# Melbourne Club challenges Justin Hemmes’ plan to transform historic car park into creative hub



Sydney billionaire Justin Hemmes’ ambitious project to transform an eight-storey car park in Melbourne’s central business district into a vibrant ‘creative wonderland’ faces significant opposition from one of the city’s oldest private clubs. The development proposal, revealed in February by Hemmes’ Merivale Group, aims to revitalise 34/60 Little Collins Street with a diverse array of attractions, including an art gallery, an ‘incubator hub’ for artists, a boutique hotel, and live music venues.

The site, known as the Parkade, currently functions as a car park under a lease held by property company Dexus, which extends until June 2037. While the City of Melbourne council approved the sale of the Parkade to Merivale in February with settlement scheduled for June, the existing lease has not been terminated. This leaves Merivale and Dexus responsible for negotiating a change in the site’s use.

However, the Melbourne Club, a private gentlemen's club founded in 1838 and based at 36 Collins Street since 1859, has reportedly acquired a 50 per cent stake in the Parkade’s current lease, giving it considerable legal influence over the site’s future. The Club’s rear garden, secluded by trees and a wall, backs onto Little Collins Street, directly opposite the car park. Multiple sources cited by The Age reveal that club members are concerned about the potential loss of parking facilities and claim they were not sufficiently consulted regarding Merivale’s plans.

A source from the Melbourne Club told The Age that members are prepared to oppose the redevelopment vigorously, stating that members "will do what it takes" to block Hemmes’ vision. Another insider confirmed, "They're more than willing to stand up to him. They've definitely got the funds, and they also have access to some of the city's best lawyers if it comes to that." In a move approved overwhelmingly at a closed-door meeting on 31 March, the Club spent $5.5 million to secure its stake in the lease, reinforcing its determination to influence the site's future use.

Merivale Group’s plans position the Parkade as a ‘creative, social precinct’ rather than a traditional nightclub, designed to appeal to families, creatives, tourists, and locals alike. Hemmes described the project as his "boldest and most innovative" venture to date, a vision he has been developing for over ten years. Speaking in February about the project, Hemmes said: "This is our boldest and most innovative project that we have embarked upon to date; a vision that I've been conceptualising and refining for a decade." He highlighted the opportunity to revitalise what he characterised as an “under-invested yet wonderful site.”

Melbourne’s Lord Mayor Nick Reece praised Hemmes, recognising him as the "king of Sydney’s hospitality industry" and applauding the project’s potential to cement Melbourne as a prominent hospitality hub. Reece noted: "It’s a huge vote of confidence that Merivale has chosen to invest in Melbourne. This entertainment precinct will be right on the doorstep of Melbourne’s world-class theatre district – and create hundreds of jobs and generate millions of dollars for the local economy."

As the status of the lease and future development remains in flux, the Melbourne Club has declined to comment, and representatives from Dexus and Merivale Group have also not provided further statements beyond their previously published remarks.

At present, the redevelopment of the Parkade site faces a legal and community battle, illustrating the complex relationship between urban development ambitions and established city institutions with historic ties and influence in Melbourne’s landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657559/Justin-Hemmes-Melbourne-Club.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data