

# A New Plan For Sydney But Is It Good Enough?

By A STAFF CORRESPONDENT 3.9.64.

**FOR** most of its 176 years of existence Sydney has been a city without a plan. The result is the city centre we all know today: narrow, winding streets which follow the path of old bullock tracks, glossy skyscrapers jostling against old warehouses, concrete canyons devoid of sun, a jumbled waterfront, a decrepit Downtown, and one of the world's worst traffic problems.

But now Sydney is going to have a plan. There is nothing like a State election to bring on a plan, of course. But to do it justice the State Government seems determined to bring some sort of logic and order to the future development of the city centre—and if it does it will have succeeded where even Macquarie failed.

Actually the city has had a plan of sorts since 1958, when the City Council's Town Planner, Mr D. McK. McLachlan, completed a tentative scheme for land use within the council area, complete with routes of future expressways. This divided the city into areas for shopping, business, industry, residential, parkland and special uses, and has been the basis of the council's policy in refusing or agreeing to new developments.

## OUT OF DATE

But it has never been promulgated by the State Government, and as Sydney has boomed it has become steadily out of date. Now the City Council and the new State Planning Authority are busy revising the plan in detail, and when they have finished it will be submitted to the State Government. The Deputy Premier, Mr P. D. Hills, is expected to display the plan for objection in November and it should become law (with possible amendments) by early next year.

Will there be any major changes to the old plan? One will certainly be the rezoning of the Rocks area to allow the new multi-tower development scheme to take place. Another will be the freeing of land for the new expressways recommended by De Leuw, Cather, which differ in several places from the old routes. The revised plan will show the State Square and new Parliament House which the Government intends (ultimately!) to place on the site of the present Sydney Hospital.

Then there is the Circular Quay area, which at present is under Mr Hills' personal control. So far three plans have been suggested for this area: the first by a group of chemists' companies calling themselves the Sydney Cove Area Improvements Committee; the second by Mr McLachlan, and the third a compromise between these two drawn up jointly by Mr McLachlan and the Professor of Town and Country Planning at Sydney University, Professor D. Winston.

## LOW BUILDINGS

This third plan was discussed again this week by the City Council and the landowners involved—including the Commonwealth Government, which is considering demolishing the old Customs House to make way for a new, higher building. The proposed scheme, however, deliberately retains the Customs House and keeps nearby buildings low so that the taller buildings further up towards Hunter Street and Australia Square will be linked visually with the Harbour. Despite this hitch, the council believes the discussions have gone "very well" and hopes to

The Town Clerk, Mr J. Luscombe, takes much the same view. "There's never been a real plan in the true meaning of the word—even this new one is just a usage plan," he said. "What I would like to see is a model, a profile of the city centre as we want it to be in the future. We could deviate from that if the necessity arose, but at least we would have something to guide us."

The piecemeal development which has been going on in the northern end of the city has spurred on this sort of thinking. Huge buildings have been jammed into awkward sites; the old, inefficient roads, gummed up with cars, have been perpetuated; architecturally discordant skyscrapers thrust up within a few feet of each other, trying to pretend their neighbours don't exist. The pattern of development has been messy and fragmentary.

A comprehensive three-dimensional plan for the future would stop this. But this involves telling landowners what can and cannot be built where and strict controls on the shape and design of buildings. It would also cause havoc to present land valuations: the political dangers involved in reducing one block by £500,000 and handing perhaps £1,000,000

to a competing landowner are obvious.

There are two solutions, both difficult. The State Government or the City Council could acquire a large slab of the central city area and redevelop it as it wished. The trouble here, of course, is money: it would cost so much that the Government is unlikely to consider it. The other is for various landholders to amalgamate their sites voluntarily for redevelopment.

## PROTOTYPE

The Australia Square and Circular Quay projects are examples of the second. If individual businessmen refuse to co-operate in the Quay scheme the Government might be forced to use its powers of resumption, but the State Planning Authority hopes this will be unnecessary and that it will be a prototype for other co-operative schemes in the future.

"There is probably room for a similar sort of development in the southern end of the city," said Mr Nigel Ashton, the authority's chairman. "Quite a few State utilities and departments own land down that way, and some of the sites overlook Hyde Park . . . it should be

possible to evolve some sort of partnership between private enterprise and the Government there."

The City Council is carrying out a survey of this area at the moment in an attempt to rescue it from decadence. Professor Winston thinks the area suitable for business blocks combined with town houses and apartments; Mr Ashton seems to hanker after a helicopter terminal or even a public square; and Mr McLachlan, who is in charge of the survey, thinks everyone should "hasten slowly" anyhow.

At least, however, the beginnings of an attempt to plan the area as a whole are discernible. The same approach could be extended to the rest of the city, though there are some important problems to be solved. What is going to happen to the City Markets? Where (and when) will the Eastern Suburbs railway be built? Where should the city's tallest buildings be located?

"Sydney is essentially a harbourside city," commented Professor Winston. "We should be careful to keep views of the Harbour and to make access to the water easy—we don't want to turn Sydney into another Pittsburgh or Manchester."

"This means we should keep the city's tallest buildings away from the waterfront, where they divide the city from its harbour, and place them on the higher areas instead. We also need off-the-harbour winds to blow through the city and cool it down on hot summer days."

There have been many other suggestions. Sydney needs a city centre, a square where people can stroll and

sit down and talk and eat (the site of the old Victoria Buildings has been suggested).

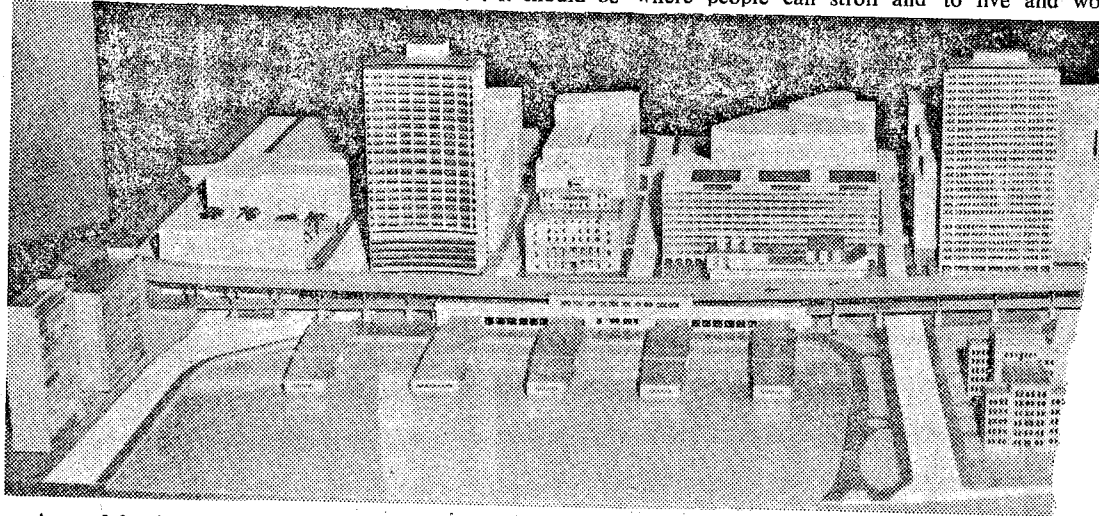
It needs more arcades and pedestrian courts, more open spaces free from motor traffic. And it needs to be brought alive at night by combining residential space with office buildings and encouraging restaurants, nightclubs, coffee bars, etc., after the pattern of London's West End.

Who could devise such a master plan? The City Council is the obvious answer; but it has a woefully small and untrained planning department—the town planner, symbolically enough, is under the control of the City Engineer. Blunders such as the proposed (and rejected) bowling green on Observatory Hill prove that the council does not have the necessary expertise.

## OUTSIDE TEAM

Many authorities feel the council should call outside team of plan to draw up a master scheme for Sydney, or set up an reorganised city department under control. The State Authority, which is in problems from Newcastle, could the plan, but it be expected to be responsible for details of one city.

At the moment Hills and the keeping a close developments to nothing goes wrong. But so the city will have a master plan which not only glue factory out itself less like to live and work



A model of the Sydney Cove scheme. It retains the old Customs House and keeps near low so that the A.M.P. building (left) and Goldfields House (right, under construction) balance

include an agreed Sydney Cove scheme in the plan which is going to Mr. Hills. So far so good. With any luck, the city centre should soon have a stable "outline plan" for future development. But many town planners and Government officials believe that this is not enough.

"What we need is a comprehensive plan which will show what buildings will be where, what redevelopments we will aim for, how we want the city to look," said Professor Winston this week. "So far we've been content to devise a land use pattern which stops someone building a glue factory in Martin Place or a tannery in your front garden. It stops the worst, but it doesn't produce the best. It doesn't say how things should be done; it doesn't produce a fine city."