



House of Assembly

Thursday, 28 October 2010

GAWLER RACECOURSE

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:22): In mid-2008, the Premier announced a \$6 million funding agreement with Thoroughbred Racing SA to enable the Gawler Racecourse to be updated to meet the contemporary needs of both the industry and the visitor/punter. That \$6 million investment by the state government has resulted in a wonderful \$12.5 million redevelopment of the track and facilities. This investment protects local jobs, small business, tourism and secures a long-term future of the open space – the track itself.

While the community has generally welcomed the investment, the proposal has been actively opposed by the local council, aided and abetted by the local Liberal Party. The overall proposal also includes the rezoning of a very small portion of surplus land for retail purposes as a way of funding the balance of the \$12.5 million redevelopment. As part of the package, the adjacent high school also obtains a piece of land to give

it frontage to the main road which it has been seeking for some years.

The DPA process to give effect to the rezoning has been opposed by the Town of Gawler aided and abetted, as I said, quite actively by the local branch of the Liberal Party. Despite their opposition to the proposal, the Liberal Party did not have the integrity or the courage to make a formal submission to the DPA process because it did not want to be seen to oppose the redevelopment, but oppose they did.

Their local spokesperson has made a number of public comments that are critical of the proposal. The DPA was authorised by the minister in February 2010 and the comments continue. The Gawler and Barossa Jockey Club then duly lodged a development application to undertake the development as proposed by the DPA. The council then decided, in secret, to take judicial review of the DPA authorisation, and the development has stalled costing the Gawler and Barossa Jockey Club \$30,000 in interest per month. I do not wish to comment on the legal merits of the case as that is obviously the role of the courts to decide. However, I was concerned by media comments made by the council in justification of its actions. The *Adelaide Independent* of 9 January states:

However, Gawler council, urban planning environmental groups, and residents are fighting the proposed 'neighbourhood centre' [the retail development] ...Gawler Council director of development

and strategic planning Michael Wohlstadt said the council consulted the community regarding the racecourse early last year, canvassing the opinions of around 600 residents. As a result, it made a submission to the State Government urging the preservation of open space at the site [the surplus land]...

My sense was that the overall view of the community in that locality was supportive of the development, subject to the concerns being appropriately addressed, which is a reasonable position. So, I decided to undertake a survey of the residents in the locality.

Interestingly enough, the local Liberal Party has publicly criticised me for seeking the views of local residents. Why would the local Liberals oppose a survey? Why would they oppose the local member of parliament engaging the community? I can tell you why. Because the opposition of both the council and the opposition to the development is not supported by the local community. The responses received up until yesterday are instructive. They show that 90 per cent of residents (from about 450 responses) support the development and oppose the council spending up to \$300,000 of ratepayers' money on taking action in the Supreme Court to have the development stopped.

I also want to acknowledge that some people do oppose the development, that is, 2 per cent of respondents oppose the development and support the

council action. While they are in the minority, their views have to be respected and their concerns addressed. However, the survey exposes the lie that the council and the local Liberal Party have been peddling that the development is opposed by the local community.

The council is quite within its rights to take action and take local opinion as one of its considerations in that decision, but it does not have the right, aided and abetted by the local Liberal Party, to lie to the local community and residents.

This proposal is supported by the government and the community, and it is about time that the council and the local branch of the Liberal Party came on board and did the right thing and protected local jobs and the local club as well as the open space for this community.

Time expired.