

A place...

PZ

SMH Mon 8.6.1970

THE Martin Place plaza— if and when it comes into existence—will be a dazzling box of 1970-style technical tricks.

Pink granite paving will be suspended above the road surface in detachable slabs which can be easily removed by a small crane—no more noisy digging and drilling to get at gas or water mains below.

The George and Pitt Street ends will be blocked off by removable flagpoles which can be used for flying banners or whisked away when total access to the plaza is needed.

The glass- and aluminium kiosks which will replace the traditional flower and newspaper stalls may be collapsible, to give added space. And a dozen or so "instant" trees, sturdy 10 feet high *Populus deltoides*, will be planted in the plaza to double the present amount of foliage.

New street furniture will be designed for the square, hopefully providing prototypes for the refurbishing of the whole city area. The designs haven't got to the drawing board yet, but at least we are promised that the rubbish bins won't be like the existing ones, which threaten to amputate the user's hand.

The new plaza will look (if the plans go through) very elegant, paved in pink Tarana granite, the stone itself flecked with black and white crystals. This will be picked up in a new raised surround for the Cenotaph in white, or black and white stone. There will be seats under the poplars. The lighting standards will possibly be ornamental glass spheres; even the manhole covers will be bronze and decorative.

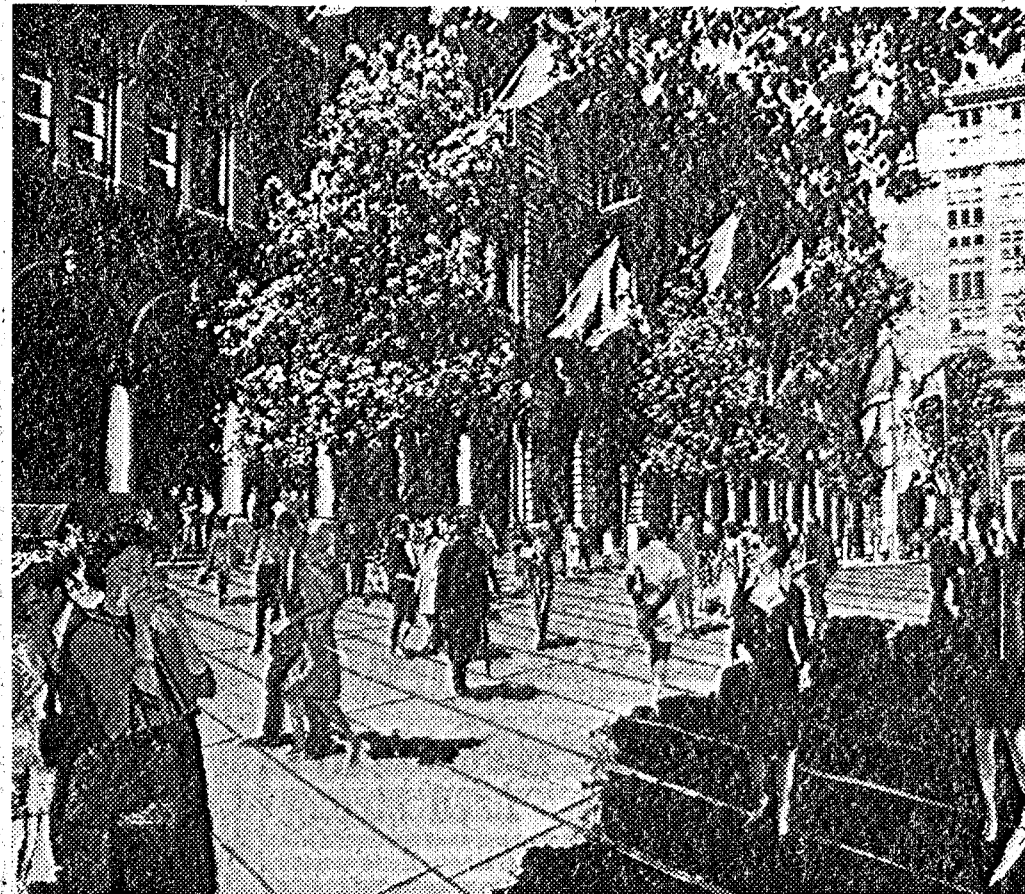
The whole scheme will cost \$330,000, or thereabouts, and the plaza will be completed approximately nine months after the Minister for Lands announces that Martin Place is no longer a street but officially an open space.

Or will it? The Martin Place plaza, mooted as an imaginative and rather far-off concept before the last Sydney City Council elections, has now become a battleground for two major conflicting interests. It symbolises the war of pedestrians v the motor car.

On how the plaza scheme shapes up will depend the future of far-reaching plans to establish a series of small plazas and pedestrian malls in the city and, eventually, to dissuade the private motorist from bringing his car into town.

The fate of the plaza may also influence the way the Sydney City Council will look at applications for the inclusion of 500 and 1,000-car parking areas in new city commercial developments.

If everything had gone according to plan Martin Place would have been closed off to traffic next month and the plaza a reality by early 1971. But opposition has been so



...for people

By MARGARET JONES

heated that the scheme is still no more than a series of attractive plans on drawing boards at the offices of Clarke Gazzard and Partners, the designing architects.

The City Council's hands are tied until the Minister re-dedicates Martin Place as an open space, and Mr Lewis cannot do this until he has considered all objections lodged by instrumentalities and the public.

Objectors

Individual objectors have been many and vocal. The City Council has been accused of squandering ratepayers' money, acting undemocratically, "pandering to powerful interests" who stand to gain from a closure (what these interests are remains obscure) and persecuting the private motorists. There has been much talk of desecration of the Cenotaph by hippies and students, and hopes have been expressed that at least the revamped plaza will be planted with native trees or shrubs (it won't).

There were fears that the Anzac Day march might be affected by the closure of the Pitt and George Street ends, but the removable flagpoles and the provision of 45 degree "roll" kerbing (to allow the entry of veteran-carrying taxis as well as fire trucks and other emergency services) has overcome these worries. The R.S.L. is now supporting the plaza scheme on the grounds it will give added significance to the Cenotaph.

A certain number of the other objections which have been received come, candidly, into the "nut-mail" category. But there is a block of solid opposition the Minister cannot overlook when he is making up his mind whether or not to rededicate.

Formal objections have come from several property owners. The City Council does not regard these as insuperable, as it believes it can calm the fears about parking, lack of access and limitations on future development expressed by the objectors.

The Council is favoured by having the whole of one side of the square occupied by the G.P.O., which has lodged no



TOP: Martin Place as a plaza. ABOVE: Mr NICHOLAS TESDORF of CLARKE GAZZARD and PARTNERS, the designing architects.

objections. The G.P.O. has in fact given the scheme a preliminary boost by lighting up its northern colonnade, and there is talk of cleaning and floodlighting the building if the plan goes through.

The really serious objections to the plaza come, however, from Government and private instrumentalities representing the motor vehicle.

These cannot be lightly put aside. Sydney's narrow streets

are already horribly congested; a survey taken five years ago showed that 13,300 vehicles used Martin Place each day, a figure obviously higher by now. Opponents of the scheme point out that east-west traffic would have to use Hunter, King and Market Streets, all of which are already inadequate to cope with Sydney's traffic.

Formal objections have come from the Department of Government Transport (which will have to find new routes for its 312 and 316 bus services), the Traffic Advisory Committee, the Parking Advisory Committee and the N.R.M.A. representing the private motorist.

These powerful bodies feel that closure of the area is going to make infinitely worse Sydney's already desperate traffic situation; that the scheme is premature because major developments in the vicinity (the international hotel and convention centre and a new building on the Adams Hotel site) will add 500 and 1,000-car parking stations to the area, thus further complicating the traffic position.

The N.R.M.A. and the Traffic Advisory Committee both want trial closures to show up any pitfalls in the scheme. This is opposed both by the Council and the architects on the grounds that temporary closure would confuse motorists and put the plaza (without its trees, new street furniture and pink paving) in a grossly unfavourable light.

How far can the objections of the groups representing motorists' interests be answered?

One of the main entrepreneurs of the scheme, Alderman Leo Port of the City Council (himself an engineer) thinks there are both short and long-term answers.

In the short-term, Alderman Port says, traffic along George and Pitt Streets will actually flow more easily because vehicles will no longer be turning into and out of the plaza area.

Survey

The usefulness of Martin Place as a thoroughfare will be effectively reduced, in any case, by the temporary closure of the top section for works relating to the building of a sub-station for the Eastern Suburbs railway.

An independent traffic survey commissioned by the Council, Alderman Port says, found that no definite prediction could be made on how the closure would affect traffic except that the George and Pitt Street flows would be improved.

Hopefully, traffic movement will be speeded up by the building of an east-west tunnel from Park Street under Elizabeth, Castlereagh, Pitt, and George Streets to Drumm Street and the Western Distributor.

Solving traffic problems is only one aspect of the Martin Place scheme, however. Alderman Port feels it is a major preliminary engagement in the pedestrians v motorists war; its success or failure is vital to the future development of Sydney.

He favours a number of small plazas, entered through crooked streets, rather than big squares and ceremonial avenues. ("Think of our westerly winds!") He is also on the side of the pedestrian.

"The Council doesn't represent motor cars, it represents people," he says. "The motorists have their own strong organisations. In the absence of a pedestrians' league we will have to do our best for people on foot."

Trend

The trend for Sydney, he thinks, will have to be active discouragement of the use of the city by private cars and, eventually, removal of parking meters and a ban on private parking. The Council will also have to think very seriously about permitting multi-car parking stations in new commercial developments. The cars v people controversy over Martin Place has brought him close to the position that Council would be wrong to approve large parking areas in the city.

The best thing about the plaza plan, though, is that it has sparked controversy and woken quite a number of citizens from the apathy that has marked their attitude to Council affairs for so long.

"The Martin Place affair is a very useful pointer to what may happen when we go on to bigger and more complex schemes," Alderman Port says. "If we can get this one through, the next plaza will be easier."

2461
Feature article on Martin Place design
by Clarke Gazzard Architects
— journalist Margaret Jones
SMH Mon 8.6.1970