Fix Harbour Esplanade now

Harbour Esplanade and Central Pier, two defining elements of Docklands that should be the main draw-cards, are the very two things that pull the area down. Harbour Esplanade, the main link between the developing precincts of Victoria Harbour and NewQuay, is an ugly eyesore of redundant tram tracks and crumbling mismatched surfaces. Central Pier, with a few “heritage” sheds of no architectural significance that provide no tangible link to the maritime past, seems to exist primarily to house noisy parties and scar the beauty of the harbour with the stained concrete car park at its western extremity.
If these third-rate places are the main event, it’s little wonder that Docklands residents and estate agents are constantly having to talk the area up.
I know that after many years of dithering by Places Victoria and the City of Melbourne, a master plan has been developed. But it’s going to take 10 to 15 years to implement! That is ridiculous.
It’s necessary to start the work immediately, because without that essential piece of infrastructure in place, the future of the quality of development in the area is in jeopardy. Nobody is going to build a palace in a pig-sty.
If a person unfamiliar to Melbourne looked at the map of the inner city I’m sure he or she would look at the location of Docklands and assume that this must be the best bit of real estate in Victoria.
I don’t regard Docklands as a suburb, I see it it as the western edge of the CBD. The part of the CBD that sits on the harbour. How good is that?
I think the stranger would be very disappointed, however, on seeing the reality of the area’s main spine. Seeing the mistakes of the past laid out before them, the hideous multi-coloured paving in all its garish glory crudely patched with bitumen. The incongruous 3D yellow
numerals, the abandoned tram tracks and the rotting white-capped piles that are the remnants of the old wharfs. Too many decaying hard surfaces and too little greenery. And too few people walking because it’s desolate and not a very pleasant place to walk.

Docklands has an enormous potential. That’s why I chose to move here two years ago. Victoria Harbour and NewQuay are developing very nicely. The quality of architecture is very high and the landscaping on both sides of the harbour is exceptional but Harbour Esplanade and Central Pier are pulling the whole Docklands area down.

It doesn’t need to be like this. Approval for new buildings in the area could be made dependent on paying towards improving the infrastructure. The present hotch-potch of paving and tram tracks could be torn up and turfed over in the short-term and the works required for completing the master plan could be started as soon as possible.

What should be the jewel in Melbourne’s crown is in desperate need of repair.

Cliff and Penny Steele