RECOLLECTIONS & REFLECTIONS

SUBI CENTRO
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The History</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Langsford</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Syers</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Opportunity</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Day</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren White</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Howe</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Works</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Blackburne</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Jones</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie Baxter</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>38-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Lewis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Costa</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Diggins</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoff Parnell</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Brand</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie and Leo Loughnan</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transformation</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Morgan</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Conti</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debra Goostrey</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subi Centro</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laki Baker</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane Kelly</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather Henderson</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>Inside back cover</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Front cover:** Clockwise from top  
Subiaco Common, 2011  
Subi Centro, 2008  
Subiaco Common, 2010

**Inside cover**  
Princeton Apartments, Subiaco, circa 2001  
Photo courtesy of Pindan, photographer Paul Parin
In less than 20 years, Subiaco has been transformed. Eighty hectares of degraded industrial land is now a world-class transit-oriented community that’s breathed new life into an iconic heritage suburb.

In 1994, the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) began with a vision. Today, that vision has become an internationally recognised reality.

A transformation of this magnitude has involved Federal, State and Local Government and many hundreds of others – planners, architects, engineers, developers, businesses and retailers and, of course, our residents.

This is a collection of their pictures and their recollections.

It’s the reflections of residents – residents who have lived in Subiaco all their lives, and new residents who have been drawn to this vibrant community since the first land was offered for sale in 1997.

It’s the tales of people who have started new businesses in Subiaco Square, tapping into the passing parade of commuters travelling to and from Subiaco through the new train station, or who have bought established businesses into the new commercial precincts.

And it captures the memories of the people who made the redevelopment happen.

We hope that their reflections inspire your memories too.

Change is often controversial, and this project was no different. There were people who were strongly opposed to the redevelopment, and we’ve included them in this collection.

At the end of the day, we believe that the SRA has left a legacy that will endure for many years to come.

We’re confident that the SRA has delivered a vibrant, sustainable community that gives residents a diverse range of lifestyle options, the ability to work, shop and play close to their homes, and an efficient public transport system. We’ve conserved its heritage, and reconnected the suburb with its neighbours.

The SRA is proud that our success has been nationally significant. Subi Centro has been a demonstration model for many developments around Australia and in Asia. Most of the people who come here to learn from us are astounded at what we’ve managed to achieve, and they go back to their own local authority and try to replicate our model.

So, as we move forward and embrace the amalgamated Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority in 2012, it’s a fitting time to reflect on our work of almost two decades. We hope you enjoy it.

Don Humphreys
Chairman
Subiaco Redevelopment Authority
THE HISTORY

Clockwise from top left
A retired 1912 vintage steam locomotive in the Subiaco scrap yard, 1965
Photo courtesy of The West Australian

Australian Fine China, Subiaco
Kiln plaque, Australian Fine China, Subiaco
Taxi rank outside Subiaco Train Station, 1913
Photo courtesy of The West Australian

Previous page
Subiaco Train Station, 1800s
Clockwise from top left:
Subiaco Train Station, pre-redevelopment, 1971
Photo courtesy of Rail Heritage WA
Rokeby Road, Subiaco, 1913
Pigeon shooting on the railway line between Perth and Fremantle, 1956
Photo courtesy of The West Australian
Truck stuck under the Hay Street subway, Subiaco
Copyright, Post Newspapers
I’ve lived in this area all my life, and it’s been interesting to see the changes that have taken place.

My parents established a home in Daglish in 1928. Two and a half years later I arrived on their doorstep – in those days home births were quite a common practice. My childhood was quite normal. I went to Subiaco State School, and then went to Perth Boy’s School until I was 14. I then went to a business college for 12 months, qualified in shorthand and typewriting and also had an introduction to book-keeping which ultimately led to me studying accountancy. After business college I went to the Transport Board, that was a Government department and the forerunner to the Department of Transport and Planning.

Working on the railway...
I was always keen to be a railway person and, just before my 17th birthday, I was selected to work on the railways. My first job was at Perth Goods where we did the weigh billing of goods going up into the country. Anyone at the Perth Goods Yard was always keen to get out to a station and, after two years, I was sent to Subiaco Station, a place I used to play as a kid.

Childhood memories...
As you get older, you realise what a fantastic childhood you had. It was a new suburb but, as a kid, you could go for miles out into the bush; you had places such as the West Subiaco Aerodrome; you had Rebold Hill, Perry Lakes; you had horse stables near the Shenton Park subway, and you were just able to do these things as a kid.

We had a swamp where we could go down and paddle; we had what we call pipes – this was the stormwater pipes, which used to drain the water as far back as the children’s hospital, I believe. It was always a challenge to go up these pipes as kids, rather scary, noises echoed as you went up, and you were tempted by the others to do it. It was a great experience.

The Subiaco marshalling yards were also an attraction. It was quite a big place and you had all these industrial places next to it.

The Station Master there at the time was Doug Forrest, and he said “look there’s no future here in this traffic branch, get into the accounts branch”. I was interested in accountancy, so I applied. Oddly enough my father was already working there, but I don’t think he influenced the scene at all, and so ultimately I got into the accounts branch, met my wife, and we bought a block of land in Daglish, living in Subiaco for 12 months while it was built – and we’ve been here all our lives.

I worked on the railways until I was 55 years of age, and was then only too happy to retire.
Daglish was a great place to live then because it was new. Subiaco was the other side of the tracks and I suppose Daglish-ites looked upon it as being not up to the same mark as Daglish. But the reverse is the situation now.

Subi Centro...

The thing is, until things happen you don’t take notice; you’ve got an increase in people coming into the suburb, then you think “well yes that’s what’s needed”. To have this land available so close to the capital city of the State is fantastic.

People who have moved away from Subiaco who might come back now wouldn’t know where they were! There are hardly any original landmarks that you could put a fix on to be able to say “oh that’s where that is”. The oldies who are still around, they have it in their mind’s-eye what it used to be like, and what they’re experiencing now.

I myself have adjusted to it. There’s further development there and the wide open spaces that I used to admire, I’ve now got to see it in a different perspective. Lots of older people would harbour nostalgic thoughts about old Subiaco, but the young ones of course, they embrace it; it gives them a new outlook on life.

It’s still work in progress but, looking at what’s occurred over 17 years, I’d say we’re looking at a seven out of 10. You’ve got to move with the times, the oldies aren’t always going to be around. It’s the young ones you got to consider and I think that they certainly embrace it.

Down the track I see people not being able to afford the rent. It does seem to have put prices up. I don’t know whether it’s businesses trying to make a killing on those who are renting premises to run businesses, but I do feel that unless we can control the prices that landlords are charging, that businesses may start to disappear, particularly in the economic situation that we are currently going through.

I still love living in the area – even though there are some traffic and parking problems. I hope that the authorities will address that problem. I believe that parking spaces are in the planning stage, but I think the traffic needs to be looked at.
I have been here now since 1975. As a railway engineer I was employed in the country for a number of years and came down to Perth in '75 on transfer to reside in Wembley and that is where I still live, in the same home.

Prior to that point, I had some association with the Subiaco area through the Railway Engineering head office in Perth. In those days, the railway was upgrading its assets from timber structures, timber bridges and culverts into concrete and we were engaging Humes to provide the concrete pipes for the purpose. The concrete pipes, a structural member, which were placed under the railway and, as such, had to bear the full loading of the running railway. This was a reasonable success although inconvenient with all the getting off one bus onto another train to go to East Perth. When it re-opened again in 1983, the link was again established and we would catch the train regularly from Subiaco straight through to East Perth.

Subi Centro...

I’m not sure of the exact date, but when it was decided to carry on with the project of Subi Centro there was much discussion about the benefits to the city to have this new area – quite a lot of valuable land being used where Humes and Metters and other companies use to have their businesses and it was hard to envisage at the time how all of this would take place.

But the overall master plan was available for all to see and I think most of us saw it and saw the vision which they [the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority] could see ahead of them. It was quite a large project and, as it evolved, it seemed as though it was going to be forever before it was finished. We saw it take place step-by-step and, at the time, I was fortunate enough to take a few photographs of the area to see how it all panned out.

“I’m a resident who had no fear that it wasn’t going to be a success. I used to look at the old railway and think how things could be improved.”

I suppose I’ve had an interest in the history generally of various things – I kept a few photographs of the development of Cambridge Street and other areas around this particular region. It’s just nice to look back and see how things used to be... it’s one of those little fads I had to capture the past. At the time, it seemed a little senseless but when you look back on the period you find it’s very valuable.

The underground railway...

The obvious thing is that it links the south part of Subiaco with the north. In days gone by, there was a complete barrier with the railway across and a footbridge which provided the only means of movement but, beyond the railway line to
the north, there was little commercial activity. Certainly its expansion of Subiaco now into that area is a seamless link between the south and the north which must be good for business, must be good for the public, for the railway to be where it is. People are now able to venture to Subiaco from more parts of the railway network and do their shopping in comfort, immediately alongside the railway line.

The weekend markets are particularly popular and around that of course we have all the commercial businesses taking place – secretarial work, banking, restaurants – it’s all starting to evolve around the railway. Certainly it’s made a difference to the place. I will point out of course that the sinking of the railway was one of the features of the project because this was perhaps the first tunnel in the Perth area’s railway system. There are several now which have evolved – the Joondalup line, there’s a couple up there and one at East Perth – but the Subiaco one was the first to be developed and it was a ‘cut and fill’ construction. It looked a little messy when it was first being done but once you see the overall planning, to see how it would fit in, it all made sense.

It’s been very much a benefit to Subiaco and to the area generally – particularly football weekends when we find people are flocking in to Subiaco Oval, and they’re using the Subi Centro area as a meeting point for coffee. A lot of people park their cars in that area, so they’re wandering in and out of shopping centres there.

I’m a resident who had no fear that it wasn’t going to be a success. I used to look at the old railway and think how things could be improved. The old station, the old track through the area was functional but one could see that something a little bit different with a seamless passage across from north to south would only be a great thing for the area. Of course in hindsight, you look back and you think “could we envisage it?” Probably we couldn’t, but the plans did show us some idea and I think we were quite excited about the prospect of having it improved. Now we look back, it certainly has improved and it’s a great benefit.

Looking back...

I suppose when I look back prior to the railway line being sunk and the development taking place, I had access to quite a few industrial/business houses of welders and wholesale shopping centres which have disappeared. Now that’s a shame because we don’t have the access to those any longer and in their place we’ve got the more commercial enterprises, the high-rise buildings, the business houses that we see there at the moment. And more industrial type businesses have disappeared, they’ve gone up further north, up to Malaga or whatever, and makes it a little less convenient for us as residents, but it has cleaned the place up and certainly given it a new façade and I’m sure it’s been done for the better.

I think the whole of society is changing. Industry is moving out towards the outside fringes of the city and it’s just another example [the movement of industrial activities from Subiaco]. It may have caused some inconvenience initially but people adjust to it and do things differently. So I have no problem with the way it’s finished up, it’s a successful transition and still happening, I suppose. We still see things happening, we’re still changing.

The housing has certainly improved on what we have been used to – we can see a new era of housing in the area. Where I live in Wembley we have a 1930/40s type structure and down the road at Subi Centro we have these new structures, which are entirely different but have brought a new look into the area. Yes, it certainly has changed. We have the old tech school down the road here which used to be a feature of the area and now that’s been fringed by all this new development. It’s still happening, it won’t ever stay the same – it’ll keep moving on and we’ll continue to see changes no doubt and be living in a more congested environment.

The actual traffic pattern through the Subiaco area has changed considerably since this project, with the old Hay Street subway closing and the railway being sunk under the roadway. We now have the Hay Street extension going at level across the area. We don’t see subways anymore and it does provide for a far more even flow of traffic. It’s all one-way there of course now and that does aid the situation – with more cars on the road now, you have to adjust to this and I’m sure the move to replace the subway and sink the railway has been a great boon for the traffic flow.
Suburban character...

I think it’s changing, it’s changing continually. I think it’s proximity to the city, proximity to the ocean – all those things. Sporting facilities are very good in this area – parks and gardens. The Subiaco Redevelopment Authority [SRA] has been very careful to preserve the parks and gardens in the housing area, and there’s a lovely lake setting with meandering paths for walking or riding bikes through the area. So they have preserved that aspect of living and they haven’t just built houses everywhere and have been careful to blend a little of the open spaces with the housing – and that’s very important.

Although we’ve seen things that changed our lifestyle, the area has become a little more convenient for shopping, for access to the city – I think that has improved, and the surroundings are a lot cleaner. The area has been given a facelift and I think now we perhaps see the old Subiaco in the south and, in this area, we see a new Subiaco, which is good.

I’d like to also say that I’m quite pleased to see some recognition being given to the project and the concept, because it’s an important part of our community to make sure we look back and we don’t remain too stagnant with things. I do belong to the local Lions Club here in Wembley-Floreat, and I had the chance about 10 years ago to put up a heritage trail around the area. So we have a lot of these links with Floreat-Wembley which we’ve been trying to preserve and I see Subiaco as being another area where things should be preserved – the old should be kept there in some form, photographs or some form of monument to depict how it was.

I notice that Subiaco has its little plaques on the street to recognise various key events and key buildings in the area and those things should be preserved with an eye on the fact that you’ve got the new era. You’ve got Subi Centro there which is coming along and giving us a new lease on life, if you like. So we’re quite pleased by the way it’s all happened.
THE OPPORTUNITY
THE OPPORTUNITY
Clockwise from top left

Demolition near the railway line, Subiaco
Copyright, Post Newspapers

Factory owner, Mal Wilson
Copyright, Post Newspapers

Demolition near the railway line, Subiaco
Copyright, Post Newspapers
HON JOHN DAY  MLA
Minister for Planning (2008 – present)

It was recognised in the early 1990s, when Richard Court was Premier, that there was an opportunity for a much better use for the old industrial and railway land in Subiaco which had, to a large extent, become derelict.

This was in the days when the virtues of transit-oriented developments, getting higher density and better use out of major land around public transport hubs were new concepts. The need for services around the Perth–Fremantle rail line were being recognised and so the decision was made to go ahead with what was then quite a revolutionary new development, using the redevelopment authority model.

I have some recollection of what Subi Centro looked like back then. I remember in the 1970s visiting my late father, who was in St John of God Hospital in Subiaco, and taking him out one day – heading down to the old Subiaco Station and over the walkways. It was vastly different to what is there now, of course. It really is an enormous transformation which I think just about everybody now regards as being hugely successful and beneficial to Subiaco.

\[ \text{I am delighted at what has been achieved in Subiaco, and the new life that has been breathed into the area, the revitalisation which has been achieved and the high level of vibrancy and public amenity which now exists in Subiaco.} \]

It had been recognised, and proven through experience, that the redevelopment authority model was the only option for the Subiaco redevelopment. A single public agency with the ability to undertake master planning, overall land use planning and design for an area, development control (the ability to approve the buildings to be established in the area) and with the responsibility of cleaning up contaminated soil, which exists in many old industrial areas such as Subiaco, East Perth and on the old Midland Railway Workshop site.

Having all of those powers and responsibilities under one agency ensures a very strong level of coordination and consistency. It also means public funding can be made available up front so that the cost of getting the development going can be met. Developments like Subiaco, East Perth and Midland almost certainly can never be undertaken by the private sector because of the very substantial upfront investment that needs to be made, and the debt which is therefore incurred.

In the case of Subiaco it’s been a very positive net return, in financial terms, but it would never have happened without the public funding and the substantial investment to clean up the contaminated sites and to underground the rail line and build the underground station.

It’s obviously better to undertake a much more coordinated and larger scale redevelopment through one agency rather than doing it with individual land owners in a much more ad hoc way. You get a more consistent outcome in the end. We’re also seeing this in the Perth City Link project, for example, where the Perth-to-Fremantle rail line is currently being undergrounded in the city centre. We’re going to see a similar excellent outcome there, I think, which will be the result of a lot of thought having gone into the overall design and a lot of attention to detail.

An innovative master plan...

The undergrounding of the rail line and the new Subiaco station, which allowed development above the station and much better connectivity for pedestrian walkways, was certainly a first for Western Australia and showed what can be
achieved through the use of an innovative master plan. It set out to create a transit-oriented development with medium density development around the train station, mixed use retail and accommodation areas, with restaurants, cafés, commercial facilities and office space all in the same precinct. The result is Subiaco Square, a very vibrant outcome which attracts a lot of people.

The intention was to provide medium density development in high-quality buildings and apartments, with the specific aim of reducing reliance on motor vehicle transport and increasing the use of public transport. Obviously that opportunity was there with the site being adjacent to the Perth-to-Fremantle rail line, but it was also responding to the changing demographics of our community. We have an ageing population, and more single people, and there is a growing need for good quality, apartment-style accommodation rather than single houses on separate blocks. Increasingly people want to live in areas of high amenity in apartment-style accommodation where they can access services very easily; where they can just walk out of their front door and get a coffee, or go to a restaurant, go to a movie, or walk in the park. That’s been very much the philosophy around this development.

The public open space that has been achieved in the residential area – the Green Spine – is a very high-quality outcome. It is a wonderful park, very well maintained and a lot of detail has been thought about in its design and construction. Once that green spine is completed, the amenity for local residents, and importantly visitors to the area, will be outstanding.

The residential vs industrial balance...

Where there is an opportunity for high-standard residential development close to major public transport services, moving industrial activities to other locations makes sense. Having said that, we do need sites for industrialised activity in the metropolitan area. The Government is in the process of developing a land strategy for the Perth and Peel regions to provide for growth in economic and employment land in appropriate areas in and around the metropolitan area. It’s important that people have the opportunity to work not too far from where they live. In the case of Subiaco, it was recognised that this area had changed substantially and to accommodate more people in residential developments and to undertake high quality retail and office developments, really was making much better use of the land.

I understand there was quite a bit of resistance from the community at the time. I was in my first term of Parliament back then and not directly involved with this project. I know from my role as Planning Minister for the past three years that there was quite substantial resistance to the particular planning arrangements that we have put in place for the Australian Fine China (AFC) site. People do have a resistance to change occurring in their locality and we see that in many parts of Perth. But I think it has been demonstrated – for example through the outcomes here in Subiaco – that once developments which are well thought through and constructed according to good design outcomes are completed, people will not only be much more accepting, but they will be very supportive once they can see what actually is achieved and the benefits for the local community. It is easy to see how well this development has been integrated into the wider Subiaco area.

There was certainly an intention – and it has been achieved – to provide a proportion of affordable housing for people on lower incomes, and also for social housing for people on social security benefits. That has been an important part of this development.

The environmental outcomes have also been very important – reducing the amount that people need to rely on private motor vehicle transport is one outcome, but it’s also been issues such as having appropriate solar orientation to take advantage of solar energy in a passive way, both for heating and also cooling, and also ensuring that there is maximum possible reuse of water.

Retaining heritage and character...

Subiaco obviously does have a lot of character, and a lot of heritage buildings. I’m sure in the early days people were fearful that what was going to be constructed would not integrate or be sympathetic to the wider heritage aspects of Subiaco. I think what has been achieved has
shown people that it has been thought about carefully. The AFC development (which is currently underway) with the incorporation of the old pottery kilns, is an important example. There are other examples, too, of where the history and the heritage of the area is very well reflected, either in what’s been constructed or through interpretive elements.

I am delighted at what has been achieved in Subiaco, and the new life that has been breathed into the area, the revitalisation which has been achieved and the high level of vibrancy and public amenity which now exists in Subiaco.

Return on investment...
The State Government has invested approximately $200 million over the past 17 years to achieve the outcome that we now see. The private sector is also estimated to have invested almost $1 billion in the construction of the private sector buildings, homes, commercial offices, retail facilities and so on. So I think that is a very good return. Without this redevelopment authority model and without the decisions being made back in the early to mid-1990s, we simply wouldn’t have the development that is here now, which is providing such wonderful opportunity for people who are able to either work or live in the area.

I think the opportunity for people who both live in the area, and also those who are visiting the area, or riding through the area, is excellent. The amount of people walking around, particularly on weekends, socialising, exercising, using the cycle ways and so on, is excellent.

I think it is a credit to all those who have been involved – all of the staff, the board members, the consultants, and members of the community going back to 1994 when the decision was made initially to establish the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority. It is an outstanding example of a major transit-oriented development and shows what can be achieved through this model, for the benefits of people locally and for the wider community.
LOREN WHITE
Subiaco resident
Former Councillor, City of Subiaco (1992-2011)
Former Board Member, Subiaco Redevelopment Authority

I’ve been a long-time Subiaco resident since 1979. I lived in the old part of Subiaco around the Subiaco Theatre Gardens. Due to a little local issue or two around there, with diagonal parking being proposed, I put my hand up and became a Councillor in 1992, and forgot to leave for nearly 20 years, until 2011. Since being on Council I have become very involved in a lot of interesting things other than parking.

I also immediately became very involved in town planning. Two reasons for that – one, I seemed to be able to read plans where many other Councillors couldn’t. I seemed to understand how Schemes worked even though I’m a mathematics teacher, which surprised a few people. The other reason I got involved with Council was for the forward planning. In 1992, Councillors seemed to operate year-by-year with not a lot of forward planning.

The City of Subiaco had been quite controversial in its heritage ‘wars’ through the 1970s and 1980s to get a Town Planning Scheme up to enhance its heritage future. In that sense we still didn’t seem to be able to generate a set of plans in other areas for five-year thinking. So it was again a small group of us who decided that we needed to do something about that and got people involved in long-term strategic planning as well. Now we have 30-year plans, where we once only had two-year strategic plans, making it work very well for the city.

The other lovely feature of Subiaco of the time was the strip shopping idea with a lot of small vendors, but it’s hard to recreate it. You got to know a lot of the actual shopkeepers in their various forms – the people who ran them as their own business.

Living in old Subiaco...

Apart from Council, the White family were ‘itinerants’ until we arrived at Subiaco, hardly staying in one place more than four or five years. We found Subiaco very attractive. It was a sleepy little inner-urban place, quite a mixture of old run-down houses and then a mixture of old houses that had been redone; a struggling retail area and quite a bit of what I call ‘light commercial to heavy industrial’ activity going on, but it had a good atmosphere.

In the main street, Rokeby Road, and then in Hay Street there were lots of small shops – there was a quite fascinating range of fruit and vegetable shops, butchers, fish and chips, but mainly fashion shops and things like that, quirky little cafés – not many – and we learnt very quickly from where we lived that walking was the best option, rather than driving.

When we arrived we had two young children and we had managed to buy an old house that was on a large lot of 780sqm. The house had been used as a meditation centre for the ‘Orange People’ and when we walked in, we bought it. It was not a big house though it was big for old Subiaco. It was six rooms basically with some extension on the back that had been done in the most exciting format of orange tiled walls and exposed jarrah timber which was okay, and almost a cement floor.

It was very good because we were opposite a park. I was able to have fun gardening and managed to plant lots of fruit trees so by the time we left we had 10-12 major fruit trees.

I was going back to UWA [University of Western Australia] to do a Dip Ed at the time when we first moved in and I walked to Uni and back
from Subiaco. My wife had managed to score a
teaching job at Churchlands and so everything
was close and convenient. We introduced the
children to walking – that meant I was carrying
them in a sling or pushing a pram down to
Subiaco shops and we managed to explore a lot.
We had to pass the playground on the way there
and on the way back, so we had to stop and that
was part of the pleasure of being here; you didn’t
have to drive or spend a lot of time moving around
in the car.

The next year I got a job teaching. The weekends
were good in Subiaco as we then discovered
the markets, which had just opened up about
1981/82. That was a great place to meet friends
down there with their children; the kids could run
around in a safe environment and you would give
them 20 cents, and they would go and spend half
an hour looking for something to spend it on while
you could sit down and have a good talk. I miss
that place a bit although my children have grown
up and left now. It was good fun.

The other lovely feature of Subiaco of the time
was the strip shopping idea with a lot of small
vendors, but it’s hard to recreate it. You got to
know a lot of the actual shopkeepers in their
various forms – the people who ran them as their
own business.

Towards Subi 2000... forerunner to the SRA

I had sort of heard about ‘Subi 2000’ which was
about trying to solve the railway line problem but
I wasn’t very clear until my first night after being
sworn in as a Councillor. At the first meeting, the
Subi Towards 2000 Committee was looking for
new members and that’s when you had to learn
about it pretty quickly. I was very lucky that I was
accepted to go on to the Committee even though I
had no experience.

From the first meeting, I came to understand
that the plan was to convince the people that
burying the railway line was a great solution
and that it would allow Subiaco to join in with
Wembley without this barrier of a railway line in
its place. Secondly, it would become obvious that
a lot of major heavy industry was moving out of
Subiaco and much of this land was coming up for
redevelopment.

Much of the immediate land that was coming up
for use was owned by the State Government. I
think they owned all that land over there, of which
40 per cent was endowed to the City of Subiaco to
run and encourage workers to come to Subiaco.
In return, the city had the right to charge lease
fees and lease it out to industry. But the big
ticket industries like Metters and others were all
angling to move out because the costs had got too
prohibited.

Working with Forbes and Fitzhardinge, the urban
planners... the visionary thinkers used by the city,
a lot of work was done already at the time and it
was coming to fruition that sinking the railway
line was best. We were developing an argument
that the upvaluing of the land immediately around
the railway line and over the sunken railway
line would pay for the cost of sinking the rail. In
other words, we were developing a cost-neutral
program and the only thing we needed was
cooperation from the State Government to be
prepared to use their land for the tunnel in return
for gaining the benefit of upvaluing their own
land. Negotiations were taking place with the
Carmen Lawrence Government of the time... and
I can’t quite remember which Planning Minister of
that particular time we were dealing with.

So the idea then was to redevelop much of the
industrial land but not all of it, because industries
like Australian Fine China and BOC Gases were
still tripping along very well and they weren’t really
interested in getting involved. The Government
was certainly interested because they had unused
railway shunting yards that were just producing
a lot of dust. We were getting there but then the
Labor State Government of that time decided to
start selling bits of their land, which was a pity
because in the end they sold about half of Hood
Street and about a third of Roydhouse Street,
which ended up being a bit of a headache because
it affected the replanning of the total area. We
then had private ownership to deal with resuming
land, as it was an expensive business.

While we were negotiating with the Labor
Government they lost the election and the Richard
Court Government came in. Richard Lewis
also came along with some members of his
department and thought ‘well wouldn’t it be better
if we did something like East Perth Redevelopment
Authority and set up an Act and gave extra powers
to a body that could then overcome the limitations
that local governments have’. 
Great idea, just a very difficult birth in the sense that no one likes giving up control and the City of Subiaco was no exception to that. It was their idea, they put in a lot of money and effort to start developing the vision. But the hardhats, the CEO at the time, Patrick Walker, and the city officers were quite persuasive. What the Redevelopment Authority could do in 10 years would take us 30. They had more chance of making it cost neutral and a small Council like the City of Subiaco could be left with a big deficit if they didn’t do it right.

They persuaded us and negotiations started with the State Government. Before the Terms of Agreement were reached, the State Government had already put up the Act and it went through Parliament faster than any other Act, because both sides of the Parliament voted for it. So, it was a unanimous decision – one of the rare events I think, because everyone thought it was a great idea.

The Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) was set up and immediately the SRA Board was formed with two nominees from the City of Subiaco for the Minister to appoint. It took another two years to sign-off on the financial arrangement and the cooperation arrangement between the City of Subiaco and the Planning Minister, Richard Lewis.

When the SRA Board sat down and looked at what the City of Subiaco had been proposing they found that much of the grandiose ideas were done around the station and we were wasting too much commercially valuable land. It was creating dead spots that would not be as active at night or, if it was to be active at night, the local residents would complain because there’s too much noise. They said we had bad dead spots around the station even though it looked fantastic. That was the first bit of controversy that came up with the SRA’s first Town Planning Scheme for the area and their vision of what should be built, and how it should be built. It was so different from what the City had in mind.

**High-density housing...**

It was a bit of a culture shock all round because the City had been working on these conceptual ideas for Subi 2000 and suddenly a new group comes up with something different. However, as the agreement set between the Minister and the City of Subiaco, the redevelopment was intended to be cost neutral and therefore one had to be a bit commercial to make sure the cost of putting in the tunnel and surrounding infrastructure was covered.

When the first set of SRA plans came out they showed a massive increase in residential density. It was, in the minds of the people at the time, quite an idea among the villager-type thinking people in Subiaco, that you could have a sustainable urban village without high-rise.

The other major concern with the plan being quite big and containing a lot of substance was the fear of Rokeby Road retail slipping down the hill into the railway precinct of Wembley. Initially the SRA were proposing to double the size of retailer space in all of that station area. The biggest fear was the development of a shopping centre complex. The Subiaco Business Association was very concerned about the amount of retailers’ space – they didn’t worry about the office space because that meant workers coming in, and potential shoppers.

The other thing that upset them was the re-organised road infrastructure and issues regarding traffic flows. In other words, the locals wanted the new area to take a lot of the traffic and Roberts Road for example would become a peaceful back strip. It didn’t happen. It was never proposed to happen that way.

The City had a big rally about that and I’ll never forgive my colleagues who decided when the rally was getting really rugged and they were getting asked difficult questions, that they suddenly had really important family commitments to go to. I got left to stand up and say “well look, you know, great sentiments but I have to be honest, it isn’t going to happen. Roberts Road is going to stay Roberts Road and there has to be higher density around the railway station.” The concept at the time was the forerunner to the transit-oriented development idea. It made sense that you put more people where transport is best – buses road and train. So, yes I didn’t win many friends that day with three or four hundred pretty riled up people!

The Scheme went back to the drawing board and this time round the City and the SRA formed residential sub-committees and, through a lot
more talking and little workshops, we eventually came up with the 1996 Scheme. By that time, I had also gained a chance to be nominated onto the SRA Board.

Being on the SRA Board was an eye-opener first. I can remember ‘meeting the enemy’ so to speak, because there was a lot of rhetoric on Council about these nasty people who had been appointed, who I found out were, in fact, fairly community, like-minded people, and very successful in what they were doing... very clear thinkers.

Heritage...

One of funniest sagas I remember in Council was the criticism that we didn’t do enough to protect heritage. We wanted to protect heritage, so we put aside a lot of energy and effort and started developing a heritage plan but in the game of understanding sensitivities, you really have to be conscious of who you choose to run the initial consultation. We learned that you don’t get a consultant who is a heritage fanatic, because they tend to be a little bit visually impaired on what happens with all these other people who worry about heritage restrictions.

The better idea this time around was to amend the Scheme to include a heritage precinct. Rather than listing individual houses, you develop heritage precincts and that way you can describe what is actually heritage and it’s not always a specific building. Preserving a building is not preserving heritage. Preserving heritage is more about when people come to the spot, they sense and feel the history and the history relates to what is there. So, the heritage is the linking of the historical feel with the physical surrounds.

There is some interesting linking but visually people know they’re in Subiaco. They know it’s a time and place. So trees can become significant in that sense like the Morton Bay Figs on Roberts Road for example. The Council is now trying to develop these heritage precincts. We try to identify what the significant markers are, that take people back essentially to that time that gives that sense. It’s not easy to do but that’s where the push is now.

Affordability and sustainability...

The other things I did on Council was to help set up the social housing committee and a sustainability committee. The wonderful thing about Subiaco was the incredible mixture of people and people in little houses could live next to people in big houses and it just historically happened that way.

People who built big houses bought three blocks while those only wanting little houses bought one block. Chester Street is a classic example of little houses next to big houses.

The idea was to keep Subiaco as that city where we have a lot of elderly people, a lot of people with children, a lot of people with disabilities – the idea is trying to retain them. The City of Subiaco has a policy now where they lease out land at low rents to organisations who provide low cost housing where feasible. Particularly in a suburb where everyone can walk to most of their conveniences, it works really well.

For the sustainable house, Steve Potter and I realised that if we got in early, we could talk the rest of the SRA Board into putting a block aside for the City of Subiaco to come in and experiment with an environmental house. The idea being the environmental house looked no different from anything else, but you didn’t have to necessarily conform to all the guidelines – we were able to put solar panels on the roof and all those sorts of things.

Perth’s not an easy place to implement these kinds of things because it has a bit of a cowboy mentality in the sense that the cavalries are all gung-ho and yet also conservative, but we generated a lot of interest in the environmental house and it did influence quite a few people, subtly. We showed you could design a house that still looks good, not fantastic, but still good, very liveable with all these added benefits. In the two years it was up and running we had to turn on the air-conditioning only six or eight times. We were running on a temperature range of about 16 degrees at its lowest to a max of 26 degrees I think. We had grey water recycling, the lot.

Subi Centro achievements...

I think it’s worked incredibly well and, on reflection, the planning group who came in and set up the original contracts and that sort of
thing, were far more visionary and conscious of what Subiaco could look like into the future than the rest of the people involved.

I think more could have been done but I think it’s been great for Subiaco. Once my wife and I saw what was happening after 30 years together in Subiaco and after 23 years in an old house, constantly doing renovations, constantly doing repairs, when our children left home and we were left with a large garden... we were getting tired, and we saw what was happening in the new area and looked at our lifestyle and moved there.

So we’ve been living here in the Centro Village area for coming up 10 years and I haven’t regretted it. We’ve totally enjoyed it. There are some little annoying things but they’re all part of the sacrifice. You can’t build development like this and cater for every family member having a car. It’s got good pedestrian features, the extra money has been put in to make it more walkable, so you’re close to the things you need. I’ve timed it at nearly six minutes for me to walk from here to the Woolworths and on the way I pass the Station Street Markets on the weekend and the railway station. It’s about the same time to drive, longer in fact, if you look for parking – if the parking under Woolworths isn’t full. So it’s much easier to walk.

Also, if you look at some of these areas they have natural boundaries around but they don’t stop you walking through the boundaries – they are just a visual reminder that there is now a shift from one area to another. When this little area is finished off you’ll be totally surrounded by tall, more solid buildings so it’ll be a little enclave, with a protective wall built around us. That’s consciously done. A lot of road designs tend to go around, but if you enclose roads, you enclose people and noise as well. You’ve got to do something else to deal with it, so in that sense it has worked well.

The project has been one of the good learning curves for everyone involved. If you keep a reasonably open mind you learn as you go along. I personally would like to put a few more dots on the ‘I’s’ and cross a few more ‘T’s’ and I think, like building a house, your last five per cent – the finishing off – is what most people notice. So if the paint job is no good or the skirting boards are the wrong size, you can ruin a really good house, and I think the same way about Subi Centro, in the sense that the whole area has just got to get properly finished.
THE OPPORTUNITY

Subi Centro was a vast ‘backyard’ of Subiaco, as we used to call it. It was the wasteland, the industrial land for the whole of the western suburbs for nearly a century.

The vision was to try to seamlessly bridge the suburbs of Subiaco and Wembley but, at the same time, do that in a 20th Century manner which reflected the values of Subiaco and Wembley in a modern context.

There had probably been two decades of work – thoughts and ideas about the project – before I became involved in 1994. They had come from ideas about how one might raise the railway line or lower the railway line – a lot of this originally came from the fact that the railway line was an obstruction and barrier to traffic.

I don’t think anyone in the industrial areas saw this as a huge opportunity because back in the 1970s and 1980s that’s not what cities were doing. It was only just becoming a trend in northern Europe, England and North America – so I guess they were trying to solve transport issues and then we realised that by solving the transport issue we had this other opportunity, which was to then add value to those two localities.

Public consultation...

There were five years of various sorts of public consultation through both informal and formal statutory planning mechanisms and we created, in the end, a series of Concept Plans that were one better than the other each time, and the community had the opportunity to have their input into that process. Finally, we got to a point where we felt we had a concept that the community could buy into and we were comfortable that we should go forward with it. It took from 1991 to 1996, really, until the community endorsed that final concept.

There was a lot of opposition and it was mostly from the people of Subiaco. They had always traditionally had a very contained town centre. They felt any change to that would allow in the people from the northern end and would dilute the effectiveness of their town centre. They saw themselves as a little country town that just happened to be three kilometres from the city centre of Perth and so that was a big change.

The other thing at the time was the retailers of Subiaco had seen a great deal of change to Rokeby Road and a lot of the key traditional stores had disappeared. So they felt any additional retail or additional economic activity was a further threat to Rokeby Road. So we had some people in the community who were worried about additional pressure on community facilities arising from extra population; we had the retailers and property owners worried that we would further dilute the retail core of the town centre; and we had the usual scaremongering about the change of character to the place and that it would be very hard to maintain that ‘intrinsic Subiaco’.

“Subiaco is a fantastic bit of real estate. It has a really great character and urban environment – there is a lot to build on; there is a history there.”

People from Wembley weren’t so worried other than we would potentially put a bit of traffic through their suburb. I think we had several public meetings at which there were 200-300 people. They were educational as well as an opportunity for us to listen. When we finally went out with a more final concept, we had more than 600 submissions, which gives you an idea of how involved the community was with the process.

We looked at their concerns and, one-by-one, addressed them... just broke it down and said “look we’re comfortable (looking at the economic...
studies] there will be a benefit to the retailer in the end.” We had experts come in from the eastern states who had done this before and said “Yes your town centre is struggling, but we’re going to reinforce it and strengthen it” – which proved to be the case.

We looked at the issues around density and traffic and said “by the time we restructure Roberts Road and all the roads around it, we can probably get a much better road system,” which we’ve demonstrated because we got connectivity and more alternatives for people. The key pressure points of Hay Street and Haydn Bunton Drive now have less pressure on them because there are other linkages.

As to character and spirit and how that has changed, that was probably the hardest issue to address because it’s so hard to define but, because it’s been so gradual, after the initial beginnings and works had happened, people have adjusted to it over time. All it did was strengthen the business community in Subiaco and it has shown the community groups not to fear change that might be happening a kilometre or two away from them.

More challenges...
The other challenges were mainly logistical. We had to underground an existing rail line and keep one operational as well. We had 1.6 kilometres of underground tunnel and about a two kilometre work site which we had to dig in an urban environment. That was nearly a $40 million exercise and the contractor, Multiplex, invented an entirely new system to deliver that. Other issues were maintaining a road system around the site which involved temporary roads and temporary bridges.

The other challenge of course, was that any time we did anything or went anywhere on the site we encountered a great deal of contamination and we needed to then work through a system of effectively remediating sites, always knowing that it didn’t matter how much testing we did, we would always end up finding things we didn’t expect.

The great thing about Subiaco was that we were effectively building a ‘renovation on an existing solid house’. Subiaco is a fantastic bit of real estate. It has a really great character and urban environment – there is a lot to build on; there is a history there.

We effectively had a brown-field site. It was unconstrained in the way we could transition from its former uses. A lot were temporary uses transitioning to more permanent uses. We didn’t have to do as much staging as you might in other projects. The real value was the fact that we were building on an existing character and settlement. For example, one of the first things we did was change the post code from Jolimont to Subiaco and it basically doubled the value of the land overnight because people perceived it as being Subiaco rather than the Jolimont industrial area, so that gives you an idea of that advantage.

It was very heavily programmed as you might imagine. The key bit of infrastructure was the tunnel because, until that barrier could be lowered and the new roads put in, it was very hard to psychologically connect the project area with Subiaco. However, in the interim, we went to the other least constrained bit of land in the project area over in Salvado Road and started the residential development. There were two reasons for that – one is that the lead time on those things can take a couple of years and that’s just to get the land on the market, and then of course we had to build the houses and start to get a community. So we knew that was a five-year exercise by which time we would have most of the key infrastructure in place and the main open space links beginning to be generated.

It was also developing cash flow for the project because it was readily available, good quality residential land.

Integration of old and new...
Overall, for Subi Centro as a place, there was a lot more effort put into how the urban fabric integrates, and how it looks and how it works than most other projects in Western Australia at the time. It pretty much set a benchmark for that.

Most of it on the surface looks quite good. It sort of fits in with Subiaco and I think that’s been part of the reason why it’s been so readily adopted by the community because it didn’t produce this rather large foreign development on their back door step.
In terms of all the infrastructure – the roads, the pipes, the wires and the train – that has all worked really well. The train station now has 10 times more users than it did before. On almost every level it has been a success and hence it has won numerous awards throughout Western Australia and Australia.

I think we, as a project team, always wondered how we could have better knitted the new community with the old. But that’s probably the only aspect that I think in hindsight we probably could have done better.

Massive achievement...

The fact that the project had been given some consideration for the previous two decades and nothing had happened, and then a redevelopment authority comes along and the whole project is commenced within three years gives you an idea of the importance of a redevelopment authority. They are a singularly focused organisation with the appropriate skills that you need for that particular job and, without a redevelopment authority and the Act and the powers they have, you would never get any of these projects to the scale and complexity completed inside two decades.

I think as a model, as a transit-oriented-development model, it’s probably at the forefront still within Australia. It’s interesting, you can look back and there’s been a lot of development done in the eastern states and even now in Western Australia and I don’t think many of them get close to what Subiaco has achieved. So I think as a demonstration model of what can be done in a broader urban and town planning sense, it is a superlative effort.

The other thing that really stands out for me is that it doesn’t matter how hard you try at the time, when you look back, you can always feel you could have pushed it a bit harder and added more to it. The most common thing I hear from people involved early on, and even some Councillors who were on Subiaco Council at the time who had concerns, was that the densities we achieved then that seemed so progressive, are probably now seen as conservative.
THE WORKS
THE OPPORTUNITY

Previous page
Temporary rail line around the new station site, Subiaco, 1998
Photo courtesy of John Syers

Clockwise from top left
Excavating rail tunnel site, Subiaco, circa 1998
Hay Street diversion, Subiaco, 1998
Excavating rail tunnel site, Subiaco, circa 1998
Photo courtesy of TPG Town Planning and Urban Design
Left to right
Excavating rail tunnel site, Subiaco, circa 1998
Relocating a kiln in the Australian Fine China site, Subiaco, 2011
Works near King Edward Memorial Hospital, Subiaco, circa 1998
Photo courtesy of Jack Michael
Our involvement with Subi Centro was right from the beginning when it was a sand patch and first advertised for tender by the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA). We were one of a number of firms that put in a tender for the redevelopment of what the SRA called at that time the ‘jewel in the crown’, which was the square around the station and all the surrounding buildings.

When we won the project we were very excited. It was the largest urban renewal project in Australia, so it attracted a lot of national press. We were not sure of the strength of the market for leasing and or selling, so we undertook major pre-sales marketing campaigns and pre-leasing campaigns for the retail space and the sale of the apartments.

At the time there was a perception in Perth that we would never sell residential apartments around a train square or close to a train station because of the noise. However, the market proved that to be very wrong, in fact that is actually what the people wanted. They wanted to be close to transport, shopping and in proximity to the cafés and all the things Subiaco Square now offers.

The majority of the first stage apartments sold off the plan. We did some marketing from display apartments when they were finished but, in the main, all of these projects were pre-marketed and sold off the plan from an on-site marketing centre located where the current station stands.

There was a lot of opposition in the early days. People were saying the development was too dense but in fact we were of the view at the time that it could have been denser and it would have been just as successful and just as attractive as it is today.

Today, I think Subi Centro is marvellous. As a promoter of the original project I would have to say it has been highly successful for a whole range of reasons. There is a diverse range of people and businesses and all of them without exception are very happy with where they are living and working.

Our role...

We put together the consortium to develop the Subiaco Square project and brought to the table, for the part-tender process, a very experienced and financially strong consortium of three parties. It was a joint venture with the expertise and financial strength to ensure that the Government got what it wanted, which was the delivery of the project with no hiccups.

It was marketed through newspapers, the internet and a marketing centre we built on site, which had models and all the displays of the various parts of the project.

“At the time there was a perception in Perth that we would never sell residential apartments around a train square or close to a train station because of the noise.”

The marketing pitch at the time was ‘The soul of Europe in the heart of Subiaco’ and that was deliberately worked up as a catchphrase because we genuinely believed this was a European-style square that was a first, not only for Perth but for Australia.

Buyers responded very well because, at the time, the market for this type of development was just starting to mature within the inner city of Perth.

I believe the success of the project is due to the attention to detail and the support given by the SRA to us, as major developers. The whole planning of open space, the scale of the design and the guidelines we achieved made it very attractive for us, the buyers and the leaseholders.
The SRA set the vision and the guidelines and it was up to the developers who tendered, to put before them that vision in significant detail, with artists’ impressions and models, to support their submission to make sure that this didn’t turn into a ‘slum’ in a few years.

Realising the vision...

I feel very proud of what we’ve achieved. I think that the products that we have created here and the opportunities we have given so many people to live and work in this sort of environment have been very rewarding. This has been evident by the fact that many of the apartments around here have sold for what would be record prices not only for Subiaco but within the inner Perth city area. You’ll also notice that there are very few opportunities to lease commercial or retail space within this area. It is very popular for all forms of tenancies.

As a joint venture or consortium, we had a project manager but we also had a very active project committee that managed this whole project. This dream could not have been achieved without the close working relationship with the SRA and, to a lesser extent, the Subiaco City Council and all the people, all the highly-qualified professional people involved within this project.

I think the vision has now come to fruition and I think that Perth, the SRA and the Subiaco Council, along with us as the consortium who built this ‘jewel in the crown’, can be very proud of what has been achieved today.
I lived in Bagot Road after I studied and worked in England so I’ve always had a very close affinity with Subiaco. I was one of the very first Eagles members, so it’s always been part of my heart living there.

Subi Centro was a really interesting challenge when it came to us and the team that was assembled with Bill Burrell as the planner. It was in the early days of urban design, which was finding that space between the roles of the planner, architect and designer.

When you look at a railway line, and at what you have on either side of it, it’s always sort of got the arse-end of everything – the disuse, the industrial stuff. As trains have become quieter, and are perceived as a more positive thing, in a transit-orientated development people do want to live around railway stations now. There’s major access to cheap transport, to work and all that sort of thing. The concept of a village around a railway station, whilst in Europe it is quite common, in Australia it’s still quite rare. So it was a really interesting challenge.

*The master planning process...*

The Minister at the time was Richard Lewis and the Premier was Richard Court, and they obviously had a very strong interest, being property guys. Richard Lewis was a planner himself so they were quite keen. There was a Labor Government who was in power in Canberra, but they were also very keen there with Brian Howe (Federal Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services), to start the whole Building Better Cities program.

For us, it gave a real opportunity for more innovation and there was also this Federal Government money, so you could set your goals higher.

The other significant thing is that there wasn’t a lot of planning over brown land, or old industrial land, other than what had happened up at Claisebrook, and a lot of the planners had a bit of a ‘carte blanche’ approach to planning. To a degree that happened here as well, and it was almost looked at in light of there being nothing there – just plan over the top of it.

When Bill Burrell and I started working together, there were some very strong ideas for the model we wanted to do and around how we could knit the fine grain suburb of Subiaco, and the very strong Rokeby high street through to what was a lower density Wembley.

Of course you had the bigger ingredients of St John of God Hospital, all the medical infrastructure there and the really powerful force of Subiaco Oval, but we looked at this general way of living, the finer grain, and how could we connect those. I suppose the philosophy at the time was pretty much guided by some of the thinking happening in Europe and North America, which is really where you should look to, the DNA of what was there – taking in what the width of the streets were, the rhythm and pattern of density etc, so we really took that attitude and started to develop.

The pattern of development there came through as we pretty much had it on the traditional plan. At that point as it was rolling out, there wasn’t a lot of reaction from the community because it wasn’t affecting anyone.

Then, as we progressed through to the first unveiling of the master plan, it was interesting to reflect on the methodology because we were encouraged by Government and I think our own professional discipline, to really take it to the ‘nth’ degree, to get it all worked out, to paint a fairly refined and defined picture of what was going to happen there.

Then we went to the community. Well the biggest lesson we learnt was that we should have gone in with a blank sheet of paper and said “we’re
listening to you, we want to hear from you, what do you want?”

Instead it was, well this is what you’re going to have. Obviously we were terribly enthusiastic about what we had designed. Everyone felt very confident that it was the right solution, and we felt that by bringing this new infrastructure, this whole new plan, there would be great warmth and enthusiasm.

“We thought we were on the right track, and when you go into these places you work out what the issues are, the opportunities, what people’s ambitions are, what people’s visions are and generally, if there’s some small opposition group, you should work out what the issues are and negotiate with them, you should try and find some trade-off.

You should listen to the people who know the area first and really come with their love and passion for it, and figure out what it actually is they want. Sometimes it’s rubbish, because a lot of people actually come up with some crazy ideas that are really not important in the hierarchy of things, but some of the things which I thought were going to be real no brainers, like preserving the station, preserving the old signal house, weren’t. There wasn’t a lot of love for all those buildings at all, and that surprised me.

I think the key thing at the time, if I can remember rightly, was about Rokeby Road, which didn’t actually run through the station but came up to it and you had pedestrian access into the square itself, which was a lot smaller. There was a series of different camps in there – one wanted to reduce commercial development because they thought it was going to kill Rokeby Road. I’d say the outcome of that is that it’s actually made Rokeby Road come to life, and I think planting those trees and all that sort of stuff has been the generation of the quality of the urban spaces in the streets, especially in Subi Centro. I think the other thing was the green belt to the east, that was a strong one as well which wasn’t in the initial program.

We were trying to get people who would come from the station down Roberts Road into the stadium. This sort of bifurcation, which really was successful in terms of diminishing the crowd and catering for the people who want to go straight to the station and home, versus those who want to go to the restaurants and catch up with friends in Rokeby Road.

We had a series of meetings with the community about these things and it was also quite strongly fuelled by the Uniting Subiaco group which was a good voice for people’s concerns. You can be on the right side or the wrong side and I always end up on the wrong side, but I really respect what they do as a mouthpiece for disenfranchised groups.

That just sort of shows the insensitivity of the approach, but I also think we weren’t properly equipped, and this is pretty typical of what’s happening around the world. Community consultation has grown within the last decade and a half, a lot more than what it was then.

Community consultation...

I think we actually had rotten tomatoes thrown at us once. I remember coming home and speaking to my wife saying “Oh my god!” I had never seen people like it. There was a very uncontrolled, quite hostile crowd. They were also quite well organised, and I’ve got to say on our side we were not equipped for it professionally.

The concept of a village around a railway station, whilst in Europe it is quite common, in Australia it’s still quite rare. So it was a really interesting challenge.”

It was also recognising it was planned over some really badly run down sheds, disused car parks, contamination, and some beautiful things like St Joseph’s Church were smothered in this industrial wasteland. So we were shocked by the reaction being so negative.

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We were trying to get people who would come from the station down Roberts Road into the stadium. This sort of bifurcation, which really was successful in terms of diminishing the crowd and catering for the people who want to go straight to the station and home, versus those who want to go to the restaurants and catch up with friends in Rokeby Road.

We had a series of meetings with the community about these things and it was also quite strongly fuelled by the Uniting Subiaco group which was a good voice for people’s concerns. You can be on the right side or the wrong side and I always end up on the wrong side, but I really respect what they do as a mouthpiece for disenfranchised groups.

That just sort of shows the insensitivity of the approach, but I also think we weren’t properly equipped, and this is pretty typical of what’s happening around the world. Community consultation has grown within the last decade and a half, a lot more than what it was then.

At Claisebrook there was no one living there. There was a polluted part of the river, disused mounds of crap everywhere, it was really just an old gas works, and people were really saying please clean it up, whereas Subiaco was already a vibrant living thing.
I also don’t think these same people had really put themselves into the position of potential new residents who might be living in this new community, and actually seeing the extraordinary connections and possibilities.

When we went through the research, there was a huge exodus of dollars from Subiaco – no one shopped there, you couldn’t buy wet fish there, there was not a very good butcher, the supermarket had very poor selection, there was poor parking etc.

Coles and Woolworths had their supermarkets there, but they were the worst ones in the State in terms of trade and opportunities, and I think the market was what gave retail some potential. It’s also that character in Subi, a bit like Fremantle where people have a very traditional way of shopping in the high street. So what we determined from that was there was huge migration dollars out of the area, therefore their issue about Rokeby Road being dead was actually something we could change by bringing people back in, by putting a good supermarket there, and good parking, people would be able to shop in the area again.

The other thing which was fascinating was this barrier line of the railway. People in Wembley hardly visited Subiaco, it was extraordinary. They all went to Floreat Forum to shop. Research showed they didn’t see themselves as part of Subiaco, yet they were right in it. So, we thought that by creating this road network and this pedestrian network that we would be making it a good community, but we needed to sell it in a better way.

**Then and now...**

There was this perception in Subiaco that there’s a Federation style house with the white picket fence and a beautiful jacaranda tree and that’s it, and absolutely no other type of dwelling could go there.

So when all these dwelling products started to be developed in the initial part of Subi Centro, I think that language of what they call the new urbanism, where the cars are concealed, it’s very pedestrian orientated, it’s probably a very traditional architecture with pitched roofs and that sort of stuff, it supported and reinforced the language of community will.

I think innovation is the key thing. How to sell it to people, is the tough part.

When you go through to Subi Centro, around the railway station itself... if I look back and reflect on it, I think there was the view at the time that people wanted to buy in historically referenced houses. As you can see, time has gone on from that, it has completely changed. I don’t think you’d see that happening today, as this development has come through.

I think the beautiful result of this is organic growth, it is due to the fact that it wasn’t all done in one hit. I think Australian Fine China’s got some really nice contemporary architecture so, if you look at that, and you saw this, from the east to the west, quite a change over those two decades has occurred and I think that’s healthy.

**Missing elements...**

I think the thing that has not worked as well as I thought it should have is the retail actually around the square... but there is this trend, as people start to work in Subi, of people saying “I’ll meet you down there and we’ll have a little coffee or whatever before we catch the train and catch up” – couples might do it, or girlfriends etc or a group might merge, and then you catch the train and go your separate ways.

It’s perhaps not happening as much as I thought it would, but it is happening. I thought there would be more external marketing type things happening there as well, but notwithstanding that, as a regular user of the train, and going back to the football matches and other things, it does have a real vibrancy and safeness about it.

When we were also doing the master planning at the time I advocated very strongly with the Premier Richard Court, that we should put the theatre in the new development.

If you look at the ingredients which are there, you’ve got the health campus, you’ve got sport and recreation, you’ve got retail and there was education with the TAFE. The missing bit was the cultural program and I thought, if you look
at good city design, that’s a very important ingredient.

The other thing is that it was not dense enough, but I think if you look at what’s going to happen on the western side of Station Street that will start to change over time, and if we look at it now, in 20 years, and in 100 years it will look quite balanced.

The architectural language is also probably trying to fit too much into Subiaco rather than create its own credibility, I think the station itself does that quite nicely, it feels like a contemporary building, but I think the other stuff around it looks a bit sort of fake and ‘oldy-worldy’.

60 per cent employment in the area. If you look at a typical suburb in Perth you have about 12 per cent employment, so you’ve got a huge mountain to climb to get up there.

I think for the authorities as well, what’s been interesting is the way in which they’ve changed as an organisation.

If you look at New Northbridge, Subi Centro, Claisebrook Village, etc the traditional pattern was to get the master planners in to do that, get the planners in, create the Scheme text, take it through Government, get that locked up in the master plan – then start the infrastructure works, put the public art in, put the trees in and then sell the lots – so you had this rolling series of consultants, from the visionaries, through to the guys who did the civil works, and people who tried to sell it.

In doing that, I think the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) and East Perth Redevelopment Authority learnt that their organisation also needed to be fluid and to grow with these things. So the fact that they needed to get smaller for Government efficiency, to allow others to do the work for them and bring in the best people for the best time, rather than build up a whole network of master planners over there. I think that’s been very beneficial to Government and to the industry.

The finished product...

Overall, it’s been fascinating working with the SRA because each time they’ve reflected on history, and said where have we gone? How can we improve? They’re always about making a better thing for the community. Some of it is responsive, jump to the left, jump to the right etc, but the development industry is like that as well.

At the end of the day I think what we’ve got here is the beautiful Subi Centro – it feels finished, but it’s really just started and there’s so much more to happen.

“ I think that’s the fundamental thing. Change is inevitable and you’ve just got to try and plan for it as much as possible.”

The strength of leadership in these projects has been amazing from all Premiers through to Planning Ministers to people at SRA, all of the consultants – we are really blessed in Perth to have all of these really top international thinkers. Actually, a lot of people come to Perth to learn from Subi Centro.

Prince Charles came here, we’ve had visitors from America, Europe and the eastern states – when this started it was the whole TOD [transit-oriented development] thing, and for about five years there, we were leading the world. I think Perth City Link is also going to be a real world leader and it’s going to be fantastic to see it rolling out.

Aerial view of Subiaco Square, 2000

I think the employment was the other thing. Typically to get a really sustainable community, you need to have economic performance there. They say to have a good, balanced, sustainable economic community you need to have about
I was the public art coordinator at the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority right from the early planning stages until just a few years ago.

The public art program was devised as an integral part of the overall planning so, when I came on board as the public art coordinator, the planning group had just started. I think there was a heritage architect. Everyone was involved in the planning.

During the planning stages we looked at positions for the artwork but we also thought about end-users of things like the play area. The site had been an industrial area so we looked at commissioning projects which celebrated the various industries as they moved off-site.

The site-specific artwork the Watershed by Kevin Draper and Rodney Glick, for instance, incorporated one of the chimneys that was actually on the site. There are also gas bottles, which are up on the western side of the development and down the centre of the road, to reflect the BOC Gases that were located there.

Quite hidden away is a fantastic sculpture by Susan Flavell, which is a tongue-in-cheek take on those heroic sculptures usually of dead white men on plinths. She’s actually put a kookaburra on a plinth, which was based on the ceramic kookaburras that used to be produced at the nearby china factory.

We did a project with Mary Knott in the park on the eastern side of the station, a beautiful little bronze sculpture that we all loved.

When all the works began and they were digging huge holes, there were big fences around so we commissioned Pamela Brittain – a great artist who works with communities and local schools – to do something to enhance the fencing. She got a whole lot of drawings from school kids on what Subiaco meant to them and she turned that into a computer-generated collage. The collage was printed onto metal that went around the fencing.

The play area artist was Peter Dailey. It’s fantastic and I gather the kids that used it when they were really small, are now teenagers and hang out there. It’s like a big television that’s a play area where kids can really use their own imaginations. I like the fact that it’s continued on with that generation who first used it, who now hang out and annoy old neighbours.

Kim Cannon did a beautiful mural on the back of Knox Storage to hide ugly walls when they were constructing new housing. The other mural on the back of the Lords wall was by Steve Tepper.

Integrating the old and new...

Our aim was to create a sense of place and to integrate the old and the new. We did some community consultation before we started. Public art was integrated into the landscape design, and celebrating the history was a very strong element of the design.
At that time, public art in Western Australia was relatively new, so we were still trying to present the best of our contemporary art to an audience that doesn’t necessarily go into galleries. It was about bringing art out into the public sphere and it was a very strong ethos.

*The Watershed* would have been outstanding if it hadn’t had such a chequered history. It was nothing to do with the artists but a good example of how things can go a little pear-shaped. What they originally intended was that this shed would go over the filtration pond and people would be able to walk through it. But the water filtration went wrong for the whole route, so the engineers had to change it and bring a pump in which had to go exactly where the artwork was. So the artwork, which also had water coming down it, had to be redesigned. Then it was approved by officials from the Council and everyone was happy, but then there was a change of personnel and the Council wouldn’t turn the water on! I gather it is about to be turned on again. If it is, I would have to say that *The Watershed* is probably my favourite public art piece. I like that they used technology. I also really enjoy the use of colour juxtaposing the very old and grungy look of the actual water and the big tower.

Working with the redevelopment authorities, when you get in at the ground level, is actually the most exciting thing about being involved with public art. The whole idea of integrating art in urban design is a very exciting concept and, for me, it doesn’t diminish.

The speed of the transformation of Subiaco, because of the project, was amazing. When we were commissioning the work that turned out to be Susan Flavell’s *Kookaburra*, I remember saying to the artists that we would meet at a particular spot and, after only one week, that spot was gone! It was astonishing to watch the speed and the transformation.
Subiaco Redevelopment Authority


The Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) created under the Subiaco Redevelopment Act 1994.

1994

- Modified Scheme gazetted and approved.
- Multiplex Constructions appointed to re-route the railway line and construct a new underground train station.
- City of Subiaco partnered with the SRA.
- Official project launch; Community Liaison Committee formed; public art plan adopted.

1995

- Preliminary Concept Plan advertised. More than 300 public submissions received.
- First community consultation.
- Steering Committee formed with residents, leaseholders, ratepayers, the Subiaco Business Association and Historical Society members – later becoming Uniting Subiaco.

1996

- Land releases in Centro Place; Subiaco Gardens and Subiaco Common completed.
- Premier Richard Court drove the first train on the new tracks of Subiaco Station.
- Hay Street subway removed.

1997

- The redevelopment area named Subi Centro.
- Demonstration street established.
- First land release in Subiaco for more than 100 years – the auction in Subiaco Gardens on 12 July 1997. Twelve lots sold.

1998

- Work on the old BOC Gases land began.
- First residents moved into Subiaco Gardens; first commercial buildings tenanted.
- Subiaco Park subdivision completed; Market Square Park officially opened.
- Daglish Park upgraded and renamed Richard Diggins Park in honour of the City Council Mayor and SRA Community Liaison Committee Member.

1999

- Railway tunnel completed in March, on time, on budget.
- Subiaco Square officially opened in November.
- New road and pedestrian networks connected north Subiaco with the town centre.

2000

- Subiaco Rise set a new benchmark with the release of 105 lots including ‘special needs’ lots for potential disadvantaged, disabled or elderly residents.

2002

- Subi Centro named Best Urban Renewal Project in WA by the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA).
Subiaco Redevelopment Authority  SUBI CENTRO TIMELINE: 1994 – 2015

2004
• Subi Centro named Australia’s Best Urban Renewal Project at the UDIA National Awards.
• A 196sqm Subiaco Rise homesite sold for $525,000, setting a residential land sales record.
• Subiaco Sustainable Demonstration Home opened.

2005
• Normalisation started; 67 per cent of the area returned to the City of Subiaco.
• New public art policy was adopted by the SRA.

2006
• Australian Fine China (AFC) presented the SRA with the very last plate produced by the factory and handed over its lease.
• A detailed Heritage, Conservation and Interpretation Plan developed in conjunction with the Heritage Council of WA.

2007
• Total of 86 per cent of the Subi Centro area normalised.
• The SRA acquired the TAFE site for the Centro North development.
• AFC site forward works commenced.

2009
• Kiln No.1 relocated – to be interpreted into the new AFC site development.
• Expressions of Interest sought for AFC lots.
• Design Guidelines for Hood Street precinct adopted.

2008
• Scheme and design guidelines for Centro North progressed.

2009
• First Centro North sites released.

2011
• AFC subdivision plan approved.
• Subdivision works commenced on Centro North.

2012-2015
• SRA merged with other redevelopment authorities to form the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority.
• Centro North and AFC due for completion by 2015.
• AFC set to raise the bar on environmentally sustainable living with energy efficiency targets to achieve a 55 per cent reduction in scheme water use and greenhouse emissions; WA’s first lot-based geothermal energy system to be installed.
Planning Minister John Day and former Planning Minister Richard Lewis at the Recollections & Reflections: Subi Centro launch, 2011.
THE PEOPLE
THE PEOPLE

Previous page
Community members make a stand in favour of sinking the railway line, Subiaco, 1995
Copyright, Post Newspapers

Clockwise from top left
Subiaco Rise residents Geoff and Yvonne Parnell in Subiaco Common
Photo courtesy of Geoff Parnell

Graham Kierath, Minister for Planning 1997-2001 (second from left) with members of the Subiaco Square Consortium – John Blackburne, Stephen Beer and John Simpson
Photo courtesy of John Blackburne

Dr Kathy Meney, Subiaco Redevelopment Authority Sustainability Consultant
Clockwise from top left

Tracy Wiseman pictured in the Post Newspaper
Copyright, Post Newspapers

Working at Australian Fine China, Subiaco, 2006
Tony Morgan, CEO of Subiaco Redevelopment Authority 2001-2011, Subiaco Train Station, 2006

Laki Baker and Eamon Sullivan, owners of Louis Baxters Espresso Bar in Subiaco Square
Photo courtesy of Andrew Baker
Copyright, Louis Baxters Espresso Bar Pty Ltd
THE PEOPLE

HON RICHARD LEWIS
Minister for Planning (1993-1997)

I was the Planning Minister who put the legislation together. The East Perth Redevelopment Act 1991 had been proclaimed in about June 1991, and I became Minister in January 1993.

The Authority that was going to be put in place had planning powers to re-zone and to initiate and to take through [to completion], though it always got referral and commentary back from the Council.

The Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) was also an Authority that acted directly under the Minister. In other words, if we wanted to build roads and all those sorts of things we didn’t have to go to Subiaco Council, but when we set the Authority up there were two members of the Subiaco Council nominated and appointed to the SRA.

The SRA Board was actually hand-picked, I hand-picked every one of them because I knew how hard it was to get through the bureaucracy of local government, the bureaucracy of planning, and people had to be able to identify with the project, know what the project was about and get on with it. I was looking for people who were business people, people who weren’t bureaucrats. I think Stuart Hicks was one of the only bureaucrats who was on the board initially.

“The hardest job we had was convincing people that they could live in a 200sqm house with two garages, maybe rear access, and a walk up on an 8-9m frontage, and a 220sqm block. As soon as they could see what could work, it became very, very popular!”

LandCorp didn’t have any powers of zoning or indeed any powers in their own right. It would never have worked [with LandCorp as the Government agency responsible] because to do these jobs you must have unfettered planning power, you must have resumptive power.

At the time, $80 million was made available from the Federal Government’s Building Better Cities program and that money was under my control. I think we used $30 to $35 million in East Perth, we allocated $5 million to Subiaco and the rest went to Homeswest, CAT buses and other things.

Changing densities....

In those early days we had a huge problem with public attitude to higher density living. As Planning Minister I was looking at how we could increase the densities of the inner city and inner metro regions, but local authorities were insisting on adhering to planning laws that were 25 years old, and 25 years out of date. Our challenge was to create something that would show people that you can do some beautiful housing on 250-220sqm with an eight metre frontage.

We’d had some experience in East Perth. We had a hell of a lot of objections there, but we got some very fine architects to design three-level houses on 200 and 250sqm blocks. And we showed people that you don’t have to have 500sqm to build a lovely home in the metro area.

And then along came Subi and I thought the same thing – we have to get density into Subiaco because Subiaco was traditionally 1000sqm lots. Our vision was to create a community that was more townhouse style, with a mix of residential and commercial uses.

I’d been in London walking around some of the back streets, looking at those beautiful row houses that have been built around parks, and I went to Boston – a beautiful town built in a similar style. That’s what I wanted for Subi Centro.
But there were plenty of residents who didn’t want anything to change.

On community opposition ...

With the SRA, there was quite a strong and reasonably well orchestrated community of opposition. Some of the retailers at the time were driving it on the basis they thought that the centre of gravity of Subi would shift to the north and their businesses would suffer.

I think some people, certainly some of the older people, thought we were going to turn it into high rise apartments all through Subi. A lot of the opposition was based on ignorance and a lot of it was done, in my opinion, for the sake of protest. If people go in half-baked, they think, ‘I don’t like that’, and then they protest. The mindsets started with vocal people in the community getting to the local Councillors, and everyone had this fear of the unknown.

The Supreme Court objection really upset me. That was done by a bloke who lives on Rokeby Road, a lawyer. Then when the Court handed down its decision, they had to pay all the costs because it was a frivolous action. But guess who paid the price? We did, because he just said he didn’t have the money. It was done under the name of an incorporated body and the incorporated body had no money. Anyway we won, but they messed us around a bit.

Getting started...

It was pretty tough in the first years. Many of the local Councillors and the Council staff hated having their power removed. They couldn’t stop the planning, they couldn’t stop the development, they couldn’t do anything. We had universal powers but they could hold up our access to the land.

Most of the land had been leased to the Subiaco Council I think for a period of 50 years, and then on-leased to local businesses. We couldn’t get through the Subi Council because we didn’t own the real estate and we didn’t have the financial resources to just resume it. Finally, I had money allocated and I wrote a letter to the Mayor and Councillors. I said, “You’ve got 10 days to make your mind up, if you haven’t made your mind up in 10 days then that money’s being allocated elsewhere.”

It was Deputy Mayor Heather Henderson, I think, who called a special meeting of the Council, they agreed yes, let’s get on with it. We had a special meeting down there where the deal was signed and it basically was that on the hand-back, the Council would get 17 per cent of all the profits generated.

The first stages...

We knew what we wanted. We had good designs and good concepts. We built display homes, we started on the landscaping of the Green Spine that runs through the development. There’s a heritage site down the bottom of the park – we preserved that and we put the waterway in. We knew we had to have the waterway because it was a desert and the water really made it. Because it was so well presented, we sold those lots and did quite well out of them.

We’d taken a lot of time to make sure the residential areas were well presented, and the cash we earned allowed us to move on to the next stages of the development. We went to the north next to St Joseph’s Church and we had a lot of opposition at the church but we could see that you needed office and commercial space, retail space and parking facilities.

Then we looked at the railway, but there was resistance to sinking the rail line, and I thought, ‘That’s the dopiest thing I’ve ever heard.’ Sinking the railway was absolutely necessary. It was the only way you could really have unrestricted
boundaries and flow from one part to the other without dividing the town. I know Transport didn’t want to do it even though we were paying for it, or most of it.

But I was very, very strong on that. The rail line was sunk, and I don’t believe the development could have worked effectively unless it had been.

Looking back....
It’s made Subiaco (the redevelopment), Subiaco was dying. Back then, Subiaco was getting like Fremantle is today. Fremantle has absolutely had it, all over red rover. All they’ve got is parking income.

I’m personally very proud to look back on what we’ve achieved, and see other governments around Australia saying, “Let’s go and visit Subi.” It’s turned out well, and it’s been done well. It’s a great tick to the planners, the architects, the engineers, the contractors. It’s all tick, tick, tick.

I’d give it a mark of 85 per cent. I wish we’d had the funding to acquire the old markets on the corner of Hood Street and Station Street. It’s still a run-down site and I think we could do more with that.

Anyway, that was one of my disappointments. I think there is unfinished work there.

But what a great place to live! We had all this community opposition and now everyone wants to live there. Wouldn’t you? The railway station means you’re just minutes from Perth and there’s bus services.

In retrospect, the hardest job we had was convincing people that they could live in a 200sqm house with two garages, maybe rear access, or a walk-up on a 220sqm block with an eight metre frontage. But as soon as people could see what could work, it became very, very popular. Those people who lived on a quarter acre or 800sqm block with all those lawns said “Hey, I don’t want this anymore. I want to have easy access, no maintenance, a new place.” That drove the concept of it but it was very hard getting the mind shift. Very, very difficult, but we did it!
I served as a Councillor 1983 to 1994 and then as Mayor of the City of Subiaco 1994 to 2005, so I saw the birth of the Subiaco redevelopment.

Dare I say, it was a saga! There was a lot of heartburn and a lot of tension between Government and the Council. By establishing the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA), what we as a Council thought was best and right for Subi was ignored – we were effectively dictated to by the Government of the day.

Not inviting us to be involved in the project was, I think, an obstacle that remained a problem throughout the redevelopment process. There were heated debates and public meetings for and against what we were going to do with the area.

We fought very hard with the SRA over the greening of the railway station, but we lost that battle. Today we’ve got that ugly-looking monstrosity in front of the station. Once upon a time that was an all-green area facing on to Rokeby Road. It was an appalling decision not to allow it to be retained as a green space. Yes, there’s a green space through the residential precinct, but this was an opportunity to make something really special of that station area. I believe that was something the public really did want, and that there’s still a great deal of resentment that that green area was not preserved.

We were always in favour of the redevelopment of what was a largely industrial wasteland and, in the end, we’ve got a residential development. But I believe that from a cultural perspective we’ve lost something. It’s changed the social mix of Subiaco.

I have always believed that in any successful mix in suburbia there has to be an element of public housing and that’s one battle we had with the SRA. I’m very glad that the Council persevered on that issue.

In terms of how the project has evolved, I think the streets look good, but they’re not friendly. It’s what I call a roller door culture – it’s very anti-social; there are no welcoming features. Some of the environmental areas could be tidier than they currently are. But it was always about getting the balance right, and that’s hard to do when you’ve got a dictatorial government saying “You might be the local Council, but we’re running the show.”

Some positives.....

Now that the development is 17 years old, there’s no doubt that the area of Subiaco is better than it was.

From a commercial perspective, I think Woolworths has been a good thing for the Subi Square area. The Woolworths store, and the handful of commercial spaces and the cafés and coffee shops around the railway station, are all good (although how much coffee can one drink per day? I just don’t know – I refuse to take up the challenge).

“ I do believe that one of the great benefits of the redevelopment has been the increase in the use of public transport. ”

Subiaco Railway Station sits well in Subi Square and, in fact, that was a good initiative for the long-term plan to underground the Fremantle railway line anyway, so we showed vision there in a collective thought regarding where the railway should go.

Certainly the intent of joining the new development with old Subiaco (hence the name Subi Centro) has been achieved. The bland landscape that was once the industrial areas is much tidier.

So you know, you’ve got your ups and you’ve got your downs. In the main, I think it’s improved but it could have been so much better had we, the elected Councillors, been able to make an input and have some say on the matter.

I happen to like the East Perth redevelopment better than I like the Subiaco redevelopment.
I like the way that’s been done and I do see differences between that and Subi. It’s possibly that I’m too close to the action to be objective. But I think Subi’s got some of the same ambience.

_A public transport hub_...

I do believe that one of the great benefits of the redevelopment has been the increase in the use of public transport. But that gets back to my argument about public housing and the need for more of it in Subi Centro. Where you have good public transport arteries, it makes good sense to build public housing nearby. People in public housing are on limited incomes and the only way many of them can travel is by the public transport system. I believe that allocating a percentage of public housing in all these redevelopment areas, addressing the mix of suburban development, is the way to go. I think we’ve seen a move this way of late, and I think it is for the better. If the well-to-do people don’t want to care and share, perhaps they could move elsewhere.

Our old public transport system in Subiaco was very, very good – we have always been well-served by public transport in Subiaco. By building up the population in the redevelopment area, the patronage of the public transport system has increased quite dramatically.

I have to say that as I walk around, I see too many people using their cars when what they should be doing is walking to the train station, walking to the bus station. They’d be doing the environment a great service if they used their cars less.

**Looking back...**

At the end of the day, after 17 years there is more pulse in that area than there ever was before the redevelopment so that’s the positive side of it. There is breadth, there is life. The quality still remains questionable because, as in all communities, we need to get the mix right. I’m adamant that every community needs to have a mix. Grandmothers at home to look out for neighbours, those who are working finding that they’ve got good neighbours, and public housing tenants sharing the same street. I think that’s the future.

So the pulse is alive and well and I think it is going to be for a long time. The SRA was given a job to do and they’ve done that. Had we worked better together, and had we as a Council been able to have more input, even better results could have come about. Realistically, I think that in principle it’s been a good thing, but only thanks to the Federal funding of the Building Better Cities program.
I was Mayor of the City of Subiaco during the period when the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) was about to get underway. I think it is probably important to reflect on just how it all happened.

The City of Subiaco had endowment lands on the Northern side of the railway line. The Town Clerk and City Engineer at the time was Jim McGeough, who unfortunately is no longer with us. Jim put a proposal to Council that the income from those vested lands really wasn’t a very significant amount and that the Council should really think about doing something about it.

To that end, approaches were made in various directions to see whether or not Government would be interested or whether private enterprise would be an opportunity for Council to consider.

I happened to differ with Jim on the way Council decided to proceed. I have always held the view that local authorities should control their own destiny and for me it was important that we retained control of the area and not cede that control.

The Council believed we didn’t have the expertise to do any developments in the endowment lands. My view was that we could employ consultants and other professionals to project manage in concert with Council’s assistance. Anyway, it wasn’t to be and ultimately the decision was taken to change the vesting order and create the SRA.

We were given an undertaking, at that time, that development of the area by the SRA would be in keeping with what we knew to be true Subiaco. Now I have to say that I express a disappointment here because I don’t think the intent that was mentioned at that time has been carried out. I have always been of the view that Subiaco has a really rich history and we had hoped that that would be emulated within the new developments in the SRA area.

There were opposing views, of course, in that regard and my vision was lost in the bureaucracy of both the SRA and Government.

One of the major issues at the time was the then Premier – Richard Court – had been to Japan and seen some really up-market shopping areas and, if my memory serves me correctly, I think it was originally 50,000sq ft (might have been sqm) allocated for commercial development and I had a very bad feeling about that because if you had that sort of commercial space available, it would have severely, adversely impacted on businesses in Rokeby Road.

“Collectively they have a very strong residential group and have contributed to the City, no question about it and just recently two Centro residents have been elected to Council.”

So Richard and I had a discussion about that and we, agreed to disagree, as I recall. In the end however, he was accommodating and the square meterage was reduced, I think, by something like 50 per cent.

So that was the start of the, perhaps I shouldn’t say revolution, the evolution of the SRA.

Our culture and history...

One of the problems that existed at the time was trying to convince people in the SRA that there was a culture and a history of this City that was very important and still is very important to the
locals. I was also the foundation president of the Subiaco Historical Society so I had a vested interest, I suppose.

There are only three Subiacos in the world and they all began as Benedictine monasteries. I think it is true to say, and I stand to be corrected, that the City of Subiaco is the only local authority area in the southern hemisphere that began as a Benedictine monastery. It is therefore a unique start to a municipality.

I believe that the community was led to believe the SRA was going to do a development that was in keeping with Subiaco proper, and I certainly promoted the fact that we hoped and would expect that.

I think the unfortunate thing about all of this was that there were opposing views. People have different views about what heritage is. There had been, and has been over a period of time, public disagreements about the extent to which heritage property should be protected, which should be listed, which shouldn’t be listed, as well as several acrimonious public meetings from time to time. The SRA didn’t have to build Federation-style houses but in retrospect perhaps they should have given more attention to the aspects of the buildings in Subiaco proper. It could have been the elements of those buildings that were used in part of the designs in the new buildings in that area over there (the development area).

In some quarters, today Subi Centro has the nickname of Tinsel Town and I think it is true to say that probably the people who have come to live in that area have perhaps not integrated with the remainder of the community and that the older residents in Subiaco really don’t have a connection with that part of town.

The train station is an interesting situation. It was originally intended that area would be a fully enclosed, underground station. I put a proposal to the SRA that if the railway was going to be sunk it should include the Subiaco Oval and have a one price ticket for seats to the oval. The vision also included rentable commercial space along with some sporting facilities which would be income producing all year round. As it was originally intended that the whole area around the station was going to be underground, the Council had a view about that and felt that it perhaps created problems from a security point of view. The reason the area is now open to the sky is the fact that the Council raised the issue with the railways and SRA and said it needed to be open so that people could actually see and feel safe in the area.

The commercial impact...

I don’t know how well the businesses have done in and around the railway station. If there’s anything any good that’s come out of it, and no doubt there are good things that have come out of it, it is that you can actually go to the railway station, go into town and, very easily, come back; there’s also underground parking available. Some businesses seem to be well patronised, the restaurants certainly do. And probably what it’s done is bring people into that end of town which at one time was considered to be in dire need of some commercial activity.

So from that point of view it has bought people into Subiaco. I think that’s helped generate business in Rokeby Road for the shopkeepers and certainly on football days that happens. The prospect of losing Subiaco Oval out of the area is one of the really sad things that is likely to happen. Some businesses have flourished as a result of the football being here and Subiaco has always been known as the home of footy and hopefully that is still going to be the case in the future.

If my memory serves me correctly, and I didn’t see all the 600 public submissions obviously, there was an overwhelming view that the new part of town should be part of Subiaco and not different from the rest of the City. People wanted to see open space and greenery and not too much traffic congestion.

I believe there is a divided opinion regarding its success. There are certainly people who think it’s great. Clearly it’s created an opportunity for people to come and live in a City that has almost everything to offer – restaurants, theatre, variety of shops; and to be able to jump on a train [if you’re an oldie] for no cost between 9:30am and 3:30pm to go to town and come home again in a 10-minute ride each way. I understand there has been some difficulties with the park over there where some of the younger people in the community have from time to time made a lot of noise at night and upset the neighbourhood with their unruly behaviour.
Another matter, as I recall, that has emerged as a result of the houses being so close together was the transference of noise. I believe that’s been a disadvantage that’s popped up on occasions, so I would say that the community is divided in its views about the merits or attractiveness of it. But those are the views of people in my age group, not the younger people and the younger people probably do have a much different idea of what it is than perhaps I do or my friends do.

The positives...

Everyone is welcome in Subiaco. It has always been a very welcoming community here. There has been an enormous amount of interest shown by the residents in the Centro precinct. Collectively they have a very strong residential group and have contributed to the City, no question about it and just recently two Centro residents have been elected to Council.

There’s always been a very strong community spirit here. Very strong. Our residents protect the City’s interests. We are held to account as Councillors and the beauty of being in a City like this is that you can walk down the street, see and meet your friends, have a chat and a cup of coffee. People knowing people is what it’s all about in this city.

I do recall that while all the discussions were taking place in Council about the SRA, Councillor Meg Sheen raised the issue of sinking the railway. The idea at the outset was disliked by almost every man and his dog. It was a very radical thought for

Council and the SRA at the time. She upset a lot of people and she was feisty but her thinking was very, very sound and very clear and very innovative. She was a dynamic lady and the world’s a poorer place for her passing.
THE PEOPLE

GEORGE THOMAS
President, Subiaco Business Association
First resident, Subiaco Rise
Director of Strategic Services, Hames Sharley

My involvement with the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA) and redevelopment in Subiaco really comes from my relationship with business in the areas the SRA has developed, including the Subiaco Square and surrounding areas; and obviously in terms of the development of the residential areas through Subi Centro and Subiaco Rise, and through involvement with the development of the Australian Fine China (AFC) site.

The concept for Subiaco Square originally was a European piazza. It doesn’t work as a European piazza because it’s got a great big hole in the middle of it, with an ugly steel roof over the rail station! There are a number of things we can do in terms of dealing with the hole in the middle, creating greater activation, creating a greater sense of place for the community to come and congregate... there could be more vitality in the Square from a community viewpoint. The station doesn’t need to be open above. Throughout the world, stations are under piazzas or buildings, for that matter.

Unfortunately the Square doesn’t really work from a commercial viewpoint, mainly because of the layout of the Square and the types of businesses that are there. The location of Woolworths entry at the beginning of the arcade rather than the back means it doesn’t attract through traffic. That will probably be overcome when the Salvado Road developments are finished – there will be more of an attraction for people to walk through the arcade. But businesses within the Square have struggled and I think that’s commonly acknowledged. I know that the City of Subiaco, the SRA and the Business Association are having discussions about how we improve that situation.

“The Square is there since 1997 and everything needs a refresh and re-evaluation of how it’s working. The way people do things today is quite different from the way they were doing them when it was built. For instance, people are now asking, “Well, how do we take it to the next stage? This is a great area, can we improve it by covering the railway opening? Can we improve it by looking at some of the ways elements and people interact with each other in the Square, and the movement of people through the Salvado Road developments?”

Mixed use planning...

The mix of residential and commercial is something that we certainly support as planners because it’s important to create a sense of community. All too often you create lots of apartment blocks or a commercial precinct that, while fairly central, can be very dead after hours because there is no activation of the area. Higher density, mixed-used developments are certainly a very good way of moving forward and probably the only viable way in some areas. In hindsight the density around Subiaco Square should be at least double the existing and probably could contain more employment in terms of office development.

Subi Centro was certainly a ground-breaking concept back then, although there were similar trends that were happening elsewhere. Now we’re seeing more ‘vertical village’ developments – high-rise buildings with retail, hospitality and food at ground level, commercial space on top of that and then a lot of residential above.

Living in Subi...

We chose to come to Subiaco long before we actually get to live here and that was mainly because we couldn’t find the right place. We
wanted to be in the new Subi Centro area and we spent two years looking at every house that came on to the market, but not one met our needs. We knew the next auction was coming up in Subiaco Rise so we bought a block in the first auction and built there. We were the first people to move into the Rise.

Subiaco, and the Rise development, has met all our expectations as a place to live and as a community to live in. You’ve got the advantage of the house; the smaller block so you’re not maintaining lots of gardens; and the benefit of a large beautiful parkland that’s right on your doorstep. So in terms of a place to live, we’re particularly happy. Being a new development in itself creates a sense of community because people get to know each other. We know a lot of people in our street, whereas living in other areas half the time you didn’t even know who your neighbour was, let alone someone who was five or six doors down the road.

There’s quite a good community spirit I think that’s come with that. And I sense that for people I know who live in the old Subi Centro area, that’s still there as well. They’ve got friends they meet or people move in who they talk to. There are probably some good friendships and supported community activities happening as a result of that.

I think Subiaco is now a fantastic blend. If you want to come and live in Subiaco and live in an older area, an older house, an old cottage, you can do that. If you want to come and work in Subiaco there are plenty of options and choices through a wide range of businesses. And if you want to come and play and eat in Subiaco there are plenty of options, albeit that hospitality options are starting to diminish a little bit. There are options for everybody.

Subiaco railway workers
Copyright, Post Newspapers

Sadly, I think there are some who see two parts of Subiaco – a bit of an ‘old and new’ attitude. From a new person’s point of view, I don’t look at it as being any different, everyone lives in Subiaco. Some people choose to live in an older-style house because that’s what they like. I personally like a contemporary look and feel. I know that some people hold the view that the new people coming in don’t really belong here, are not part of the ‘real’ Subiaco.

Next steps...
There’s still a lot to happen in Subi Centro. The AFC development forms the link between the north-west corner of Subiaco and the new area so I think it’s important that development moves forward.

There’s mixed views on the extent of the AFC development and that’s obvious from the issues raised by the Council and other groups. It’s probably fair to say the Subiaco Business Association had some concerns about the impact – not so much in terms of the residential development, our concerns were more about the parking issues and the amount of commercial space, without a lot of activation. But we acknowledge that it’s early days in terms of planning for those buildings.

At the moment the number of people using public transport to come into Subiaco is low, I think it’s about 30 per cent. The planning guidelines that are in place assume a much higher rate than that. People don’t use public transport to come to Subiaco to work because it isn’t at a level that enables them to do that effectively, we don’t have the public transport infrastructure at the level that Sydney does or London does. If you’re living in the northern suburbs and you work in Subiaco, to get to Subiaco is a major exercise so people drive their cars. Even people in Osborne Park who want to do business in Subiaco, to get to Subiaco is a major exercise so people drive their cars. Even people in Osborne Park who want to do business in Subiaco drive their car – it’s an eight-minute car drive or an hour-and-a-half train trip, bus-train-train-change-trains trip.

So, because of its relatively poor public transport, Perth is still very much a car-driven city and the planning guidelines understand that. How they really try to encourage people to use public
transport is by restricting parking, and I can understand the reasoning behind this, but we’re probably about 10 years too early in putting constraints in. In a lot of overseas countries, where they’re looking at developing their public infrastructure in terms or transport, they are constructing buildings that are providing parking now but with the aim of taking that parking back and converting it into commercial space in the future. Whenever a new commercial building is built in Subiaco at the moment, the amount of parking that’s available for people who work there is a lot less than what’s required and it creates huge issues for the workers and nearby residents, who have to contend with commuter parking in their local streets.

There are other areas where parking really hasn’t been provided. If you go to Herdsman Business Park for example, there are cars parked everywhere – on the lawns, in the bushes. If you try to visit a business in Herdsman you can drive around for half an hour trying to find a car park. It’s not conducive to business once you have to do that. So the major concern the Subiaco Business Association has is the amount of commercial space and the impact on businesses because of the lack of parking. Now that’s something, I suppose, as the AFC development proceeds, has the potential to change.
I have always had an affinity with Subiaco which began when I attended business college and lived with my grandfather in Coghlan Road.

When I saw the newspaper ads for the first auction I drove by and checked out the area and thought, “Mmm, this looks interesting.” I attended the first auction and went from there. I didn’t buy on the day of the first auction because I thought it was too expensive for me, but I have a friend who is a property developer and he persuaded me that I could do it. And I did! I got a designer, we designed my house and I absolutely love it!

It’s the whole infrastructure of Subiaco that I really like. I am a member of the Eagles, and of course Subi Oval is within walking distance. It takes me six minutes to walk into Subiaco and the train station. It’s got everything you could ever want – good restaurants, cafés, theatre, movies and the Subiaco Hotel. I sometimes go into the city, or anywhere for that matter, on the train. It’s just so convenient.

The early days...

When I first moved in, it was interesting. The first thing I noticed was there were no birds; they took about six months to appear. It was very community-minded from the very start. Everyone was happy to come out of their homes, in fact in those early days every time a car alarm or house alarm went off people would run outside. Of course we got over that, but it was quite funny initially.

The density doesn’t bother me at all. I took to it like a duck to water and I still love it to this day. People ask me, “Isn’t it noisy?” But it isn’t. My son had an electric guitar and I’ve often asked neighbours if they heard him and they didn’t. You just don’t hear any noise. I don’t hear the train. Maybe you get used to it, but it certainly isn’t as noisy as some people think it is.

A real community...

I’ve lived here for 13 years now, and I don’t know that it has changed very much. When I first moved in it was mainly older people and now there are definitely a lot more children around, which is lovely. There’s still that community feel. The park is absolutely the best asset. Even in the early days we had drinks at the park every second Tuesday. Now there is a Christmas party that has been held every year since we’ve been here. You can take a present to give to your child and Santa comes along. The barbecues are continuously used and you will often see wedding photos being taken around the lake. I always take my granddaughter to the park whenever she stays with me.

“It’s got everything you could ever want – good restaurants, cafés, theatre, movies and the Subiaco Hotel.”

All the people with dogs meet down at the park and they have formed their own little community; they have drinks and do all sorts of things together. A lot of the streets have got their own little thing happening, as well. I go out for dinner regularly with about four or five other ladies in this street and we’ve been doing that for several years now.

There’s a group that plays Mahjong and another group who play Bridge. There’s a walking group and I think there’s a swimming group as well.

So I have absolutely no regrets that I moved here! It’s the best thing I have ever done. It’s a wonderful investment for me and I just absolutely love the area. Whenever I tell people where I live they all say the same thing, “Oh, you must be so happy living there.” They all see it as a fabulous little suburb with great infrastructure. And they’re right. It’s got everything.

HELEN BRAND
Subiaco Gardens resident

I have always had an affinity with Subiaco which began when I attended business college and lived with my grandfather in Coghlan Road.

When I saw the newspaper ads for the first auction I drove by and checked out the area and thought, “Mmm, this looks interesting.” I attended the first auction and went from there. I didn’t buy on the day of the first auction because I thought it was too expensive for me, but I have a friend who is a property developer and he persuaded me that I could do it. And I did! I got a designer, we designed my house and I absolutely love it!
MARIE AND LEO LOUGHNAN
The Grange residents

We’ve lived in Subi Centro since 1996 and we came down from the country. We built a block of units in conjunction with our daughter – she built three and we built three – in Cambridge Street. We developed the site and we lived there in one of the six units until we sold them off. We thought it was beautiful there in Cambridge Street.

We were bike riders and we used to ride through Subi Centro and saw the new development happening. I remember they had a guy there who was a waiter, who used to invite you into the area on Salvado Road.

We thought ‘This looks good’ and Leo said, “Let’s go again you know, we’ll sell the unit and buy a block.” So we bought a block for $145,000. That was in Subiaco Gardens at 27 Tallow Tree Crescent. My daughter was still working up at Laverton in the country where we had a hotel before we came down here – and Leo rang Louise and said we were going to buy a block in the area. She said, “Buy one for me, Dad. Is there one next door?” So we bought the two blocks.

“YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO HAVE SOME HIGH-RISE, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO HAVE APARTMENTS LIKE THIS AND HOUSING AS IT WAS ORIGINALLY HERE.”

We’ve got eight children and two of our sons said they wouldn’t mind one either. We had two single sons then and they said they would go in as well!

We just loved it. We built the house, we moved in and we were there for more than 10 years. Then Leo turned 80 and he said, “I think we should look to our future, this is getting a bit much.” We had a big townhouse – four bedrooms, four toilets with everything and we didn’t want to be doing guttering or maintenance anymore.

It had a very narrow frontage but a three car garage and a lovely wide barbecue area. It was really a beaut home, but I realised that you have to look ahead when you get older. I was 70 and it was a lot of work.

At this time my daughter sold their house and they moved up to Trillo Road in the new development up there, which is just beautiful and she’s got a lovely home up there. So we were left behind for a while, but she said, “Come up to St Ives.”

We were a bit keen at first but then Leo said no there’s too many older people up there and the exit fee is too high.

We looked around everywhere, looking at everything. So we put our house on the market and we sold. I was sad about that, but then we bought this place. As soon as I walked in the front door I knew this is where I wanted to be.

There are 52 apartments in the complex. That frightens a lot of people, but we had lived in Crawley in an earlier time and we knew what living in an apartment was all about. We love it. We’ve got 18 grandchildren and we’ve got a pool here.

I realise now that we handed the baton over to our kids. They’ve got pools and they all live in the area. But we came here because we belong to St Joseph’s Church. We walk to mass, we’re six minutes into town. We go to Woolies down here and we enjoy the café society. We go for coffee every day. It’s a beautiful, very caring community.

We just feel so safe here – that’s the thing, we put our head down every night and we feel so safe. We are not a bit worried.

We walk to the shops, we walk to the church, walk to the railway station. They’re all about 120 metres away and it all takes us about three minutes.

We had a procedure last week at the hospital which we have from time-to-time, and we walked there too – it’s just so handy.
People are very nice here. There are a lot of rentals, which used to worry me a little bit, but we have no trouble. No parties, nothing. Even my doctor said, “How can you live in a place like that – you live with a lot of people?” but it’s so quiet, you don’t hear anything – and it’s so safe. That’s what we love.

Remembering old Subiaco...
Well I remember all the factories – it was an eyesore. I used to go to the china factory and buy china. It was pretty run down and you really wouldn’t want it in your suburb. And the old markets, that should be developed like the European markets in the town square. I’m not frightened of development. You walk along the street and if it’s a nice streetscape, that’s all that should really worry you. People should be allowed to develop.

I remember we used to ride down Rokeby Road and ride over at that station, and getting back, that was a nightmare! That was a shocking station and it should have been developed way before it was.

There are a lot of people around that are stopping a lot of development. If you lived in New York, this close to the city, there’d be buildings 40 and 50 storeys high. All they want to do here is build them 10 storeys high.

You should be able to have some high-rise, you should be able to have apartments like this and housing as it was originally here.

We don’t want to live in a little cottage in Subiaco. We appreciate them, and I love the little cottages and their stained glass and everything, but it’s not for me. We wouldn’t feel safe there. We couldn’t afford to keep up the maintenance on an old place, painting it all the time and keeping it right. I want to feel safe. I want to be able to walk everywhere.

We want to stay in our home. We want to have help in when we need it and look after ourselves. We don’t want to be a burden on society. I mean I love old Subi, but I couldn’t live there.

I’ve lived in a three-storey house on the river and now I wouldn’t want to live there for anything. When you get older you’ve got to make your own decisions and be happy.

Living the life...
Well we’ve got a pool here and I swim every day, and Leo does the weights and he rides. We go for a 20 kilometre ride together every Sunday.

We take the easy roads... and we’re slow – but it’s flat along the railway. It’s a beautiful ride and, you know, we’re living the life! There’s a pod of dolphins there, you see people fishing, it’s amazing. We see the shags on the rocks and we look at Eliza and what she’s dressed in. I mean if only people would get out and see what’s around them. It doesn’t cost anything. Living in Subiaco is amazing. The shopping is also fantastic.

I love the passion of the football. I sit out on my balcony and I listen to it. The kids all go because they’re members and they call in here and they park downstairs and I listen to it on my trannie and when you hear the people cheering, you know, it’s exhilarating. And the concerts, I couldn’t care less. People say, “You know, those concerts!” It’s wonderful, it’s amazing that you are part of it – and I look out and see all the people going up there in their colours and it’s exciting, vibrant.

I go down and sit at Café Café or Louis Baxters and half a dozen people come up and talk to you. We’ve made really good friends. We have dinner parties, we go to the parks, with picnics.

You know, I just love my life. We feel so happy here.
THE
TRANSFORMATION
THE TRANSFORMATION

Previous page
The transformation:
(left to right)
Subiaco Railway Station, now part of Subiaco Square

Photo courtesy of TPG Town Planning and Urban Design

The transformation:
(left to right 2003, 2004)
Lords Sports Complex, Subiaco

Photo courtesy of TPG Town Planning and Urban Design

The transformation:
(left to right 1996, 2004)
Roberts Road, Subiaco

Photo courtesy of TPG Town Planning and Urban Design
The transformation: (left to right 1997, 2005) Aerial views of the redevelopment

Photo courtesy of TPG Town Planning and Urban Design
We set out with some very clear objectives. We set out to achieve a linkage between Subiaco and Wembley. We set out to achieve improved public transport and, therefore, more people using public transport. We also wanted to ensure that the makeup of the fabric of the buildings responded to the history and the heritage of Subiaco – the red brick and the pitched roof. And we set out to ensure there was an increase in residential, commercial and retail offerings.

This was a very big project and it’s a project that had a very strong vision, but actually delivering that vision on the ground was a huge undertaking.

It was a project characterised by industrial land. Hume Concrete manufactured clay and concrete pipes; there was a small airstrip; Australian Fine China (AFC) manufactured fine porcelain; Arrow Mowers made mowers; all the industrial base of Perth was here in Subiaco. So, to shift from that – to decontaminate the soil, to provide the subdivision and the residential housing – is a big, big undertaking. It takes many years. And it requires a team, an expert team, to deliver that.

The project focused on developing a retail and commercial core at the head of Rokeby Road. The project required the railway line to be built underground to provide that linkage between Subiaco and Wembley.

All those things take an enormous amount of time. They require civil contractors to come onsite and interfaces to be developed with the community. Remember, this impacted heavily on the existing community and how they would use the area. We needed to ameliorate those impacts to allow the community to continue to operate while we delivered the project. We brought a product to the market on which people have been able to build beautiful homes and commercial buildings.

The early years...

When this project was first committed to by the Government and by the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority [SRA], we spent our first years understanding the land and understanding the businesses that sat on the land, so that we could stage the development to complement the businesses and let them ease out of the project slowly.

Even today many of those businesses are still here. You can still get your Humber Snipe serviced at a local garage in Subi Centro! They are great things but, over time, those businesses relocate. So it was really a matter of knowing what we had and trying to give a friendly hand to minimise the impact on businesses.

At the end of the day, we were bringing a new community into the area. Today there is in the order of about 3,600 people living here, over 6,500 people working here, people coming to be entertained and to meet friends, to use the parklands where many pushbikes come through each day.

But some of those industries (impacted) became very angry and they felt that they should be allowed to sit here on the railway line and enjoy a prime location for very cheap rents. In some cases, some of those industries were noxious and they contaminated the soil. In the history of any city, there is an evolution where areas become in higher demand for residential and for commercial and of course those industries move on to the next industrial area. That’s happened in Perth, at Canning Vale, Forrestfield and Welshpool.

The greatest success is Subiaco Square. That is nationally significant. It’s been a demonstration for many developments around Australia and in Asia.

TONY MORGAN
CEO, Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (2000 – 2011)
So we were looking for a win for both sides. We were not actually looking for any confrontation – we wanted new people to arrive and feel comfortable and the industrial users to move out with a clearly laid out plan and plenty of time to do that.

I was involved in this project from 2000 and, during that period, the AFC site was acquired, developed and is in the process of being sold. When you front up to a group of people at AFC and there are 80 people working there, you feel obligated to those people to ensure that they have a future as well.

Simon Carroll, who was the General Manager, was instrumental in working with me and the SRA to find a solution.

I think at the end of the day most employees were generally happy and understood the need to move. Some people were still a little bit angry because their whole community was established around AFC.

Today AFC is manufactured in Asia. There’s a retail outlet on Scarborough Beach Road and most of the employees moved on to other jobs with AFC in different locations around the world. Some of them went to South America to start with and then to Asia, or they’re now working in other locations in Perth.

So again, a win-win for both sides. We needed to make sure that we looked after people and didn’t bulldoze through too quickly. We took the time to really ameliorate the impacts that this sort of project brings.
THE TRANSFORMATION

The first residential development...
The first residential houses were occupied in Subi Gardens in 1999. That’s when it started. We started building a residential population to enable us to move toward Station Square.

We’d created a demonstration street – I remember there were lemon trees in the front yards – and people had the option of choosing the house they wanted to build with one of those demonstration home builders, or designing their own.

One of the key aspects of this project was to integrate Subiaco’s heritage. For example, we wanted to make sure we reflected the red brick which is so commonly used through Subiaco, and the pitched roof. So it’s the scale and form that we saw as being very important to ensure that Subi Centro embraced Subiaco and Wembley from whence it came. But that’s delivered a long line of outcomes through the project.

The public art is a response to the heritage of the area, as is the landscape design. For instance, on the Humes Concrete site, where they manufactured clay pipes, there were some beautiful fig trees. We preserved those trees and incorporated them into Subi Gardens. So we can walk there today and sit at a bench under that fig tree that came from the mess at Humes Concrete. That history is there. It’s recorded. People should continue to be reminded about it. It’s those sorts of opportunities that we pursued.

The AFC heritage is so rich and we’ve been able to respond to that. Walk through the AFC site today and you’ll see there’s a lot of public art that reflects the heritage of what occurred there, such as the large circular sculptural pieces reflect the spinning of the plates on the wheels.

Design detail...
It’s important with a project like this to really respond to design detail. Because that’s what people remember. They remember the small tile that’s embedded in the concrete, or the texture on the wall or the plant materials. They are the sorts of things that we spent enormous amounts of time on, to really find the essence of what makes Subi Centro.

I think one of the biggest successes in this project is the integration of new contemporary architecture with the old Subiaco. I think we did a good job on that. It’s brought that balance together well for the people that live here and the people that pass through. So we’re generally praised about that outcome.

For me the greatest success is Station Square. You can’t underestimate that. That is nationally significant. It’s been a demonstration for many developments around Australia and in Asia. With groups coming through at least once a month who are amazed at what has been achieved. They go back to their local authority and the local area in which they live, and they try to replicate it.

At the end of the day there’s always room for improvement. I’d rate this project eight out of 10. You do look for those things you can do better next time and we always search for those things and there are some of those things in this project. I’ll go right back to my favourite piece – Subiaco Square – and say we could’ve done that better early on to create those markets and reinforce that as a really critical place in Perth as a destination. It will become that, but we could have most probably achieved it sooner.

The combination we got here is very special. We got a Redevelopment Authority with the combined powers that can make things happen. We were been able to marshall a whole group of consultants and staff who had the skill and experience to make these projects happen.

In any event, I am incredibly proud to have been involved.
As the principal of Time Conti Sheffield I played a role in the Subiaco redevelopment from the very start, providing marketing advice regarding design and lot orientation, lot sizes, frontages and product mix.

In 1997, after having tendered for the work, Time Conti Sheffield was appointed as the selling agents so we actually played two roles in the Subiaco redevelopment – one as property consultants and the other as sales agent.

The first auction...

I remember that the first auction day was a very nervous one for us because the product comprised of small lots of around 300sqm and it was the first time in that location that we had an auction along new urbanism lines, so the product wasn’t well known.

Just before auction day we had actually changed the name of the suburb from Jolimont to Subiaco and the first auction was in the area known as Subiaco Gardens.

We had a big marquee in the back of the car park behind the sales office and if I remember correctly it was quite a windy and rainy day, but there were more than 150 people at the auction. We had Russell Goodrich from the Real Estate program as the MC. The Minister, Richard Lewis, was present as was the Board of the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority (SRA).

Because it was new product, because of the uncertainty and nervousness, I felt as the auctioneer, I had to sell the area and do quite a bit of pre-selling before the auction to get people interested. I rambled on for quite some time about the statistics of Subiaco and the way the market was performing. I also had graphs and a chart for each block because we had design guidelines so we had to spell out what the setback was and what the height limit was and what the zero lot line was and the particular zoning of the block.

At that stage we had two products. We had townhouse lots which were 200sqm with an eight-metre frontage and we had what we called ‘cottage lots’ which were about 300sqm to 330sqm with anywhere from a 10 to a 14-metre frontage.

To our relief, the auction itself proved very successful. All bar one of the 12 lots sold at auction and the last one sold just straight after auction.

The buyers...

I’d been involved in the sale of East Perth and I was surprised that at Subi Centro we had a completely different profile of buyer.

In East Perth the profile was about 80 per cent empty nesters, and no one from the western suburbs (buyers mainly came from areas such as Nollamara, the Hills and the southern suburbs), we had about 15 per cent of what I call Generation X, and about 5 per cent of what I term ‘children of the wealthy’, where the parents had bought a block for their child or helped them buy their first home.

To our relief, the auction itself proved very successful. All bar one of the 12 lots sold at auction and the last one sold just straight after auction.

In Subi Centro we only had about 40 per cent empty nesters. We had 40 per cent young professionals – the Generation X young professionals – and the other 20 per cent was made up of mainly second home buyers and some ‘children of the wealthy’. And we had buyers from the western suburbs simply because it had a better image than East Perth.

It also had all the infrastructure – the shops, the boutiques, the cafés, the theatre – and it was...
close to the ocean. But it didn't have water. East Perth had the river, so it was interesting that Subi Centro outperformed East Perth because normally it is the water that attracts.

Community reaction...
In the early days there was a lot of ill feeling towards the redevelopment from the commercial community in particular. When the plans were being drawn up for a new shopping centre near the station, Rokeby Road had a lot of vacancies. We’d come out of the 1991 recession and then we had the 1993 downturn so it wasn’t very good economic times and a lot of businesses were struggling, much like the retail sector today.

So it’s very pleasing to see that the very opposite has happened. Once Subi Centro got going and residents moved in, it reactivated the area. The vacant spaces were soon leased, rentals started to climb and the turn-around was just amazing.

Subi Centro is a world-class transit-oriented development. The sinking of the railway, linking it to the southern side of Rokeby Road, having it underground, having the shops, the car parking, the residential development, has really made it into an outstanding precinct.

Looking back...
One of the regrets, and hindsight is a wondrous thing, is that we were too easy on density. If you planned that project again today you would include much higher density.

One of the concerns at the beginning was that people were against the density levels. They didn’t want it ‘in their backyard’, but now they can see it all working and working very well. It’s just such a beautiful development. It’s all linked. You’ve got the green link coming through, you’ve got the parks, you’ve got the link into Rokeby Road, you’ve got the visual link and now you’ve also got the vehicle link going up Station Street. It just ties in the whole area together and it’s extremely attractive.

It’s attracted a completely new market and a growing market. You still have ‘old Subiaco’ people in the character houses hating Subi Centro because they feel it is too contemporary and too modern. But the empty nesters and the young professionals in particular want low maintenance, they want something that is clean and tidy. There is one person in Subi Centro who’s got a marble floor in his garage because he has a Ferrari and he doesn’t want the tyres dirty!

Subiaco also had a very good set of design guidelines that were very user-friendly. It was a little booklet, not like the East Perth design guidelines which was a technical document that only planners and architects could understand. The Subi Centro booklet had pictures and diagrams and ticks and crosses for what you could and couldn’t do. It listed the materials that could be used and colour palettes. I remember one house in Jasmine Way that was built by an architect and I describe it as a history of Australian housing because it had weatherboard, corrugated iron, it had limestone and it had a tin roof. To me, it just bought together all the fabric of the history of housing in Western Australia. It was wonderful.
The Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) represents the development industry. As members, we have developers, consultants, environmental consultants, civil engineers. We've got lawyers, accountants, people that are marketing properties, government agencies, local government etc. So our viewpoint bubbles up right from the belly of the urban development industry.

One of the key issues is about diversity of product. Because we are a growing population, we are getting far greater diversity in the nationalities of people coming in and in the different expectations that people have, and so what we want to see is sufficient diversity – new product in master planned communities, great urban infill where there’s some terrific amenity that is provided, and opportunities for medium and high-density.

We’ve got significant challenges in delivering it, particularly in the cost of construction of high-density and in delivering affordable housing. But that’s the underpinning philosophy of UDIA – how do we make great places to live for people with differing expectations? Whether it’s about where they are in their life – a single, young person, a couple, family with children, people who are downsizing, or people from a whole range of cultures who may not have had a lifestyle that is traditionally what we have experienced in Perth. So being able to be smart about how we’re doing it and to be able to deliver the infrastructure to service those developments in a smart, affordable way is core to it.

From UDIA’s perspective, whilst we can reflect with our knowledge today that maybe they didn’t go far enough in terms of some of the density, it was cutting edge at the time and is allowing future projects to take those extra steps in terms of density.

Crossing the rail line...

When I was working in Salvado Road, I’d go through by trying to wind my way through the back blocks of what was then Subiaco, which was very much warehouses and funny little streets and very industrial.

I remember changes happening but, because I wasn’t a local in the area and I didn’t have the local newspaper, I didn’t quite know what was going on. I just saw lots of construction, roads being blocked, roads being changed. Then one day, it was like a miracle. You’d drive from one side via Salvado Road and then ended up in Subiaco. And I remember going WOW! I’m across the railway line, how did that happen? I wasn’t aware at the time of the extent and magnitude of what was actually being undertaken in the area.

Now, in my role as CEO of UDIA it’s interesting to reflect on just how transformational that project was and how gutsy it was at that time. We didn’t do things like that in Perth. We planned it out, we went into the greenfields [sites], doing anything in the established areas wasn’t quite the way we did it.

"When we do study tours overseas we regularly get references to Subiaco as the iconic project in Perth which is interesting."

When you look at Subiaco, that whole area is held up nationally and internationally as well, as an iconic project and it is strongly recognised. When we do study tours overseas we regularly get references to Subiaco as the iconic project in Perth which is interesting. When we go to Portland or Vancouver, we’re looking at them as iconic and they are looking at us as having iconic transformation as well.
So to have a massive infrastructure project like sinking the railway line and then to talk about medium-density – it was phrased high-density, but it was really only medium-density we’re talking about.

The challenge of actually convincing people that living in a smaller place and paying more for it than they might in a fringe development was actually a good thing. And what on earth was this TOD, this transit-orientated development! This was strange to actually think of building high... densely around a railway station – all new concepts.

Brave and visionary...

The people who actually started this process were incredibly visionary and, even though it’s done overseas, to actually introduce that into a city which was really starting to grow rapidly, was brave.

Our population was being lured across by the old mantra of “Come over from Sydney! For the price of a normal house in Sydney you can buy a mansion in Perth!” To actually change it around to say that “We’re not just talking about that, we’re talking about a maturing city, where we will have areas of density and vibrancy and high amenity, as well as the opportunities to have a large house on a large block if that’s what you choose” was a major change.

It’s a fantastic thing and, as I said, when I first drove across what was a railway line and found my way through, I didn’t actually understand at that stage how truly transformational that is.

Now what we’re going to find as we move forward, with other transformational projects that are coming through, like the Perth City Link project which is going to link Northbridge into the CBD, is that we can see its roots in what happened in Subiaco. Again, we’ve got the sinking of the railway line, the ambition to bring more residents into that area to give that whole vibrant feeling, and diversity of people living and moving around the streets.

One of the issues with Northbridge is that after a certain hour at night you have a homogenous population there, but getting residents, getting people walking around with their bags of groceries or out walking their dogs and it really calms down some of the area. When you look at Subiaco going back 15 years ago, it wasn’t necessarily the most desirable place to walk around at night. Now we have a very safe, vibrant, active area that you can walk around in. It’s such an exciting project and it’s underpinning the future of Perth and diversifying significantly the type of urban form that’s available to us.

Overcoming our fears...

Time is a major factor in this. We did an analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics stats during 2011 and we are one of the lowest capital cities in Australia for approvals over four storeys. There are a couple of issues there. One of them is that people have always regarded Perth as the land of the wide open space and there is a distrust of density. Over time, with more and more projects proving themselves as holding and retaining their value both in the development and in the surrounding areas, that will dissipate some of the fear.

We also have to meet some of the challenges in the affordability of high rise. We do struggle with that too. We’re a good 30 per cent more expensive, than the east coast in our construction for high rise. So that’s problematic for us when you want to have the density in these infill areas, and having a diversity of people living there. You do not want a homogenous middle class people. You need diversity, you need blue collar workers, white collar workers, you need everybody across the board to be able to enjoy these spaces and have a community being established in those areas.

Whilst the name Subiaco Redevelopment Authority [SRA] has been coming to an end, what they’re doing isn’t. The Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority is carrying on the essence of the SRA in what they are doing. So the main achievement to me was proving that this can be done, and to have change that is so accepted in the community going forward.

There are protests about any further change but, to me, that is almost the mark of something that has succeeded, where everyone becomes so integrated into the community, that now they are resisting any further change. It’s interesting to me that this happens going forward because
they’re protective of something they value highly. So we’ve been able to get something we can point to and say, “Look, we did it here.”

We’ve got Claisebrook, we’ve got Midland, we’re really moving through and so we’ve got more and more examples like Subi Centro – evidence that we can do this, as part of a balanced approach to a mature Perth. We’re going to be housing 3.5 million people. We need to understand that we need density, we need medium-density in some places, we need high-density in others. We also need the opportunity for somebody to live in a detached house on 500sqm of land; we need rural residential; we need variety, because that will give us our heart – people being able to find the types of places, or at least aspire to live in the types of places that they want to.

We’re also seeing significant shifts within Western Australia where people are seeing the opportunity to downsize in a quality way… a way that they want to move forward into their retirement years. People are looking to be more mobile and, so again, the SRA gave people that opportunity to demonstrate that you could downsize in a quality environment and maintain your values.

Community involvement…

It is completely fundamental to involve the community. It’s one of the things that we’ve done a lot of sessions on and in fact our State Conference this year (2011) was about bringing people along on that journey. People fear the unknown. One of the things that tends to happen is they tell you all the good things but not necessarily the bad things. Then people find out the bad things and then they’re suspicious of everything that is said. To keep people engaged and involved in the decision making so that they understand these are the positives and the negatives and the reasons why decisions are made, is what gets your community involved and engaged and supportive.

You can change people around from being suspicious and negative to being advocates for the project as long as they understand what’s going on. If you simply present “this is what we’re going to do” at a community meeting with no opportunity for engagement, then it’s going to struggle the whole way through. So the community engagement is probably something that has evolved since the start of SRA and people are far, far more aware of the need to bring people along for the journey than they probably were when they started this project.

Even with the SRA, the community may have been advised through letterbox drops and maybe local newspapers and – maybe my memory is just not serving me correctly – but I don’t remember a huge amount of coverage of it more broadly, whereas now there is a lot more understanding that it’s not only residents but its users of those areas who may be working even if they’re not locals, and other people that are affected by it who also need to be informed.

Of course, our capacity to communicate has improved so much now too with the internet and Facebook, social media of all sorts, which has really transformed the capacity of the development industry to communicate with people too.

Award-winning…

Subi Centro definitely ticks all those boxes for UDIA in terms of having won awards, but you also reward innovation. You’re looking for people to do something well that hasn’t been done before. Simply ticking all the boxes doesn’t make you exceptional. And that’s what we were looking at – a project that is exceptional, not just in the concept, but in the delivery.

As time goes on, we will see other projects surpass it in terms of how it was delivered, but that’s the way it has to be. Everybody builds on the knowledge that was there before. The key thing was that it was unique at the time to go down that pathway in Perth and to deliver that and to have it as a popular outcome was fantastic.

We’ve also done some research and it’s interesting to look at the multiplier effect of redevelopment or new projects on the value in surrounding suburbs. It is at least the value of the project itself. In every project that we have examined, there was a significant rise in property values in the surrounding areas. Part of that is simply because the amenity rises and the services for those communities increases the desirability of living there, and then increases property values as a result of that. People will want to move there. So, Subiaco is actually a foundation stone of modern infill in Perth.
Previous page
Subiaco Square (view from Rokeby Road), 2011

Clockwise from top left
Market Square Park, Subiaco, 2007
Subiaco Square, 2009
Photo courtesy of Hames Sharley
Emporium Apartments, Subiaco, 2009
Photo courtesy of Pindan
Café Culture, Subiaco Square, 2011
Clockwise from top left
New homes in Centro North, circa 2007
A place to play, Subi Centro, 2002
Market Square Park, Subiaco, 2007
What I love about being a part of Subi Centro is that it’s a really vibrant and exciting area.

Eamon (Sullivan) and I chose Subi Centro I guess mainly because he grew up in this area and has great ties to the community and Subiaco. This is a perfect spot right here near the train station. It seemed like an excellent idea for a café.

Growing up, Subi Station is all I can remember of this area and maybe sand. I don’t think we ever came past — you just stopped at Subi Station and there was nothing else here. So when I returned to Perth 16 years later to find this brand new, amazing Square it was a great surprise.

The vibe’s excellent. It’s a great mix of your business people, with your locals and people using the train station — you get a really eclectic group of people.

Our customers are made up of business people — so above us are some big businesses, around us is big business, but there’s also a huge group of locals and they’re the best part of it because they’re so regular and often in our café, you’ll have the whole café in a full conversation, which is wonderful.

One of the things that I love about being a café owner in Subiaco is the conversations that I have, and the stories that I’m told and the people that I meet. Subiaco definitely has something really special about it.

Eamon and I did have the opportunity to look at other suburbs, popular café suburbs, but we felt that we could actually really bring something different to Subiaco. Both of us have always had a tie to Subiaco — for me, I didn’t grow up in this area but I love, and always have loved, coming to Subiaco as a destination for food, coffee or shopping; for Eamon, it’s an area he grew up in and so it felt really comfortable and it felt like we belonged here.

Louis Baxters is actually named after our French Bulldogs. My dog is named Louis Pierre, Eamon’s dog is Baxter. We didn’t necessarily want a café that was named after ourselves because, at the end of the day, people will come back if the coffee is good and the food is good and the service is good — not because of who owns it.

Eamon and I met on the set of MasterChef. I’ve been in television for 18 years and Eamon is a swimmer who loves to cook so he entered Celebrity MasterChef. He is now currently training for the London Olympics. As a gold medal-winning Olympic swimmer, I guess food is an important part of his life because he has to watch what he eats, so he might as well learn how to cook something really beautiful that is healthy.

I grew up in a family where food was extremely important so whilst it seems far-fetched that a swimmer and a TV producer could open a café, it’s actually not that far-fetched.

I think what makes Louis Baxters a success is that we offer something quite different and unique — it’s different coffee to anyone else. The food is all cooked in-house from your mayonnaise through to your sandwiches, it’s all done in-house, and I think the service also makes us different. I love to get out there and talk to everyone who comes into the café and I think people like that, they like the engagement and conversation.

I think it’s vital that the redevelopment occurred in Subiaco. I think that suburbs can die very easily and a lot of businesses and locals can be damaged if someone doesn’t step in and really help to build it up into a destination. Subiaco is definitely a destination and what we’ve got here at Subi Centro is something that people can come to, even if they don’t live in the area.
One of the things that I love about being a café owner in Subiaco is the conversations that I have, and the stories that I’m told and the people that I meet. Subiaco definitely has something really special about it.”
I think most of the Subi Centro project has resulted in better amenities and better attractions for Subiaco – which helps us to attract staff. Some of our staff come from around Subiaco, West Leederville and the local environment, but a lot of staff come from outside the area. A lot of our staff are not in jobs that pay high wages so they tend to come more from the north metropolitan suburbs rather than necessarily living around Subi. I think it’s attractive for staff to be able to go somewhere close, into Subiaco, during their lunch break or after work, and that’s particularly the case since the redevelopment is occurring closer to the hospital. It will be even more the case when Centro North and the related developments are completed.

The good thing about the whole Subi Centro redevelopment is that it really brings the hospital into the main part of Subiaco. It makes us a part of Subiaco much more so than it had previously been, with the buildings directly opposite us, cutting us off from the main part of Subiaco.

Bowling over the old TAFE building really opened the area up, and putting in those roads to provide direct access into Subiaco opened up the passage to Subiaco for us. I personally take the train to and from work so it’s been great for me to just go straight down through that road to the Subi Train Station and link in with the rest of the Subiaco restaurants, bars, coffee shops and shopping.

There are some moves afoot to improve the bus route from here to the West Leederville Train Station as well, which is where there’s a link. A lot of people who would otherwise take the train to the north don’t currently have that opportunity. Anything that relieves parking pressure on us is welcomed!

So we haven’t been disrupted really in any way. Obviously current works over the road at the moment means that our access through to Subi Centro, the Train Station and Subiaco generally is a bit diverted, but that’s temporary and we understand that will improve quite considerably down the track.

Embracing ‘green’ transport...

We put in place what we call our ‘Green Travel Plan’ a while ago and we’ve had more than 300 of our staff take up the option of being paid a few extra dollars a day to give up their parking rights in favour of taking public transport or finding their own way in.

Essentially the scheme asks them to give up their multi-storey car parking rights and discounted staff parking and we pay them $5 a day towards their public transport costs, car pooling or other means of finding their way in, and it takes a bit of pressure off our car park and helps the environment.

“...The good thing about the whole Subi Centro redevelopment is that it really brings the hospital into the main part of Subiaco.”

Out of a total 2,000 staff, about 15 per cent have engaged with this incentive, which we think is pretty good so far.

I have worked at King Edward Memorial Hospital on a couple of occasions and at Princess Margaret Hospital but they are slightly different locations and probably fractionally less impacted by the Subi Centro redevelopment because their access to Subi was more up at the other end and the top of the Bagot Road end. But certainly anything that makes it attractive for staff to come and work in the area is a good thing for a hospital, because getting staff is the hard thing for us. So attracting staff by saying “You’ll be working in the Subiaco environment and look at all there is...
on offer now... it’s so close you can walk there in your lunch time (and lots of our staff do that)”, is a great thing.

**Attitudes to change...**

It’s been good. It’s been all positive I think. I haven’t seen any parts of it that I thought were badly done. I think they have done it pretty well. I think it will be even better once the old markets get sorted out and really provide that entrance to that part of Subiaco. Finishing that section of the redevelopment and the area over the road from us will really bring us into Subiaco and directly connect us to Subi Centro. That will be really fabulous.

We have always had a close relationship and an affiliation with the Subiaco area. The Sisters of St John of God developed this site with great foresight over 110 years ago and back then Subiaco was obviously nowhere near as developed as it is today.

Attraction and retention of staff is the main benefit for us. Having all the facilities there for them to use at lunch time and after work would be the main benefit for us... and the ease of being able to get here.

As a patient, you don’t tend to choose your hospital by ease of access and, on the whole, you don’t largely come by public transport, so it is not so much an issue for patients. We tend to take patients from all over the metropolitan area and from the country as well.

**Working with the SRA...**

I’ve been involved through Tony Morgan who was the CEO of the Subiaco Redevelopment Authority and I guess our contribution to that consultation has particularly been about how we can improve the flow of people from the hospital to Subiaco and back again – details like pedestrian crosswalks over busy roads like Salvado Road and a roundabout at the front entrance of the hospital on Salvado Road. They are the sorts of things which are happening now, which is really terrific – things that we asked for and are now being progressed with the Council as well as with the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority (MRA).

We still deal with the Subiaco Council and the Town of Cambridge, but I think it is a great thing to have a redevelopment authority which has the authority to get on and make things happen in a reasonable amount of time. So much has happened... I didn’t realise it was 17 years... I didn’t think it was that long, but so much has happened in a relatively short period of time compared to what can happen when there isn’t a redevelopment authority overseeing it.

I think it’s exciting. We’re also involved in Midland because St John of God Healthcare is in contract with the State Government to build and operate the Midland Health Campus, so we will again be working with the MRA.

I just think it is great that you can get on and make decisions and make things happen and transform the city in a reasonable period of time. It is a really ‘big tick’ for the decision to have a redevelopment authority oversee the whole process and drive the whole process from the very beginning.
SUBI CENTRO

HEATHER HENDERSON
Mayor, City of Subiaco

I’ve been on the Subiaco Council for over 20 years since 1990, although I had a two-year break from 2003 to 2005. I’ve been the Mayor since 2005. I’ve got a really good handle on the Subi Centro project having been here almost since its inception, although I’m sure there were lots of conversations prior to my time.

I first came to Australia in 1971 and then spent a number of years in New Guinea before my husband and I came to live in Subiaco in 1978.

I guess Subiaco to me always had a bit of an attraction in terms of its built fabric. That’s why my husband and I came to live here, because we wanted to do up an old home and we have successfully renovated two or three during our time in Subiaco.

Remembering Subiaco...

For me it was that village atmosphere which then encapsulated a lot more ‘village’ than there is now. Rokeby Road had its Crossways Shopping Centre from late 1979 and the early 1980s but it also had the up and down of Rokeby Road, with some early influences that were there. There were two butcher shops, a baker and a very popular greengrocer owned and run by George Malaxos and Nick Zanthis. I can hardly remember a dress shop although there was, where Friendlies Chemists currently is, a very vogue shop called Timewells where you could buy women’s and men’s fashion – so I think it was much more a village than anything else.

There were little or no coffee bars in those days, or pizza parlours. I think the Witches Cauldron probably has been there about 40 years, so it would have just been there on its own at that particular point in time.

It was very much an old high street, like you would have in Britain. You’d have your ‘bread and butter’ shopping and the kinds of things that supported a community. You would walk down Rokeby Road and you came to a railway station, which was much further west in my recollection than the current one is, and I think at one stage there was not even a boom gate, but a passageway where you walked through to get to the other side of the railway.

There was the old fashioned kind of railway station with a little waiting room, and then the station master’s office and a few things like that. Subsequent to that, they put in a set of stairs which went up and over the chimney on the other side. I can remember them being very green, the colour always stood out to me.

It was very much used at the weekends because it was where that part of the old Subiaco Markets started up and there were a few old railway carriages which abutted a bit of wasteland that you walked across from the railway. The markets started off in those three or four little railway carriages, and then expanded right out. It was actually quite big in those days and anybody could get a stall there.

“I think like anything if you don’t take the community on the journey, the journey fails miserably, and I think that’s one of the experiences we’ve had with the whole project. In the beginning we had that diversity of opinion but they were involved in the conversation to a great extent.”

I can remember the diversity of things that were sold – it was incredible. People had second-hand shops and electrical shops and hairdressers, as well as the fruit and vegetable shops. It really didn’t encompass sitting and eating or patisseries or the French bakery, it was mainly
the day-to-day living stuff. Everybody in Subi walked down there on a Saturday and Sunday and did their shopping and it was almost surrounded by, as I can remember, lots of interesting quirky businesses that supported the kind of lifestyle we had in Subi. You had your whitegoods places, you had your motor mechanics, you had people who stripped and painted antique furniture or just restored antique furniture. In that way, it had a real support for its local community.

I can remember the industrial parts of Subiaco being very intense, when you went beyond Hay Street to the back of where Subi Centro is now, and you had the BOC Gases site and all the cylinders there. I can remember one Councillor who used to continually stand up at Council and say ‘one day that place is going to explode – we’re all going to be done and dusted’.

That one particularly stands out in my mind because I think it was probably the largest of those kind of buildings there. Opposite where St Ives is now, there was a whole row of various things as well... and, at one stage when the markets were in trouble, they moved them into a big shed where St Ives is now and they had a barrow market, like they have at The Cross in Sydney.

They tried that for a while, but it didn’t really take off because it was not close enough to the railway station, which has always been the attraction of the Station Street Markets being so close to the train station. I often went to the barrow market and it seemed to me that we needed it, but it was in the wrong place at that particular point in time.

Subi Centro...

The opportunity was given to the City of Subiaco to participate in partnership with the State Government to develop 80 hectares of land in the location where Subi Centro is now. If I remember correctly, there were people who were both for and against this idea.

Some of the strategic thinkers felt it was a really wonderful opportunity for urban renewal to take place in our city – for our city not to be divided by our railway line, very much the same as they are doing in Perth at this time – but to be able...
to embrace a new community which wouldn’t be divided by a railway line. So I think there was a strong feeling of support on Council to participate in the project.

But there was also a very strong feeling of resistance in our community, by a number of people who were also represented on Council. I can remember loads and loads of public meetings with the organisation called Uniting Subiaco, with Trish Steadman heading it up. There were some very vocal meetings down at Bunnings at Home Base about the sinking of the railway.

So it was a very divisive thing, as it went along. Even now, when there’s something that goes wrong over there, people say ’see, we told you so’. For example, we would like to change the railway station now to bring in more vibrancy. That was what we thought the development would do initially, but it didn’t, and people now say ’we could have told you that’. But it wasn’t that at all, it was just that they liked the way it was before.

So yes, the community was divided, yes the Council was divided, but obviously people saw enough strength in our commitment to go ahead. So we went into an 80/20 partnership with the State Government. I actually signed that document with Richard Lewis the then Minister of Planning.

There have been a number of things that the community has been passionate about and if you asked me now after 20 years, was Subi Centro the most passionate issue? No, I would say it was not. It’s there now and it’s been recognised worldwide as a wonderful urban renewal project. Those who live there value it so much, and have formed such a close knit community without having a community centre, or anything to draw them together. They have found this affiliation in just living the way they do, and the common park certainly is a catalyst for those friendship groups and their interaction. Probably at the time, it was the most fractious thing that Council was dealing with, but time heals all of that, and changes your perception on what it probably was really like.

The first part of the development was to sink the railway and the 800 metres or so up the road, which gave us the opportunity to then start that urban renewal process around the railway. Then we came to the first subdivision and subsequently worked right around the original common. Then it gradually came up the hill, and as it came up the hill, there was Subiaco Rise, and finally you’ve got the whole area done, except for Australian Fine China (AFC), which is potentially the last part of it.

We’ve only got that 14 per cent left and AFC is probably a big component of that.

I think if we look back we could learn a few things about it, but you always do in every urban renewal project and it may be related more to design guidelines, parking concessions and things like that, because we find they are the day-to-day things that tend to impede the residents and the commercial/retail community in that area.

Always with these projects, there’s something you can learn. I think the City got very much involved by building the first sustainable house. That was a wonderful, wonderful project and if you think at the time that the whole project caused a lot of angst – that one probably caused a whole lot more angst because Council had never been involved in a development of that nature before. We took on this huge project and I think that’s probably been one of the most successful things.

Obviously it was the benchmark for lots of other councils to start building their own sustainable homes and that one has universal access as well,
which is really very nice because the person who lives in that house has a disability, so it’s just been an absolutely wonderful thing.

We learnt along the way, and that was a wonderful contribution to the wider community as well as the Subiaco community.

Community...

I think in retrospect we should have been much more involved in trying to get more of the railway sunk and various things like that. You look back and you think, ‘Oh why didn’t we sink it right the way along to the next subway at Nicholson Road so that the Daglish community could have been part of this as well’. I think that we did the right thing for our community and I certainly know that the new community over the other side really believe that they’re not very much part of our community.

I think people still refer to Subi Centro as being ‘over there’ because it’s new, and there’s a contrast between the value that people place on coming to live in old Subiaco in terms of retention of the built fabric and things like that.

It’s also new because it doesn’t have the same level of community interest that we have in the old part of Subiaco, for example, it has no school. We have these wonderful communities of interest within our school community with Subiaco, Rosalie and Jolimont primary schools, that actually reflect what Subiaco is all about.

I wondered in the beginning how we would manage to form a cohesive community, because we didn’t have a community centre or a coffee shop in the early days where people could meet together (we’ve got one or two now). I think what the people did was join together. The dog community, for example, in Subiaco Common is probably the biggest community down there and I think that draws people who don’t even have dogs to be part of that community. They work very hard on their social activities and the things that they plan for their community. So yes, we do tend to use that language, ‘over there’, but that doesn’t mean they’re not very much part of our community.

I think the Subiaco China Green Action Group were also the foundation for securing a strong and deep community spirit in the area.

I think like anything if you don’t take the community on the journey, the journey fails miserably and I think that’s one of the experiences we’ve had with the whole project. In the beginning we had that diversity of opinion but they were involved in the conversation to a great extent and, although with the project going ahead, obviously Uniting Subiaco was still having a look at what was there, having a look at what was happening and keeping their eye on the project.

I think the rest of the development almost went without a hitch. One of the things along the way that you should probably look at was the influence the City of Subiaco had on State Government policy in terms of social and affordable housing. I share the former Mayor’s philosophy about that and we were very delighted when they changed the rules and made 10 to 15 per cent of the development available for social and affordable housing.

I live there myself now, and I live across the road from an affordable home and I’m an advocate for that community. I thought it was a really good outcome for the city because it retained the diversity of people. We mustn’t forget that we come from very working class roots in Subi, and there may be some nouveau riche around now, but we are historically working class.

Achievements...

The development has brought a whole new community that can enjoy the lifestyle in Subiaco. There have been a lot of businesses that have come to Subi since then – if you look at Hay Street 20 years ago and see the diversity of businesses that we’ve been able to attract, I think that anchor tenants are now clamouring to come to Subiaco particularly within the IT and mining industries. That would never have happened if we hadn’t redeveloped that land, and there are still pockets of that land that need to be looked at and redeveloped accordingly.

I think it’s changed the face of Subiaco. We found along the way there have been very critical debates with all parts of the community in terms of development. AFC is probably the one that sticks in my mind, as one of the critical issues. I’ve met with the Subiaco China Green Action Group every Wednesday for three and a half years. So I have invested a lot of time in that, but the Council embraced the community in
discussion. We were concerned about having an action group working on the outside, against the Council, so we said ‘okay, come on we’ll meet, let’s try and sort out these issues together’. We’ve managed to do that and that’s satisfied both those surrounding communities to the best extent that a mediated outcome can actually bring. It’s also satisfied the Daglish community who were really very worried about Stubbs Terrace and the impact of traffic on that area.

I think in that way we’ve been very successful, in embracing the community in discussions over the best outcome for AFC. In the end, the Minister changed the design guidelines, but that’s all brought out a really good outcome for our community and I don’t think anyone’s really lost face over the whole thing. It’s just a process and we had access to a process and we used it to get the best benefit we could.

Urban fabric...

I think the flavour of Subiaco very much reflects what’s there currently and the fact that the Hay Street development on the other side is now up to five stories, is going to be reflected going up the hill, I think that was what we tried to get.

I suppose looking back, if you talk about transit-oriented development (TOD) principles, and we didn’t really talk that language when they were starting the development, we might have had eight or nine stories around the railway, because that brings the vibrancy back into that area as well. I think with every urban renewal project you can learn something and if we looked at it again we might change some of those principles.

The City has questioned whether it was too late to go to Subi Centro, or now AFC and say right, this is a TOD principle. Is it our place now to start putting in high densities, when really we should have put them around the railway station in the beginning to get that vibrancy? That’s my view.

I think some of the artwork reflects the heritage of the area, I personally would have liked to have seen the SRA commit more to some of the AFC values and reflect that more... and whilst I haven’t seen the art, I understand it’s reflective of what happened there as well.

There is a very strong group in Subi that are lobbying very heavily to have some kind of museum type interactive thing on Wembley Ware. They’re very keen for that sort of thing to be reflected.

I think what the SRA did in naming some of the streets after the key people of AFC, was really a very valued thing. I wrote to both the people whose names have been suggested – they are in their 90s now – and they were absolutely delighted to have been honoured in that way. So, do I think you can do better at everything? Sure, but I also understand the commerciality of the whole thing.

Reflecting...

I think when I retire, I’ll be glad I was here at the right place at the right time. I think that we’ll leave a good legacy for the City in terms of the decision that we made many years ago. I think the community in Subi Centro are grateful for the opportunity to live in Subi, something they would have never had if we hadn’t done the urban renewal project.

I think the future Council needs to work on restoring, maintaining, somehow revitalising the station area, and I think that we need to get more people out of cars.

I remember very vividly the day that Alannah MacTiernan [former Planning Minister] and I had a little ceremony at the railway station, and Alannah gave the City a cheque for $6.1 million which was a very good outcome as our first dividend. That will always stand out in my mind as a significant part, and I’ll always be proud that I was there with Richard Lewis [former Planning Minister] to sign the original SRA Agreement document, because that’s historical.

When I walk through Subi Centro, I really like what I see. I think it’s beautiful and people come from all over the world and look at it and just admire what has been done. We’ve had visitors from New Zealand here in the city that have come to have a look at it and have gone away thinking what a great development it is.

At the time it was cutting edge stuff to make a decision like that for a small local government. What we now see happening in Perth is actually what we did 20 years ago, which is fantastic. At the time the State Government was very innovative in considering it as well.
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*Recollections & Reflections: Subi Centro* is a collection of memories and pictures, shared by some of the people who were involved in or were observers of the transformation of Subiaco between 1994 and 2011.

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