



THE FOUR PILLARS IN PRACTICE AT THE CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

Sally Calder, Director, Community and Cultural Vitality

I want to talk about a focus over the last three years in Port Phillip. Port Phillip Council, the southern neighbour of the City of Melbourne, takes in the area from Port Melbourne to St Kilda and Elwood. In our a very small municipality, the most densely populated area in Melbourne, we've introduced the Four Pillars. Sometimes we talk about a 'fourth pillar', sometimes we talk about the 'fourth pillow', sometimes we talk about the 'fourth bottom line' and sometimes we just talk about cultural vitality. But what we have tried to do is to imbed into our systems, our practices and our policies, a way of working. It's a way that's not so different from how we have always worked. But I guess that we are trying to sustain it into the future. So from a practical, management perspective, I want to tell you what we did, what worked, what didn't work and maybe there will be some lessons that those of you who are interested in trying to introduce a fourth pillar into your setting can take away and learn from.

Port Phillip is a very articulate community, diverse, with a strong cultural heritage and a strong history of activism, particularly around planning and development issues. It's got a history of being a producer of cultural events, both large and small, and it's a municipality that has a focus of being bigger than itself. It really has been a playground for Melbourne and Victoria, a place that has been meaningful for many Victorians and many Australians. And we have always been really lucky that our councillors have been reflective of our community. They've been just as passionate about cultural heritage and have been sympathetic to the notion of the fourth pillar. But we are also a community that is changing rapidly. Gentrification has had a huge impact on the city and continues to have a huge impact.

So for us, part of what we were on about was making 'how we do things around here' not just dependent on a strong CEO. Anne Dunn has been one of our CEOs, so you can tell the influence she has had. We currently have, in David Spokes another strong CEO, but the desire to embrace cultural vitality has to be bigger than one individual. It's got to be a whole of organisational and whole of community intent. So we tried to formalise and make really tangible, the intangible values that have informed how we have worked for many years. I think that probably the reason why all of us work in local government is that at some level, we want to make a difference to the way people experiences their lives. I came to local government from a primary care background. And I was interested in Anne's comment that the notions of community cultural development had started to impact New South Wales Health significantly in the late 90s, but I felt that the traditional community capacity building literature and social capital literature really missed something inherent around values and beliefs and aspirations. You couldn't really address those issues from a health perspective. So it was my sense that local government was probably the best placed level of government to try and co-ordinate aspirations to impact on those sort of issues.

Port Phillip, obviously through Anne's tutelage and our current councillors and CEO, has been heavily influenced in particular by Jon Hawkes' work, the *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*. It just made really good sense to us. Part of our thinking was that it picked up the essential challenges for local government and the things that we really wanted to impact on. So we commenced a struggle to try and make the intangible tangible, introducing a framework that would articulate very clearly what it was that we were aspiring to, what we wanted to influence, and provided some mechanism for us to check our progress.

So I am going to tell you about what we actually did. It's going to sound very linear and very neat but it wasn't at all, it was very messy and very iterative. Probably everybody's recollection of the process is different, but this is my recollection of the process. My role was really portfolio manager, but there were a whole range of people who had really pivotal parts to play in all of this. The first thing that we did was to introduce a new framework for our corporate plan, which is now called the Council Plan, built very clearly about four pillars. It identified Council's key role as being around service and sustainability and identified the pillars of economic viability, environmental responsibility, cultural vitality and social equity. So there you go, we just did it. Get a new framework and you'll be right!

Within each of those pillars we had to define a clear goal, what it was that we wanted to achieve with that pillar. At Port Phillip we love to have a chat and the process of defining our goal for cultural vitality was the source of very many really long and passionate debates with councillors and with ourselves about what it was, ultimately, that we wanted to achieve. And you may like this or you may hate it, and we could debate it endlessly, but at the moment, what we've defined as our goal around cultural vitality is to "support the conditions that allow all communities within Port Phillip to experience and enjoy diversity of values, beliefs and aspirations".

That goal has a number of key objectives. The first of those objectives is to do with local culture, so we want a place that is creative, participatory and has dynamic events and dynamic places. We also want community governance, a place where citizens are active and where they talk to one another, where people are engaged in dialogue. And, because of Port Phillip's heritage, there

are very strong themes around wanting to protect our physical and our cultural heritage. So I guess for us, cultural vitality is around tolerance, diversity, creativity in the arts, active citizenship and heritage. Having identified these objectives we then went through the process of grouping all the actions we would be undertaking in the next twelve months under each of those objectives. And surprise, surprise, the thing that we discovered was that those actions, and there were about 60 of them, came from every single division of the organisation. That was a really powerful message.

That sounds easy, but that probably took us six months to achieve. The second thing that we did was embed cultural vitality considerations into all of our key planning and reporting systems. We had to make the framework real and we had to make people live it every day. Looking back, I think this was really pivotal. A couple of examples of the sorts of systems we impacted on were, first of all, council reports.

Every single option that council now considers for every single decision that it makes regardless of the type of decision it is, will be considered not only in terms of the economic, environment and social impacts, but also in terms of the cultural impacts of that decision. Our tendering and evaluation processes, (we run a large commercial portfolio of real estate), that previously would have been made on straight economic grounds, are now assessed in terms of their cultural impacts. David's paper will describe a recent and quite controversial example of that.

And also, our planning processes, our capital works business cases, our services and budget planning are all built around cultural impacts, cultural implications. The other thing that is quite important was Organisational Development processes; the sorts of people that we recruit, the way that we induct people into the city, the way we train them, the way that we manage their performance, is absolutely informed by their understanding of the contribution that they make to cultural vitality in the city, regardless of what their role is.

The third thing that we did, and looking back we didn't do this knowingly at the time, was that we created a number of rituals and symbols that supported the cultural vitality pillar. An example of a ritual is the personal sustainability diamond that was introduced at the Corporate Plan launch, always a big bash at the city of Port Phillip. This started off as a good idea of our Coordinator of Corporate Planning & Strategy, Anita Lange, but it became a really important personal symbol in the organisation. Every single member of staff created their own personal diamond that reflected the contribution that their role made to each of the four pillars. It was a powerful device for increasing the understanding of people as to what cultural vitality was and how they could contribute to it, whereas previously they might have defined culture quite narrowly and would not have seen that there was a role for them.

The fourth thing that we did was that, with the Cultural Development Network, we hosted a cultural vitality symposium in July of 2003. Specifically what we wanted to find out from that forum was, what were the factors that promote and develop cultural vitality in local communities and what was local government's role in promoting and developing those factors? Now I have to say that we didn't actually answer any of those questions. In fact, what we discovered was that we were being called quite innovative, which was really scary, because we had wanted to influence lots of levels of government to take on the fourth bottom line approach, but at that time, we discovered only one other LGA, Marion in SA, who were using the fourth bottom line.

I'd be interested to know if that's changed significantly. We were quite frightened about the fact that we were doing it ourselves. But there were lots of other really, really fantastic things that came out of that symposium, and the best thing that came out of it, which we didn't plan for at all, was the impact that it had on our organisation. I think that up until the time of the symposium, cultural vitality had been seen, across the organisation, especially for those people who weren't in the traditional social and cultural developments fields, as the new groovy buzzword, the thing that was possibly going to take over the organisation. The band that you needed to be on, if you wanted to go up the ladder.

What actually happened was this. Because I got anxious about numbers about a week before the symposium, I badgered and badgered my general management colleagues, and I made sure that they had all of their third level managers, 25 managers from across the organisation, in attendance. The Voices of Atherton Gardens, community choir from the Fitzroy Housing Estate, performed and made a big impact. I have this recollection of seeing four or five big burly grey-suited managers from finance and the fleet and purchasing and areas like that, watching the performance, this really beautiful performance. Our South African finance manager had a tear running down his face. And he said to me afterwards, 'Sally, thankyou, thankyou so much. That was the best thing I've ever seen'.

I had realised in that moment that what we had actually done was organise our own little community cultural development event for our organisation, and the impact of that was that everyone felt included in the topic. They didn't feel excluded from it any more, they had experienced the power of art to move, I guess, and they were on board. Suddenly, it became in that moment, part of our language, part of our understanding and the territorialism or the dubiousness with which it had been received,

disappeared. In retrospect it was probably one of the most powerful things we did, even though we didn't really achieve what we set out to achieve.

The other thing that we did was appoint a three day a week project officer, Richard Holt. That was really significant because you have to have resources and the opportunity to think and explore. We don't have time to do that in our working lives, but you do need people who can actually challenge you and push you and can think of broader ways of influencing other people to respond to the topic.

We continued to host a number of specific events that were designed to explore some of the big questions that came out of the forum, like for example, the impact of gentrification on the city.

And we communicated those internally, and overseas. We sent Richard away to LA to find out more and bring it home.

So in a way, in a nutshell, that's the neat story of what we actually did. David Brand's presentation will demonstrate some of the key examples that suggest to us that we are actually making a difference. What I want to address is what some of the initial reactions were that people had to this whole debate. It was quite interesting thinking what the key lessons were that I learned out of it.

I want to mention three groups of people—councillors, staff and the traditional arts fraternity. Our councillors obviously have a strong passionate interest in this topic and they were an easy audience, but even they were scared or sensitive to accusations that this was a very inner-city yuppie indulgent thing in which to put your time and your energy. So, there were still sensitivities that had to be overcome and the sense of 'why do we have to talk about this, we do it anyway?' So for us, it was very much a conversation around wanting to sustain this into the organisation of the future, wanting to sustain it to make it bigger than one powerful CEO, wanting to make it bigger than five or six passionate arts officers.

For staff cultural vitality was, until the symposium, not an issue that staff across the board really engaged with. It was seen as confined to the groovy young hipsters in the arts and festivals unit and it didn't really mean anything for anyone else. So, as much as anything, a lot of this has been an organisational development strategy, making it meaningful for everybody. And I think for the traditional arts fraternity, there was certainly some sense of loss, when we first started this conversation. Port Phillip has had a really strong traditional approach to arts and community cultural development, and I think there were concerns that that would be lost in some way, that if arts were part of something bigger, cultural vitality, that there would be a loss and they would be at risk.

And there are two things that I can point to, that suggest that this is not what happened. The first is our contemporary art collection which every year is under threat; will we buy more? should we get more money? You know that you've had an impact when the Director of Corporate Services, who describes himself as a fifty-something Scottish Presbyterian accountant, becomes the advocate for the acquisition budget. That's the first thing that suggests to me that the arts have not been lost. The second thing that suggests that to me is the fact that we are currently undergoing a multi-million dollar accommodation strategy and one of the key issues on which we are pinning our decision is the opportunity for the building to provide gallery space. So I think we have had significant impact on the thinking of the organisation more broadly.

Having said that, it's an ongoing conversation, certainly with our Arts Advisory Board. So these are the key things that I have learned and would be keen to share with you:-

first of all, it was very helpful for us, obviously, as Anne said, to have a powerful CEO, and a council who were on board and in sync. Certainly both Anne and David Spokes, our current CEO have been incredibly valuable. It's also really helpful to have an executive team that are collegiate and collaborative. That means that the culture of the organisation isn't dominated by territorialism and competition. You've got to have an ability to get other people on board who want to support you. The other thing we learned was that, though we didn't always achieve what we wanted, we always achieved something, often something that we hadn't planned for. I think the message is, don't have too much of a plan, just get on and do it.

The fifth thing is, it's really, really important to make 'how we do things around here' absolutely embedded into what you do. And some examples of that are, first of all your systems have to reflect your intent. You have to embed the fourth pillar into all of your systems, practice and policy. Anita Lange, our corporate planner, was invaluable in getting all of that level of detail. You have to make people feel included in the topic. You've got to celebrate it, and you've got to understand that everybody has a contribution. They've got to understand that, too. Don't exclude people from it. Include people into it. Don't get too tricky and too clever. Don't try to intellectualise cultural vitality too much. Just get on and do it, and work it out as you go along. Never underestimate the power of art to move (I think that the Atherton Gardens performance was certainly the turning point for our organisation).

Celebrate your successes when you have them. A couple of examples for us were the planning and tendering processes for the

Espy Hotel and the Vineyard, processes that enabled the retention of iconic cultural venues as vital performance and gathering spaces. Finally, the thing that I would say, if you want to truly embed the fourth pillar into your organisation, is that it can't be seen as just the province of social and cultural development or, particularly, the province of the arts unit, the community cultural development unit, or the community development unit. It's got to be seen as everybody's business and you will know that you have truly embedded cultural thinking into your organisation when you and your colleagues can point to a range of finance decisions, resource allocation decisions, planning and development debates that have been informed by explicitly articulated cultural considerations. And I put it to you that I think that is the challenge. Explicitly articulating the cultural considerations that have led you to behave in the way that you have.

I also think that it is important that the traditional arts areas really grab that challenge of being able to articulate clearly the impact that they have on the culture and identity of a place. The two stories I told you earlier of the contemporary art collection and the gallery space, I think, are just some little examples, of how we've been able to do that at Port Phillip.

Finally, the thing that we are struggling with every day is not to get too complacent. We don't, for a moment, think that we've got it all stitched up. Just last week, I put a report to council about a skate park and I dreamt last night about being castigated by some prominent St Kilda residents about how a skate park in their city would attract graffiti-vandalising, drug-taking young people and their lives would end. Street prostitution is another example where we didn't get the outcome we wanted, so it's an ongoing challenge. Something we have to chip away at all the time. David Brand's paper will describe some examples that we think speak of successes.

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This paper is an edited transcript of Sally's presentation to the Fourth Pillar Conference.

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David Brand, architect and former Councillor of Port Phillip

Sally Calder's presentation was about life under the Fourth Pillar in the council organisation in Port Phillip. I'm going to describe the political perspective. I'm going to share some observations of my practical/political experience of cultural issues in Port Phillip with one or two case studies, to see if the particular can shed as much light as the general.

But a few general observations first. There's a kind of Maslow's hierarchy of needs that seems to apply to local government.

1: A city must first become economically sound, and that's based on

- a) a healthy local economy (the practical aspect), and
- b) financial propriety (the ethical imperative)

Then, layered on top of that, there are two more needs:

2. a city must be dealing with its social basics:

- a) delivery of services (the practical) and
- b) sense of justice (the ethical)

3: and the same with environmental responsibilities:

- a) build and maintain infrastructure
- b) environmental responsibility

Once these are under control, questions of a city's cultural vitality come to the fore. Really these needs are not quite so separate or sequential – their relationship is a bit more graduated and overlapping. But I'm sure I'm still committing some sort of fourth pillar heresy by talking about a hierarchy like this. When a city is healthy, wealthy and well-run, attention does seem to then focus on the cultural issues. I think this is true. Certainly, as a councillor, my experience as a complaint magnet bears it out. The political concerns; the political pressures one comes under, will get stuck on roads rates and rubbish when there's a problem, but will gravitate to the more cultural end of the hierarchy once they're fixed.

People, I've discovered, are desperate to worry and blame. (And I'm talking about my friends and allies, who really love the place, as much as anyone else!). When a city is doing well on the basics, people then fear problems on the intangibles. But in my experience, people really do care intensely about the cultural realm, and in fact I think they care about the cultural realm more than the others.

Cultural issues is how I got into local politics in the first place. In particular, the issue of the Esplanade Hotel.

The problem, you may recall, was that a developer was planning to build a 38 storey tower on the Espy - 2.5 times the height of Arrandale, the building you see next door there. The campaign was to save the Espy as a local music venue – the legendary incubator of Melbourne rock'n'roll, etc. And it was also about preserving the urban character of whole St Kilda foreshore. Whether you thought the main fight was for urban design, or saving rock'n'roll, the issues here were cultural.

It was a six year battle, with way too many twists and turns to recount here. People were so incensed about it, we got 10,000 objections sent to Council's planning department, all full of passion for St Kilda. I got elected on the back of it – it was such an emblematic fight, that just by my association with it, I was obviously a good thing for St Kilda too! One of the pivotal points the whole thing swung on was the powers available to council, under the planning scheme, for the protection of cultural heritage, when the cultural heritage was described as a use of a building, and not just the building itself. This was about protecting the



Espy as a place where certain cultures could continue to happen, rather than just as an iconic piece of architecture itself.

I was very proud of the journey our planners and officers took on this: from a flat 'we can't protect that - no way!', to sticking their necks right out in the end, in a truly audacious deal to save the cultural viability of the Espy as a live music venue. That a council - as planning authority - would stand up for this broader reading of cultural heritage, I believe, was a real landmark.

Anyway, another local controversy, quite a lot smaller than the Espy, but one that shows up quite a range of political challenges thrown up by cultural issues, is the Vineyard Restaurant, in Acland St, next to the O'Donnell Gardens..



The Vineyard was a small teahouse, built in the early 20th century.

It eventually became a Hungarian Steakhouse, whose lease with council ran out in the late '90s. The building was slated for possible removal, and it was let out on a temporary, short term low rent lease. The three brothers Iodice, and a cousin, who took up the lease, made a raging success of it as a café / restaurant / bar. It was very alternative and makeshift, and suited the local vibe perfectly. And Johnny Iodice and the boys were a pretty alternative set of operators too!

The 'Vineyard issue' that followed needs to be seated within a far greater, overarching, urban design project - the St Kilda Foreshore Urban Design Framework, that is now branded the 'St Kilda's Edge' project. The UDF/ StKE project is the biggest single issue by far that I had to work with as a councillor. It's a 10 to 20 year plan for the rejuvenation of the entire St Kilda Foreshore: Luna Park, the Palais, the Beach, the Pier, the Catani Gardens, etc, etc.



The basic idea is to keep all the aspects of the foreshore we love; fix or redo the crappy bits; and to retain all of its innate 'St Kilda-ness'. St Kilda-ness is clearly a cultural term, and it's what this massive infrastructure project is really aimed at preserving and reinventing. The UDF was built on about two years of public consultation, which was a massive task in itself. In the course of that, the question arose on demolition versus retention of the Vineyard.



The presumed wisdom was to knock it down, for more open space and open vistas and access to the adjacent gardens. But a very deep (though by no means universal) public affection was detected for this, the 'last of the beach shacks', as I took to calling it. It's worth noting that preserving the Vineyard really was a cultural decision, with barely a hook to hang on — the building had virtually no formal heritage value, virtually no obvious urban design value, and virtually no conventional aesthetic value.

But it just seemed the right sort of historical accident to retain on the foreshore — one of the 'wonky bits', as June Moorhouse might call it. Protecting a place like this was really striking a blow for culture over common sense. That's not quite true: 'culture' many times is what common sense sees. Which is then often overridden by 'the hard realities', which realists then call common sense. Because it was not justifiable on any of the other solidly 'realistic' grounds, the cultural grounds had to be very explicitly identified, and fought for.

Now, the Vineyard, over the last few years, has gone through three long, drawn-out controversies on the way to where we are today and I'll outline what we learned from them. The first two I won't go much into, except to identify some of the types of political pitfalls they generated — for me to get trapped and mangled in. The first was an incredible, labyrinthine, Kafkaesque

battle over the simple idea of the cafe trading with some tables and chairs out on the footpath in the park, next to the Vineyard.



Council had happily granted the Vineyard operators a standard footpath licence to trade on the pavement. A local citizen pointed out some time later that it was crown land, and despite council being the land's committee of management, it was not council's to issue licences over. We quickly discovered that this citizen was absolutely right. And that there was a small body of local residents, and perhaps some officers, who wanted to use this legal fact to clear out of the park something they didn't think should be there anyway.

And I also very quickly discovered a much larger body of local sentiment that demanded the outdoor trading be reinstated immediately! And which saw the whole, tedious process to correctly re-establish the right to trade there on crown

land as an attempt by council just to strangle and sink the anti-establishment Vineyard in bureaucratic red tape.

We ended up, on one day, with a ludicrous situation, at the State Government's launch of its huge Docklands film and TV studios, which was staged in the park beside the Vineyard. At that moment Victorian tourism, and cultural pride, was riding the crest of the Secret Life of Us, and the Government wanted the opening to be set before an iconic SLoU scene. The outdoor cafe at the Vineyard was the choice – the setting for countless SLoU tete-a-tetes. So the tables and chairs and potted palms were brought out from their banishment, repositioned on the footpath, and repopulated with St Kilda denizens, for this demonstration of Victoria's cultural vitality and hip savvyness. And then whisked away again once the cameras departed.

And it took forever, to go via the state legislature, to get them back again. Probably about 18 months!

It's one of the most difficult political phenomena to deal with – and it absolutely plagues the cultural realm: the cumbersome process just to reach the simple end. And it was an 18-month-long incubation of every conspiracy theory, every strain of political paranoia, and every seed of cultural alarmism. By the time we got the tables and chairs back on the path, the depth and breadth of mistrust was quite palpable. And this is from people you essentially agree with! I found it very frustrating: just having to say 'Trust me' to everyone for that long. Some of them even started calling me a politician!

When the legals are complex, the long bureaucratic wait is a formula for political disaster. And it's sometimes hard for officers to appreciate just how corrosive, what is to them an obviously necessary and justifiable process, can in fact be. It's the role of the politician to convey this warning message to the organisation. And this usually happens when the politician himself starts to feel seriously corroded!

Then there was the issue of late closing – the guys applied for extended trading outside on the footpath till 3:00am each night. The political stress factor here is trying to choose between competing cultural 'pictures' of what's going on, or at least trying to find a fair way to balance them.

There was one picture:

The Vineyard as the perfectly located, quintessential late night chill-out scene —drinks and a little late night live local music — for St Kilda's bohemian & alternative subcultures, for the waiters and bartenders and musos after their own work This is a full-on St Kilda cultural reality. A cultural strength. And every city worth its salt, and certainly St Kilda, just has to have places like this. That's why we live there!

Then there's the other:

The Vineyard as an unnecessary, unruly, inconsiderate, noisy, hard to police, constant nuisance; destroying nearby residents' reasonable amenity, dominating the park, escalating public drunkenness, printing money at residents' expense, and to add insult to injury, all underwritten by their local council!! All true.

It comes down to the interpretation you choose - the slant – the cultural reading you decide to run with.

But as a councillor,

- do you take on one particular (popular) reading, and go for it,
- or do you try to allow for all multiple readings, and somehow let a process filter them through to some sort of weighted answer?

It was Richard Holt who first pointed out to me the blindingly obvious difference between social-pillar-desired outcomes and cultural-pillar objectives: pursuing cultural vitality is often not commensurate with pursuing social harmony. Real cultural vitality just has to produce culture clashes. Social equity is about how they're resolved. The beauty of having the cultural pillar is that cultural value is not now assessed only in terms of how well it produces social harmony.



At the time of the third and most difficult Vineyard controversy, Acland Street itself was the subject of a great deal of local angst. And I think this is a very typical cultural vitality issue.

High rent was changing the face of Acland St, from the famous, quirky, Middle European-Jewish street, of delicatessens, kosher butchers and Bohemian (and that's capital B Bohemian!) cafes and cake shops it once was, into a blandly gentrifying strip of generic, tourist-orientated retail outlets. But Acland St was filling up with ice-cream parlours (in the '90s) and juice bars (in the '00s), tourist gift shops; tourist bars and restaurants; and — the most hated of all — high rent franchises, like 7/11s and Gloria Jeans. There was constant criticism and political

pressure on council to stop the rot. But especially since the famous 'McDonalds Amendment' under the Kennett Government, council, as the planning authority, can't pick and choose businesses in this way, and certainly can't culturally plan the place at that fine a grain.

Nonetheless, it is assumed, or believed, by a large portion of the population, that council can and does control all this, and that council actually wants all the higher dollar development, for its own nefarious purposes! Shopping centre mix is, indeed, one of the really pressing cultural questions facing all municipalities. And one for which local governments have very few tools at their disposal. For the cultural pillar, forget arts policy for a moment, and have a look at this planning legislation!

But here, at the Vineyard, council was the landlord too, not just the planning authority. And, clearly, we had to do better, culturally, than the other landlords in the street. The permanency conferred upon the Vineyard by the UDF meant the building had to be repaired — to stop it falling down or rotting away — and the business had to be put onto a secure footing of a longer term lease.

For this, the operators had to vacate the building, and, also, at the same time, compete in an open tender for the new commercial lease. Now this was always going to be the case - the Act is quite clear that new commercial arrangements like this, on crown land, have to be publicly tendered. But by this stage, the Vineyard operators, and their staff, and their patrons, and the increasingly engaged public, were all pretty much convinced that council was basically just preoccupied with victimising them.

It was very tough on the Vineyard boys, who could barely comprehend what was going on, and it was a very inconvenient and cumbersome process indeed. And it created, again, this runaway culture of cynicism and disbelief: a pervasive culture of misinformation, and holus-bolus rumour swallowing.

Council ran a major public information campaign. But public statements guaranteeing that the 'look and feel' of the Vineyard would be preserved were apparently just not believable.

I'll read you some extracts from the very large 'Save the Vineyard' e-mail campaign - I want you to notice how absolutely spot-on the cultural analysis of the Vineyard's place in St Kilda often is, and on the other hand, how far off the perceived facts are.

I write to you in the hope that you will help preserve the St Kilda we know and love: the essence of which lies within its peculiar characters, its diverse and accessible cultural events and its unique, quaint and irreplaceable establishments. As rates rise and new money moves in, many of St Kilda's iconic bars, cafes and shops are being run out of town by 24 hour fast food chains and an endless stream of cafe/restaurant/ bars that are as lacking in personality as they are in individuality. In doing so we are losing everything that makes St Kilda what it is.

* * *

I am a St Kilda resident. I love where I live, and love the diverse cultures in the area. St Kilda is unique. Sadly, it feels like we are going to have to start saying St Kilda WAS unique. How many trendy juice bars and international chain stores are going to be allowed into Acland St before the council realises the soul of St Kilda is being destroyed?

I can appreciate that some renovations are essential as the building is old. I cannot appreciate the offering of the licence to the highest bidder. Please think of your constituents before you allow greed to turn St Kilda into something colourless.

* * *

I am writing to you to express my absolute disappointment and opposition to the proposed closure of the Vineyard. I am a local, and I love Acland St. I moved to St Kilda from Adelaide because it has a vibe, feeling and culture unlike any other area in Melbourne. The very idea of a commercial shop, like Starbucks or a 7/11, makes me sick.

Where is your community spirit? Are you really working for the people of Port Phillip or are you only worried about your budgets? If you destroy the Vineyard, you are destroying our culture.

Are we to welcome further boredom to St.Kilda? The Vineyard is the final vessel of what made St.Kilda St.Kilda. The Vineyard site doesn't have to make money to be a shining asset in the Port Phillip Portfolio. No franchise 'coffee' business, fast food joint or pony wine bar could offer St Kilda what the Vineyard has, and will continue to provide to the community.

God Save the Vineyard. Places like the Vineyard are at the very essence of St. Kilda. To destroy the Vineyard is to destroy the culture of St. Kilda.

Really, you can hardly find more beautifully expressed 'Fourth Pillar' sentiments than some of those. Nor more variety in what people will believe when it comes to scuttlebutt about Council's intentions.

What really took the cake for misinformation though, was this: the window war!



Council erected a public notice on the building, setting out the processes and works about to be embarked upon, and explaining, in part, that

The works will not change the character of the premises. Council supports the Vineyard remaining a local icon, and these works will enshrine the Vineyard as a permanent fixture of the area.

The council will welcome proposals which are sensitive to the cultural environs and ensure the Vineyard's continuation as a restaurant where locals gather to eat, talk and listen to music. It will be essential that the historic features and presentation of the building be retained.

A fairly straightforward undertaking.

In the window immediately above the sign, though, soon appeared this graphic, of a slick, two storey glass and concrete box, labelled 'Vineyard', but otherwise sharing nothing in common with the existing building. Under the banner

SAVE THE VINEYARD – DON'T LET THEM TURN IT INTO THIS!

the accompanying text said this, if you can't read it. I hope you can spot the differences in world view here:

To the people of St Kilda:

History is a rare species that must be protected. Once we destroy the icons and buildings that link us to our past, our soul will quickly follow.

Port Phillip Council must understand that St Kilda's great treasures – Luna Park, the Palais and the Vineyard (to name a few) can't be abandoned in pursuit of a larger plan. And in much the same way, they have to respect people like us who are dedicated to keeping alive the spirit of St Kilda.

We won't let this place, or our part in building the Vineyard into a St Kilda landmark, be compromised by a flawed strategy. We won't abandon you, and we won't give up without a fight.

I won't even try to unravel which planet of paranoia or cynicism this arrived from. But it's instructive of what a local politician sometimes has to deal with. With rumours flying around that the tender had already been secretly awarded to various other parties, or even to the current operators, Council had only one way through - to run a fourth-pillar-enlightened, and absolutely straight, transparent tender process. Which is what it did.

Councillors had their input on the assessment criteria, but were thereafter rigorously excluded from the process.

The tender principles we pre-set were, (more or less)

- the tender should not be designed to exclude the current operators,
- whatever the outcome, the operators eventually selected needed to be culturally credible with the current fans and patrons,
- and, although a credible market rental was required, Council, as landlord, must be responsible for the cultural product it brought to the street, not just the dollar return it collected.

A tender 'ideal' we discussed early on was that the process should, in effect,

- pick out the culturally credible bidders, and
- then let just those tenderers compete against each other on all the other criteria, including dollar return.

The tender process worked — and this is the practical lesson I think we can offer in cultural pillar management — because:

- the weighted assessment criteria included a set of strong, clearly thought-out and articulated cultural objectives, and
- the tender assessment committee included real subculture-savvy cultural advocates on the team.

The result, you may have guessed, was a highly gratifying surprise, to me at least, with our culturally appropriate 'rogue cowboy' operators actually coming out on top of the rigorously quantified scorecard. And I need to emphasise that the scorecard was weighted towards a cultural outcome — favouring any culturally credible operator — and not toward any one particular operator.

I reckon one of the proudest moments I've had with our council, was in the chamber, hearing the initial tender advice from our Executive Director, Corporate Services, David Graham — a self-described "55 year old Scottish Presbyterian accountant" — an inveterate single bottom line man if ever there was one — giving his fastidiously argued analysis of the cultural factors underpinning his committee's recommendation for the tender award.

So what was so special about this decision? Non-dollar criteria aren't radically new, just because we've now got a fourth pillar to go by. Nor is ending up with a culturally preferred outcome something new — though to obtain this sort of decision, I have a feeling it is often leapt to, intuitively, rather than arrived at by process. I think it's in the way cultural principles were actually embedded in the formal process that makes this decision noteworthy, and, I think, working through the formal processes, and sticking to principle, in all the heat, was an approach we can perhaps take heart from in the new world of quadruple bottom lines.

And the public reaction? Happiness. Puzzlement. And a sudden shift in world views among many of them - I think amazement that local government could actually do what they thought it never would. And for me, a huge sigh of relief, and a great feeling of reconnection with community and local culture. And a real sense of pride in a council organisation actually grappling with the cultural dimension, in practice.

A real Fourth Pillar decision!

It's really interesting to note what sorts of issues drove the local election campaigns in Port Phillip last weekend. In St Kilda Ward there were seven candidates all standing for pretty much the same things:

- ensuring residents' say on the future character of the foreshore, and
- making sure live music venues are retained in St Kilda

Both obviously cultural issues. Roads rates and rubbish were not to be seen.

These cultural issues were where the heat was - the ones on which every candidate was desperate to establish his or her credentials. Beneath these, of course, were countless issues - financial, social and environmental - that are absolutely vital, but were not, at this time, controversial. But maybe also this is saying, that if politicians look after the cultural issues properly, all else may possibly be forgiven. Culture is, after all, **who we are** and **what we live for**.

David Brand is an architect and former Deputy Mayor of the City of Port Phillip