

YARRA RANGES / NY DALE POST 16/2/99

Beeches to be a restoration

DEVELOPERS of Sherbrooke's Burnham Beeches estate have pledged to transform the property into a tourism drawcard for the Dandenongs.

The rundown 22ha property, once the home of the Nicholas family which founded the Aspro empire, is set to become a revamped tourist attraction, with accommodation, function rooms, restaurant and health spa planned in the development.

Yarra Ranges Council approved a planning permit last week, giving developers Lustig and Moar the green light to start works on the estate.

Amid concerns from environmental groups, Lustig and Moar spokesman David Parsons said the group planned to leave Burnham Beeches a "far more faithful building than it has been".

"We feel most stakeholders

have had a chance to express their views, and this is one tenth the size of our usual developments," Mr Parsons said.

Under the plans, the property's Norris House, originally built by local environmental identity, Alfred Nicholas, will be restored and renovated to provide 66 guest rooms, a 120-seat restaurant and bar facilities for 40 people.

Heritage

Lustig and Moar have also been presented with conditions from Heritage Victoria on the Norris House restoration. The conditions detail the retention of existing staircases, lounge window panes and original columns.

Mr Parsons said the designs would place an emphasis on giving Norris House as much prominence as it deserved. He also denied developers were planning to take helicopter trips

from the estate.

Cr Robyn Hale said it would have preferable if the site had been bought by the State Government but hoped the developers pushed for the estate to become a financially viable asset.

"It's one of the biggest tragedies in the Dandenongs to see Burnham Beeches sit for six to seven years in wrack and ruin; hopefully the developers can make it a site we can all be proud of," Cr Hale said.

Environmental groups expressed concerns over the visibility of detached guest accommodation villas from nearby streets, including Panteg, Perrins Creek and Mernda Rds.

Other concerns included the proximity of developments to lyrebird habitats in Sherbrooke Forest and on the conspicuousness of cladding of villas.