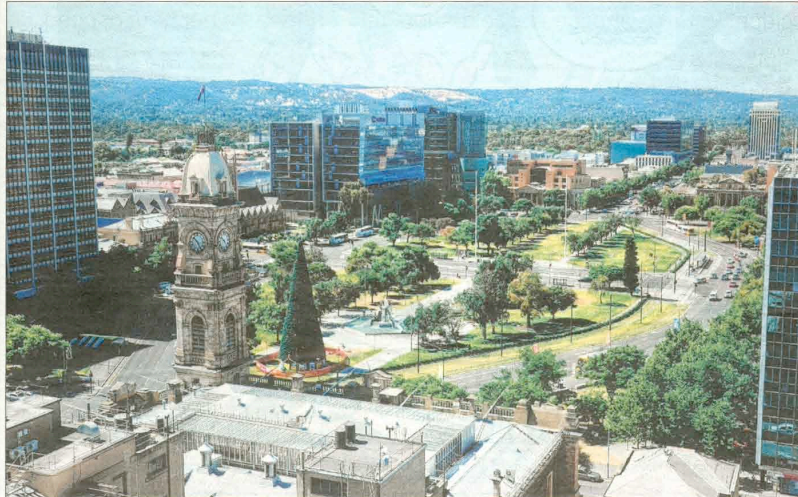


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Squaring up to the future



IN terms of increasing the use and vitality of the capital, Adelaide City Council's proposed \$105 million redevelopment for Victoria Square is a pivotal first step.

Imagine a major intact park at the centre point of Colonel Light's Square Mile, actively utilised year-round for a variety of community events – as well as significantly enhanced usage by city workers, residents and visitors to the city.

A revitalised Victoria Square would act as a tremendous drawcard to the capital on the weekends, public holidays and holiday festival seasons and allow a whole new generation of year-round community-based events in our city. Victoria Square is at the literal and figurative centre point of the capital, and its multi-billion economy, notwithstanding the recently expressed thought bubble that the redevelopment of Adelaide Oval (and the expenditure of \$450 million on new grandstands) is somehow going to move the "epicentre" of the capital to the banks of the River Torrens.

I suggest that these commentators study a copy of Colonel Light's "A Plan for the Town of Adelaide, March 1837"; and investigate the pattern of development, land use and investment by six generations of South Australians, in the square mile over the last 175 years.

The total rateable value of the property in the square mile is in the multiple billions of dollars. Some 150,000 people work daily in the commercial office district, which is centred on Victoria Square. There is an existing mix and pattern of residential, commercial, small business, retail and recreational uses throughout the square mile which are longstanding and unlikely to change anytime soon.

The economic activity generated by the relocation of income from AAMI Stadium, estimated at \$10 million per annum, is minuscule in terms of the multi-billion dollar city economy.

The Oval project is exciting for AFL football followers, including myself, but it does not in itself transfigure a 175-year-old city.

If one could respectfully make any criticism of Colonel Light's wonderful Plan for Adelaide it would be that Victoria Square could have been larger. Through successive generations, Victoria Square has been dissected by roads to the point where 49 per cent is taken up by road bitumen.



Victoria Square carries 48,300 vehicles every day and has typical noise levels of 65-80 decibels.

The redevelopment of the square, involving a realignment and much more efficient use of roads bounding it, will result in a substantial increase in the park proportion of the square while interfering little with traffic capacity.

It is not possible to take the Wakefield St-Grote St dissection of the Square underground because of the long entry tunnels required and the effect on the existing buildings (including St Francis Xavier's Cathedral).

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But it will presumably be possible to close this portion of the roadway after evening peak-hour traffic, on weekends and during the festive season after Christmas Eve.

To extract the maximum economic and public benefits for the capital out of the upgrade it is vital that the full \$105 million upgrade be undertaken. The worst-case outcome would be for the city to spend (for argument) half the amount and end up with the half-baked compromise with nothing to show for it but a large financial hole in the council's pocket.

This means that the council will need to carry out the redevelopment in several stages over three to five years – unless the State Government augments the Council's budget with additional funding to speed up the project.

This would speed up the benefits to the capital. It would be a far superior investment for the state to make ahead of building new infrastructure on the riverbank. We should follow a fine Scottish tradition and fix what we have first.

To do the full project will not have a significant effect on the commencement date of the council's Rundle Mall up-

grade, which is still in the planning phase and two to three years away from being "spade-ready".

In reality, notwithstanding understandable pressure from Rundle Mall traders, Victoria Square is in a far more urgent need of upgrading given the fact that nothing has been spent on the square for decades, whereas the mall was itself the subject of an upgrade in the last 20 years.

Victoria Square is grossly under-utilised, whereas the mall is today a great success and the second-most-visited mall in Australia after Brisbane's, with 2.3 million visitations per year.

The aim of the council in its mall upgrading program is, properly understood, to improve what is a well-performing mall. This, by the way, gives rise to a significant financial risk that, in addressing the physical structure of the mall, the council may not be addressing the real issue: to get visitors to the mall

to spend more of their retail dollar there.

Many contend that the real issue is the lack of product differentiation from regional shopping centres. This needs careful thought by the council, as changing the paving will not address this.

The Victoria Square redevelopment would act as a catalyst for development in the commercial office district of the capital, in particular the western sector of the square mile north of Sturt St to North Tce and West Tce. There is significant potential for commercial and residential development under existing planning guidelines in that sector.

The square, unlike the Riverbank, is located at the very "epicentre" of public transport, serviced by buses leading to all corners of metropolitan Adelaide and the tram. It is also located within easy walking distance of significant carpark stations.

A heavily-utilised Victoria Square is going to provide a fantastic centre point for state's capital of which all South Australians can be justly proud.

Mark Hamilton, a member of the Adelaide City Council, is a former Deputy Lord Mayor of Adelaide.

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