

Push to add police site to Yarra parkland

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THE old East Melbourne Police Station would be demolished, and its site added to Yarra Park, under a Melbourne Council push for compensation for parkland lost to the MCG redevelopment.

The grey-brick, boarded-up police station, on the corner of Vale St and Wellington Pde, has been empty for five years.

The council is also asking the State Government to hand over an unused strip of land along the section of railway on the park's north side, and the site of former army barracks on Swan St.

The land would be in compensation for parkland taken up by the new MCG concourse and a pedestrian bridge linking the park to the Exhibition St extension and Birrarung Marr.

Cr Kate Redwood said the council realised it was asking for much more land than that lost by the MCG redevelopment.

"But it's an opportune time, given all the commitments of State Government environment

policy for the (2006 Commonwealth) Games. We're looking for this site (the police station) to be brought back into the park rather than it being left an eyesore," she said.

The council would speak to VicTrack about the rail reserve land, she said.

But Cr Kevin Chamberlin said he believed the government had already marked the former army barracks for use during the Games.

He said the land, next to Gosch's Paddock, was to be returned to the council, under a promise by the former Cain Government, in compensation for parkland lost when the Rod Laver Arena was built in the early 1980s.

But the former Kennett Government reneged on the deal.

Sports Minister Justin Madden's spokeswoman, Kym Carter, said the minister was yet to receive a formal request from the council.

"However, he is confident a positive outcome will be achieved," she said.

Brothers and sisters cop a new home

■ AFTER two years of uncertainty surrounding whether it can stay at its Richmond premises the Big Brothers Big Sisters charity has finally found a long-term home.

The organisation, which pairs adult mentors with young people, has been offered the use of the run-down former East Melbourne police station by owners VicTrack for a peppercorn rent.

Executive officer Paul Mathewson said the charity was in discussions with the City of Melbourne to finalise planning issues.

The organisation was given six months notice to vacate its Richmond premises earlier this year but the land-

lord, the Jesuit parish, recently extended the lease until June 2006.

Mr Mathewson said the new site was ideal because it was in a better location.

"We'd love to have a building that would give us considerable public exposure," Mr Mathewson said.

"We need to find a long-term home for our own sake because it is unsettling for everyone that we keep launching from six months to six months."

The charity, which has 150 young people on its waiting list, last week secured \$230,000 in funding over three years from the Federal Government's Mentor Marketplace Programme.

Fourteen service providers across Australia shared in the \$4 million funding round.

Mr Mathewson said the funding would allow the organisation to focus on building financial support in other areas such as community fundraising and business partnerships.

Big Brothers Big Sisters recruits and trains volunteers to be mentors to young people aged seven and upwards across the Melbourne metropolitan region.

Volunteers spend weekly sessions with young people for a minimum of 12 months.

- Michelle Draper