

# Bringing the house down

A St Kilda boarding house will be shut down after violence and drug use spiralled out of control. **Jordy Atkinson** reports

**T**he Little Grey St boarding house at the epicentre of a crime wave will be shut down after authorities bowed to public and media pressure.

Housing Minister and Albert Park State Labor MP Martin Foley last week announced the closure of the Regal, following outcry from people living near the disreputable rooming house.

It came after the *Leader* on February 23 reported violence, abuse and drug use had hit crisis point in nearby streets.

Garbage contractors had also refused to service Little Grey St amid spiralling crime.

Radio star Kate Langbroek also spoke out about an injury she sustained during a “crazed, violent, terrifying attack” at her house on March 2.

Speaking to the *Leader* on March 7, Langbroek said she was relieved the Regal would be closed.

The 48-room boarding house, which currently has communal bathrooms and kitchens, will be remodelled into 37 self-contained single units for disadvantaged older women.

But Langbroek called for 24-hour security to guard the Regal’s entrance until it officially shuts.

She said the building had become “a repository for any kind of broken person” since the nearby Gatwick Hotel closed.

“You can’t just dump people in the middle of people like that and call it a community, call them vulnerable, then go away wiping your hands and think it’s going to be okay,” she said.

“(Politicians) are so removed from the concept that they work for us so ... if we have to make our electorate a swing seat so we get



‘The Regal’ boarding house in Little Grey St will be shut down; (inset) Kate Langbroek’s injury.

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KATE LANGBROEK

results we will do that.

“But in the meantime I’m so relieved politicians have listened and acted and I’m heartened by what they’re capable of doing when they do listen.”

Mr Foley said “antisocial activity” had been a problem around the Regal for months.

He said about 24 of the boarding house’s 48 rooms had already been closed and tenants rehomed.

It is not clear where they have been moved to.

The remainder will be closed within two weeks, and work will start on remodelling.

The State Government has

splashed \$6 million on the redevelopment, which will house women over 55, the “fastest growing group of people facing housing and homelessness stress”.

Southern Metropolitan Region state Liberal MP Margaret Fitzherbert backed Langbroek’s call for more security until the Regal shut. “We need guards now to keep everyone safe until the closure happens,” she said.

Ms Fitzherbert said it shouldn’t have taken pressure from the *Leader* and Langbroek to get a result when residents had repeatedly asked for help.

“People have been living in fear and dealing with violent crime on a

daily basis because Martin Foley took so long to act,” she said.

Friends of St Kilda Hill’s Darren Robinson spoke of his group’s relief in the wake of the news.

“St Kilda is an awesome place to live and it’s a real community that is inclusive of all who want to be part of it,” he said.

“We won’t stand by and watch people destroy what we have built,” Mr Robinson said.

The group’s dossier of unsavoury behaviour notched up more than 200 incidents.

Port Phillip Inspector Jason Kelly said police had increased patrols around Little Grey St in recent months and a number of arrests had been made.

“Operation Little Grey aims to provide both a visible and covert police presence and enhanced response to issues,” he said.

The operation would continue in coming weeks, Insp Kelly said.

“We will work closely with ... stakeholders during the rehousing process to ensure the safety of the broader community,” he said.



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