

Hobart CBD's unique character under attack from developers

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THE character of our unique city is being whittled away by anti-democratic processes.

In the name of progress, and at the whim of our leaders' current pre-occupation with development at any cost, the character of Hobart is being overwhelmed by the short-sighted policies of our political masters.

Readers will have noted the hype surrounding the renewed push by the Fragrance Hotel Group to build two out-of-character skyscraper towers in the Hobart central business district (*Mercury on Saturday*, May 6). Do we really want a city that is a poor copy of one

Residents must stand up and make their feelings known, says David Halse Rogers

of the mainland capitals? Surely a better way can be found to provide for growing tourist numbers.

Launceston has managed to retain its uniqueness — just compare the Launceston and

Hobart Grand Chancellor Hotels.

As more Tasmanians become aware of the ramifications of the State Government's draconian statewide planning scheme, local councils are placed in the position of having to comply with a standardised planning template, which will slowly see the face of our cities, towns, villages and landscapes irrevocably changed.

However, the new planning provisions do not mean that councils should roll over and beg for a kick.

Just before Christmas, under instruction from the

Tasmanian Planning Commission, Hobart City Council rushed through 21 "urgent amendments" to the Hobart Interim Planning Scheme, 2015.

What is the intent of these amendments? Many were not simply minor alterations to its planning scheme.

The observant would have noticed that amendment UA14 dealt with clauses to do with CBD building heights. This amendment now allows for aldermanic discretion on the height of buildings in the Hobart CBD. Until recently, any building toward the edge of the CBD was controlled by

a gradual reduction in the height allowed. For example, a building in the centre of Hobart could be taller than one planned for the outskirts. This restriction was a deliberate policy of previous City Fathers to ensure tall structures would not overwhelm the existing (often colonial) architecture.

A further example: quietly and without any fanfare, amendment UA15 abolished the heritage protection for the former Motors Showroom at 179 Macquarie St.

This commercial building won the 1972 Royal Australian Institute of Architecture's

Triennial Award. While the HCC did not support the delisting of this building, the TPC again ordered the council to do so.

Recently, a development application, requiring the present building's demolition, was lodged with council for an 11-storey hotel. Due to the council's heritage protection, the development was refused due to the above-mentioned heritage protection, but also the fact the development adjoined the heritage-listed former Hutchins School, and, further, breached the height restrictions for the site.

Citizens, do we really want

the unique character of Hobart destroyed simply to enable the few to make money out of the many?

It is the Georgian character of Hobart that makes it special for its inhabitants and tourists alike.

It is the human scale that creates so many positive, beneficial responses from and for its populace.

In Europe, planning in major cities does not allow for buildings over five storeys in height to be constructed in the centre of historic precincts.

Just look at Vienna, Rome, Paris or Amsterdam: any building that is out of

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proportion with its neighbours is relegated to the suburbs.

For example, La Defense, Europe's largest purpose-built business district just west of the city limits respects "Old" Paris, being located in a way to minimise any impact on the historic and touristic values of the "City of Light".

Decisions, such as those just taken by the HCC, are too important to be left to our representatives, especially

when those representatives appear blind to the jewels with which they are entrusted.

If Hobart were a canton of Switzerland, such important decisions, as are obviously now being considered behind closed doors — with their far-reaching and major alterations to our way of life — would be put to citizens' referenda.

Once we allow elected representatives carte blanche with the decision-making

process, we have only ourselves to blame.

Make your feelings known to the aldermen who make these decisions that you wish to be given proper consultative powers to decide how you want to live.

The lip service that currently purports to provide that consultation is bogus. It is a flagrant abuse of the planning scheme.

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