

SYDNEY

Planning a city to be enjoyed

By TIMOTHY HALL

THERE WAS NO doubt that the warmth with which Sydney's first strategic plan was greeted in 1971 was genuine. Twenty years of council laziness and apathy, and a plan, if it could be called that, based largely on a Royal Commission of 1909, had produced a messy, soulless city. The Civic Reform Group had come into power at the Town Hall on the promise of a grand design for Sydney which would shape the city's future for the next 30 years.

By any standards the plan was extraordinarily ambitious. It had three features which were quite novel to local government in Australia: it took as its starting point the ideal city in which people would like to live and work, and worked back from there; it directly involved the community in every stage of the plan; and it was sufficiently flexible to allow it to be altered at any time to keep pace with the city's changing needs.

It was a general declaration of intent and now, three years and a million dollars later, comes the real thing. As before it is thoroughly researched, simply and intelligently presented, and even more feasible than most people had dared hope for after reading the first report.

It would be a great mistake to measure the success of the plan so far by its tangible results. Much more impressive is what the council has done to stop things happening. Says Alderman Andrew Briger, chairman of the council's development committee: "You have to stop the ship before you can start it off in another direction."

The declaration of objectives just published is largely a crystallisation of the strategic plan outlined in 1971. There is a shifting of priorities and a few major departures from the first plan. In particular it has become clear that the forecasts of population made at the height of the building boom were wildly overstated. This has meant that the spine of the city, as it is termed in the report, has been reduced. The spine — in which the major development is to be allowed — is now the district between Circular Quay and Central Railway, bounded on the east by Macquarie and Elizabeth Streets and on the west by George and Kent.

The report is now more specific about where it would like to see the money coming from to finance its proposals. It argues the need for a share of direct taxation, both Federal and State; and for some of the \$1000 million debt relief

given to the State at the 1970 Premiers' conference. At a more prosaic level the council wants the fines collected from people who commit parking offences, particularly as it has to find most of the cost of the officers who enforce parking laws. (At present council gets the parking fees, but the State collects the fines.)

The new scheme lists all the Action Plans which the council has embarked on and promises to implement the first stage of the pedestrian mall in Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, between Bayswater Road and the new, enlarged Fitzroy Gardens.

The western distributor no longer even features in the city structure since Tom Uren and the Federal Government bought up 100 acres of land in Glebe. As the State Government cannot reclaim Commonwealth land, this effectively

At present the council has no legal power to prevent a development on environmental or aesthetic grounds. If it bans a new building, for example, on the grounds that it overshadows another building, the decision can be — and often is — over-ruled by the strictly legalistic Local Government Appeals Tribunal.

From some bodies the council had had a great deal of support. The State Government, particularly because of the personal enthusiasm of Lands Minister Tom Lewis, has been unstinting in its help, even if it has not always resulted in hard cash. From others there has been downright obstruction or, almost as harmful, indifference. In the three years since the scheme was first released, it would be hard to find a single occasion when the Public Transport Authority has done anything to improve the quality of



Sydney's Martin Plaza: a traffic-free haven for pedestrians — and more are on the way

blocks the planned route for the freeway. The DMR now wants it to go through Ultimo and Chippendale, but the report suggests for the first time that a better route is along the Darling Harbor goods route, over Railway Square and central goods yard to Redfern Station, there to link up with the southern freeway route.

Perhaps because so many of the council members who are doing the most to implement the plan are themselves first-generation Australians, there is to be no attempt to break up the ethnic groups or disturb them in any way. It is accepted that they will exist until new generations break away and become absorbed in the community.

The pet schemes of various aldermen have found a corner in the report — Alderman Leo Port's is to have Garden Island returned to the public; Lord Mayor Nick Shehadie's is to put up new sculptures, flowers and fountains; however, little is done at present to clean up the existing statues. Throughout the report the importance of giving the pedestrian more freedom to walk safely and unhindered by traffic is emphasised.

life for the people who are forced to use its services. Wynyard Station was singled out in 1971 by the council as in urgent need of improvement. The authority's only contribution to date has been to suggest to the dry-cleaning company which has the franchise to Wynyard's public lavatories that it might be desirable to supply them with seats.

In 1971 the main importance of the scheme, apart from the direct benefit it would bring to Sydney, lay in the fact that it was there at all; that it gave local government an opportunity to be a little less shabby and ineffectual.

It is probably wishful thinking to believe that there is already a new sense of pride in what is being done in Sydney on the part of the people who live there. It will be a slow and frustrating process. As George Clarke, whose company Urban Systems Corporation produced the scheme, said in the declaration of objectives: "Council has begun the herculean task of imposing order on the decades of chaos of previous city development." That in itself is a rare achievement.

THEATRE

A goldmine in vulgarity

Story by BRIAN HOAD, pictures by CRAIG LAMOTTE

AUSTRALIA'S ANSWER to the Wedding at Cana is beginning to work its own miracle — turning the murky waters of the Wimmera (as they flow across the backblocks of Victoria's Western District through the country town of Dimboola) into a stream of pure gold, so to speak.

Jack Hibberd's by now nationally notorious piece of theatre for total audience involvement at the wedding reception for Maureen Delaney and Morrie McAdam in the Dimboola Memorial Hall is about to spread around the world like some horrendous medieval plague.

To summarise the current international state of emergency, contracts have already been signed for performance rights in North America and Britain, and are in preparation for New Zealand and some 10 European countries. Negotiations in the U.S. currently involve a national chain of 87 theatre restaurants and include a Puerto Rican version for New York. The first British version is scheduled for London next October.

So Dimboola, which started life as an idea gleared by Hibberd from a short story by Chekhov, was penned by him while living in London in 1969, was sent back to Melbourne and given a two-night stand at La Mama that same year, and was revived with resounding success by



In Hibberd's Dimboola actors and audience are all just members of the wedding

the Australian Performing Group at Melbourne's Pram Factory under the direction of David Williamson during April-June last year, now staggers drunkenly on the brink of becoming a multi-million dollar industry.

Its richly colorful local content and its novel demonstration of just how theatre

can be made to surround and involve an audience in an evening of relaxed amusement are only minor factors in the world-wide interest. According to the APG's administrator, John Timlin, the man who is handling all the paper work, the thing that really set the promoters' eyes sparkling was that Dimboola, essentially very simple and cheap to mount, has managed to gross something like \$1.4 million at the box office in its first year around Australia — and just when they were saying that popular theatre was no longer a profitable proposition.

After its Melbourne revival last year Dimboola was snapped up for Sydney by John Harrigan and Denis Wong and put on at Bonaparte's where, this week, much cheerful celebrating is going on in honor of its first birthday and an advanced booking list which already stretches to next year. A Melbourne promoter, Neil Harrold, is in charge of the new version there, launched at the Chevron last February. He is preparing to present it to Perth next month and is handling the North American and British rights. In the past year Dimboola has also reeled drunkenly but happily through Brisbane and Adelaide, Canberra, Mt. Isa, Ballarat and Bendigo but not, as yet, Dimboola itself — nor is it likely to since as Timlin explains, most of that town's citizens have already made the long journey to Melbourne to witness their apotheosis.

All of which money-spinning success is just a tiny bit embarrassing for both the APG people and Hibberd (a founding father of the group) who in the past have built their theatrical endeavors upon a background of poverty, struggle and a



Bride Maureen Delaney and groom Morrie McAdam lead the dancing at their "mixed" marriage celebrations.



The bibulous Father O'Shea in a more steady, communicative moment . . .