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Labor in rezoning stoush

Exclusive
Royce Millar
Ben Schneiders

Two Victorian Labor MPs lobbied for the residential rezoning of 133 hectares of land earmarked for an employment precinct in Melbourne's sprawling south-east, after they were approached by a residents' group funded by developers behind the plan.

Valuers and planning experts say the rezoning, if approved, would deliver a \$50 million windfall to the owners, giant developer Leighton and market gardeners the Kelly family.

The *Sunday Age* can also reveal that the MPs, Jude Perera (Cranbourne) and Judith Graley (Narre Warren South), received thousands of dollars in donations before the 2014 election from consultants to the Cranbourne West landowners, the Mornington-based Watsons Pty Ltd.

In election year 2014-2015, Watsons was also the single-biggest property industry donor to

the Liberal Party, tipping almost \$80,000 into the (ultimately unsuccessful) campaigns of south-eastern Liberal candidates and current Casey councillors Geoff Ablett and Amanda Stapledon.

Donations of any amount are legal and *The Sunday Age* does not suggest otherwise.

Watsons is headed by Ferrari-driving planner and lobbyist John Woodman. His who's-who client list has included, or includes, the Fox, Ansett and Baillieu-Myer clans, as well as Tony Madaffer, the man police have alleged to be Melbourne's mafia boss.

A *Sunday Age* investigation has confirmed that Mr Perera pressed the office of the Andrews government Planning Minister Richard Wynne on multiple occasions about the rezoning, including as recently as October. The rezoning process has been in train since Casey council backed the idea in 2015 after initially opposing it before the 2014 election.

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Anguish for the missing

The parents, siblings, partners of these Uighurs have disappeared in China. Today their Australian kin are speaking out.

NEWS & EXTRA

How Melbourne's deadliest terror plot was foiled

Plans for a Christmas day massacre were building, **Erin Pearson** reports.

Ibrahim Abbas stood smug and proud in the dock, laughing as he described how he and three accomplices tried to avoid

detection while they stood at Federation Square on December 20, 2016, planning how to kill people with bombs and knives on Christmas Day.

CCTV shows dozens of people including a number of children standing nearby, oblivious, as the group tried to be secretive while discussing their plans on the steps

REVIEW ON HOW INTEL IS SHARED

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TROLLEY MAN GRANTED BAIL

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of central Melbourne's unofficial meeting place.

During his two-week long testimony to the Supreme Court, Ibrahim — the group's ringleader — revealed his sickening plot in detail.

"'Cause it'd be pretty stupid for someone to hear us talkin' about our plans," Abbas laughed as he

described the group's visit.

"I'm just thinking how I'm gonna use my knife as efficiently as possible."

Just weeks earlier he had pleaded guilty in Victoria's Supreme Court to his part in the Christmas Day terror plot.

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Health & Care



Old friends Jan Candy and Jan Somers look forward to being apartment neighbours in Brunswick.
Photo: Luis Ascul

Allison Worrall

Best friends Jan Candy and Jan Somers fondly remember moving in together after they finished high school in the 1970s. They rented an attic studio in Elwood, paying \$20 each a week.

"It was fabulous," Ms Candy recalled. "We were raring to get away from our parents."

Fifty years on, the pair are preparing to live at close quarters again, having recently bought two apartments on the same floor of a new development in Brunswick.

The friends represent a shift in the demographic of apartment buyers in sustainable, inner-city blocks, according to the Melbourne-based developer behind the project, Milieu.

Alongside environmentally conscious young professionals, apartments are attracting a cohort

of single, older women looking to downsize.

For Ms Somers and Ms Candy, both 68, the decision to purchase together was a long time coming.

"Over the years, we'd talked about being in close proximity to one another, perhaps even buying a house and dividing it into two in some way," Ms Somers said.

She inspected a retirement village in Carlton, while Ms Candy looked through a unit in super-sustainable development the Commons, the Brunswick building that was the inspiration for the Nightingale model.

Eventually, they settled on the yet-to-be-built development on Breeze Street, a seven-storey complex of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments priced from \$465,000 all the way to \$1.02 million.

"Even when we're old, we can

still manage to get to the train station or up to Sydney Road," Ms Somers said, before clarifying, "but we have no intention of hitting old until about 95."

Both women will sell their homes in Brunswick to move into their new two-bedroom apartments, due to be completed in 2020, just before their 70th birthdays.

After a stroke at home 18 months ago, Ms Candy said it would be a relief to have someone she knew close by in the apartment building.

"Because Jan and I have been so much a part of each other's lives, it's really reassuring to know that there's someone just down the hallway," she said.

The pair said they hoped to share meals, walk their dogs together, and "keep an eye on each other".

Milieu sales director Patrick Cooney said that of the six downsizers who had bought into the development, all were women.

They shared a strong desire to be part of a community, he said, and were drawn to the sustainable features of the building, such as solar panels, double-glazed windows and reclaimed timber flooring.

"You have a lot of people wanting in there because they have seen what's happened in the last 20 years, and they're worried about their grandchildren and want to do their bit."

Downsizers have seized on Melbourne's apartment market in recent years, particularly in well-connected, inner-city suburbs. But Mr Cooney said that, like most owner-occupiers, they had become more discerning.

"A lot of people are taking a lot

longer to make a decision," he said.

"That's the main shift we've seen in the last year or so.

"They're daunted by a lot of the open-for-inspections, particularly in Brunswick, because it has had a lot of poor development outcomes," he said, referring to internal-facing apartments and bedrooms with borrowed light.

This sentiment was shared by Ms Candy. "For too long we've had developers going rampant with unbelievable developments that have no sense of community and no personality, and I find that really sad," she said.

Although nervous about buying off-the-plan, the lifelong friends were confident they had made the right choice, and looked forward to meeting their neighbours.

"It feels like it can be a place for life," Ms Somers said. "I don't want to move again."

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