margaret Wood said the group was shell-shocked by the court's decision. "We were resolute about this challenge and naturally we're very disappointed," she said.

During the case it emerged that a letter from the developer, Thakral Holdings, stated that unless the Government intervened, the company would review its stake in the Hilton. "One very real option is the cessation of the Hilton . . . in its current form," wrote Thakral's Victorian development director, Dan Kolomanski.

"(It) would be a regretful but necessary commercial decision by Thakral, a major blow to the 328 hotel employees."

Premier Steve Bracks and Treasurer John Brumby both confirmed knowledge of the letter. Mr Brumby told a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing in May that the Hilton ought to be developed.

"No rational minister could believe that (the) building could have been completed in time for the Games."
JUSTICE STUART MORRIS

Opposition planning spokesman Ted Baillieu said the court had "concluded that Victorians may well have been conned", and labelled the Government's intervention as "yet another dodgy deal".

A Government spokeswoman said the ruling confirmed Ms Delahunty's intervention was lawful and appropriate. "It supports the Government's view that the Hilton redevelopment is of economic importance to Victoria," the spokeswoman said.

Mr Kolomanski said the "final hurdle had been removed".

"We've already commenced the refurbishment (of the Hilton) and other areas are in the advanced stages of planning," he said.

Games security budget blows out to $76m

By PETER KER and ROYCE MILLAR

THE Victorian Government's security budget for the 2006 Commonwealth Games has blown out by almost half since 2003, reaching $76 million.

Security spending on the Games has been a secret since the May 3 state budget, when the Government separated it from the $697 million Commonwealth Games budget and decided it would no longer publicly report security expenditure.

The move amounted to a blow-out of the Government's $697 million cap, and was justified on the grounds that knowledge of security spending would reveal the nature and level of protection.

The current figure of $76 million was leaked to *The Age* this week. *The Age* was told that close to $50 million in state security money was removed from the Games budget, and once separated, was topped up with an extra $26 million.

The money will help the Victorian and federal police and other agencies provide comprehensive security for athletes and the public.

A spokesman for Commonwealth Games Minister Justin Madden would not deny the figure yesterday. "We're advised that we cannot detail the nature and cost of security for the Games at this stage," he said.

"It was made clear in the budget papers that additional security funding was required. This detail will be released after the Games."

The State Government's secrecy was ridiculed by many commentators, particularly after the Federal Government openly announced that it would spend $84.8 million on Games security.

Opposition Games spokesman Gordon Rich-Phillips said the Government had tried to create a "secret blank cheque" by refusing to reveal its expenditure on security.

"There is no justification for it being taken out of the Games budget as it is quite clearly Commonwealth Games expenditure," he said.

Despite removing the security money from the cap, the Government will still spend the full $697 million, meaning that around $50 million now for other Games projects.

The Melbourne Times

news

DELAHUNTY CLEARED OVER HILTON

OPPONENTS of the development next to East Melbourne's Hilton Hotel have lost their bid to show the former planning minister had made a mistake in approving the development. The Supreme Court last week found that Mary Delahunty was not wrong to "call in" Thakral Holding's redevelopment of the MCG Hotel and adjacent mansion Mosspenoch, despite wrongly claiming the development was needed for the Commonwealth Games. Justice Morris found that Ms Delahunty made the decision after Thakral threatened to downgrade its presence at the Hilton if not allowed to develop.

The Age 10/03/2006

City Games projects are slow off the mark

Ministerial intervention misses aim

By ROYCE MILLAR
CITY EDITOR

TWO major inner-city construction projects controversially fast-tracked by the State Government in the name of the Commonwealth Games will be little more than bombsites come next week.

The historic MCG Hotel in East Melbourne, which the Government promised would be transformed into a shrine to football, is gutted and derelict and will remain so indefinitely.

In December 2004, then planning minister Mary Delahunty bypassed normal procedures to override the Melbourne City Council and approve the redevelopment of the Hilton on the Park, including a $40 million refurbishment and construction of a 15-level apartment tower behind the neighbouring MCG Hotel.

At the time Ms Delahunty declared the redevelopment, including the Hilton facelift, a project of state significance and important to the Commonwealth Games.

Yesterday Thakral Holdings, which owns the Hilton and surrounding buildings, acknowledged progress was a long way short of what it had hoped for by Games time.

Managing director John Hudson said he believed he had a "moral commitment" to do something before the Games, so the company refurbished the top two levels of the 20-storey hotel.

He said the project had been held up by a Supreme Court appeal by local residents including pollster Gary Morgan, government red tape, and by underestimating the complexities of the refurbishment.

"I think we all underestimated how difficult it is to do a $40 million project in 12 months."

Last year Supreme Court judge Justice Stuart Morris found that Ms Delahunty was within her rights to intervene at the Hilton, but noted that "no rational minister" could believe that a 15-level apartment building could be finished in time for the Games. In fact, it hasn't even started.

With a softening of the apartment market and another appeal lodged, a start to work on the apartment tower and the revival of the MCG Hotel could both be years away.

"I don't think I'll sell many apartments off the plan when, if we lose the appeal, we have to say, 'Sorry you can't have your apartment any more'," said Mr Hudson.

At Flemington, developer the Bensons Property Group has not yet appointed a builder or got final building approval for the apartment/retail project that was to replace the Lombards paper warehouse destroyed by fire in late 2004.

In January last year, acting Planning Minister John Pandazopoulos took planning control of the site from the Moonee Valley Council, citing a need for "immediate action" to ensure "redevelopment" of the site by March 2006.

But the Bensons Property Group confirmed that a builder had not yet been signed, nor has final building approval been sought.

Executive director Michael Foley yesterday stressed that the debris from the fire had been removed from the site in time for the Games.

The Government is now focusing on the longer term importance of the two projects.

Claire Miller, a spokeswoman for Planning Minister Rob Hulls, said the Hilton project was a "significant investment" that would "benefit the state long after the Commonwealth Games have come and gone".

"As for the Lombards site, the State Government and the Moonee Valley City Council have worked hard to provide every opportunity for the redevelopment of this site, including ensuring that the appropriate permits were in place," Ms Miller said.

The Age 19/08/2006



ROPERTY developer Thakral is another listed group looking overseas in its struggles to find good investment opportunities in Australia as competition for assets here remains intense.

The owner and manager of Hilton on the Park in East Melbourne and Australia on Collins yesterday reported a 148 per cent jump in full-year net profit to $89.3 million, a result boosted by revaluations. Underlying profit was up 27 per cent and the distribution was up 4 per cent.

Managing director John Hudson says the group is in the early stages of looking at opportunities overseas. "We have the money but I can't see the value at the moment (in Australia). There's so much capital out there chasing quality property."

If Thakral does buy in Australia it won't be an established asset, rather one with potential. "We're not just interested in collecting the rent," Mr Hudson says.

Developing assets with potential was the group's model for upgrading its Hilton on the Park, located near the MCG. Its hotel component is still being refurbished while talks are ongoing with a residents' group over a proposal for about 50 residential units.

The refurbishment was a factor in Thakral's hotels result not being as strong as Mr Hudson had hoped, while the Cronulla riots last December hurt the performance of its Novotel Brighton hotel in Sydney. However, Mr Hudson is bullish about the prospects for Melbourne, with its year-round cycle of events good for the hotels business.

"It shows every sign of continuing to be strong," he says.

BEN SCHNEIDERS

The Leader 17/01/07

fastfact 0 knockbacks

Council knocked back a 16-storey proposal from the Hilton in 2001 and in 2004 for 15

Battle over tower

DEVELOPMENT

Lynda! Cairns

HILTON Hotel wants to build a 14-storey apartment tower next to its Wellington Pde hotel but the council says the proposal is twice what it would allow.

Residents and Melbourne Council want the State Government to put a 24-metre height limit over East Melbourne and to knock back Hilton's plans. Planning Minister Justin Madden is expected to look at both plans next month.

East Melbourne Group co-vice president Judith Batrouney said the proposed tower was far too high and would be an imposition on residents. She said residents supported the council's proposed 24-metre limit, which would restrict development in East Melbourne to about six storeys. A council report presented to councillors in December by committee chairwoman Catherine Ng said the proposed tower would be far too tall and an imposition on residents and the Fitzroy Gardens.

The 14-storey tower, to the east of the Hilton, would include 52 apartments, 124 car parks and shops.

The report recommends the proposal be cut by two storeys and a loading bay be built at the front, to avoid noise and other impacts on neighbours at the rear.

It also requests more detail on the "retail premises" planned for the ground level.

"Retail premises is a broad definition in the planning scheme and includes a timber yard, adult sex bookshop and supermarket," the report says.

"It is suggested that this use be further substantiated to provide clarity in the assessment."

The *Leader* contacted the Hilton Hotel but did not receive a response by deadline.

The Age 14/10/20010

Bitter battle over footy's birthplace

MCG Hotel redevelopment 'inappropriate for the site'

By **JASON DOWLING**
CITY EDITOR

THE fight for the MCG Hotel is proving as tough as any game of football played at the ground — which seems only fitting for the code's birthplace.

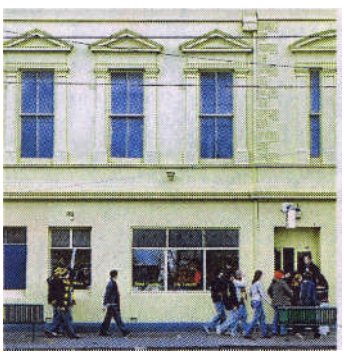
Prominent Melbourne pollster and local resident Gary Morgan is fighting plans by Thakral Holdings — owner of the Hilton on the Park and the MCG Hotel — to build about 80 apartments at the rear and beside the former MCG Hotel in proceedings before Victoria's planning tribunal.

It is proposed to demolish part of the existing Hilton Hotel complex and part of the rear of the MCG Hotel for the residential development, which includes a 14-storey tower.

The dispute dates from 2004, when then planning minister Mary Delahunty approved the development only to have the approval overturned in court in 2008 after a challenge by local residents.

Melbourne City Council has now granted a permit for the development, which Mr Morgan is challenging.

Mr Morgan, who lives next to the proposed development, said the MCG Hotel should be celebrated and the development was inappropriate for the site.



The MCG Hotel in East Melbourne.

"My position is the hotel should be restored to what it was in the 1870s and should be made part of the tourist and historical precinct," he said.

He vowed not to give up the fight.

"This is only the first quarter and it has been going for 10 years," he said. "We will be there to the end."

Architect Bruce Trethowan prepared a statement of evidence for Mr Morgan regarding the heritage issues surrounding the development proposal and the MCG Hotel. He told *The Age* the hotel had great historical significance for Victoria.

"Melbourne Football Club was founded in the MCG Hotel and the Melbourne Football Club is one of the oldest football clubs in Australia, if not the oldest," he said.

"The rules of Australian Rules football were first set down at the MCG Hotel and it has got quite a lot of historic significance attached to the site and the building that is remaining there.

"To further demolish the building and take away years of character and everything else that has been built up there I think is not the right approach."

But Thakral managing director John Hudson said the company had gained the necessary planning approvals for the development.

"This is just him [Mr Morgan] trying to stop us doing it. We got the support of council, we got the support of the East Melbourne [residents] group, so it's the last desperate throws of a desperate man," he said.

The case is continuing before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Herald Sun 20 /08/2011

Pub in danger

HAMISH HEARD

THE pub credited as the birthplace of Aussie rules football will be bulldozed within months unless a last-ditch bid for heritage protection succeeds.

The Heritage Council of Victoria last week met to consider whether East Melbourne's MCG Hotel — where the game's rules were drafted in 1859 — was worthy of inclusion on the state's heritage register.

A heritage listing would protect the hotel from plans by Hilton on the Park owner Thakral Holdings to demolish it except for the facade and replace it with a residential tower.

Millionaire pollster Gary Morgan, who lives behind the site and has been fighting the proposal for nearly 10 years, was driving the application for heritage listing.

"This is as important as Government House, Latrobe's cottage, the Exhibition Building — it's the home of football," Mr Morgan said.

"Only mad people would pull it down."

Mr Morgan last year failed to convince Victoria's planning tribunal to overturn a Melbourne City Council permit allowing the demolition.

He said the application to the Heritage Council was his "last stand".

Architect Bruce Trethowan, whose name also appears on the heritage application, argued against demolition at a Heritage Council hearing last week.

He argued that keeping the building's facade and knocking down the rest would be disrespectful to Melbourne's sporting history.

"If you just keep the facade, you have actually taken the soul out of what the building was all about," Mr Trethowan said.

"The MCG Hotel was the cradle of Australian rules football and that relationship with football and cricket continued right up until the hotel's closure in 2004."