

JULY 24, 1971

1971

T

INCORPORATING THE AUSTRALIAN FINANCIAL TIMES

BEING WISE AFTER
THE PENTAGON PAPERS
THE SEXUAL PROBLEMS
OF LADY ATHLETES

JUMBO JET OR
WHITE ELEPHANT?

FASHION: ANARCHY IN
THE MARKET PLACE

See pp 17-19 & pic of GC, LP + AB

A NEW STRATEGY FOR OUR CITIES



AUSTRALIA 30c. AIR-DELIVERED COPIES: NEW ZEALAND 40c, NEW GUINEA 44c, SINGAPORE \$2, MALAYSIA \$2.

A new strategy for our cities

By PATRICIA ROLFE



TO MOST of Sydney's 2.8 million people, as they daily struggle up from the murk of underground stations, wait in sunless canyons for the slow blink of traffic lights geared to cars and not people, cough quietly in the yellow winter smog, and wince at constant, violent noise, it may not seem a matter of much moment that as of this week Australia's largest and oldest city has on offer strategic as well as statutory planning.

Statutory planning is what Sydney and other Australian cities have had since their birth. It is what anyone

who has ever tried to knock up their own carport or remodel a bathroom grows to know, bureaucrat's bliss. A statutory plan sets out that "a refreshment room means a restaurant, cafe, tearoom, eating-house or the like." Statutory planning means color-me-rigid: "All land colored yellow with green edging with scarlet lettering superimposed thereon" is set aside for one purpose and can remain so until the end of time.

Strategic planning is trying to take hold of things by the other end of the stick. Instead of making rules and then

seeing how they work out, a strategic plan tries to look at what you want to do and then sees how you make rules to do it. When you have done a few things you take another look at the plan and perhaps unpick it a bit and put it together again. You can call it action planning.

In the Strategic Plan issued in Sydney this week it is put: "What is needed is continuing planning which produces every year a plan for the next few years, and every few years a plan for the next two or three decades, so that the next steps and the distant goals are

known at all times." The plan recommends that review and, if necessary, revision should be done every three years.

Tactfully, it is put that a statutory plan "must be supplemented by a set of objectives, policies and performance standards to ensure that the statutory powers will be exercised effectively and to some purpose." This means that you do your strategic plan first, then back it up with a statutory plan. The fact that it has always been the other way about in Sydney might be due to the historical fact that Sydney had a bureaucracy for 50 years before it had Local Government.

The Sydney Strategic Plan was put together in 11 months. It may too much represent compromises, not with planning principles but with the wishes and aspirations of the people who contributed to it, including the 500 groups and people who were asked to give their views or who gave them unasked. "Planning . . . is very difficult," says the Lord Mayor, Emmet McDermott. "Many people must feel it is impossible. But my Council believes it is our duty to try."

The main thing is that the plan is there. Its achievement may be to make Local Government throughout the country look a little less shabby and ineffectual.

While State Governments complain constantly about having their powers filched by the central government, the States quietly take more and more from Local Government. As well, many councils are so cowed and so lacking in planners and other professionals to stiffen their sinews that often powers held legally by Local Government go by default and decisions are left to State departments and statutory bodies.

Strategic planning for Sydney gets you right in there with the fashionable issues: economic growth and the quality of life; centralism and decentralism. If Sydney's Strategic Plan is understood well enough and discussed widely enough it can give ammunition to those who come up against, say, Mr. Whitlam and his speechwriters and the view (gained largely, one would think, while surveying our cities from the back seat of Commonwealth cars) that Canberra can solve all problems.

"Nowhere," says George Clarke, the head of Urban Systems Corporation, one of the firms that made it, "does the plan suggest that the problems of Sydney can be solved anywhere but in Sydney. You can't plan a series of walkways for Sydney pedestrians in Canberra; you can only do it here."

And when you look at quality of life versus economic growth in the confining space of a city rather than in some vague, universal context, it becomes clear that the choice is not one or the other, that you must have economic growth to pay for the quality of life you want.

The plan may offer some rebuttal to the prophets of gloom whose answer to



Looking ahead to a better Sydney: planner George Clarke and city aldermen Leo Port and Andrew Briger

the almost overwhelming problems of cities is that we should somehow abandon them and go out into the desert and begin all over again. "The City of Sydney," says the plan, "is a large, complex, often awkward fact. It will not conveniently go away."

The Sydney Strategic Plan, a hard-cover book of 192 pages, with a briefer version to be sold cheaply to Sydney people who want to study it, as its makers hope they will, is the brainchild of the Civic Reform Group, currently in control of the City Council, and in particular of two aldermen, Leo Port and Andrew Briger. It has been put together by Urban Systems with architects McConnel Smith and Johnson and management consultants W. D. Scott and Co. Forty-seven people were in the team.

It was commissioned by the Council for a \$100,000 fee. Perth is the only other Australian city to have a strategic plan, but it is a less comprehensive one. Melbourne has within the past few weeks decided to have one, at a hang-the-expense \$200,000.

By coincidence, Sydney will have a new statutory plan, prepared by the State Planning Authority, at much the same time. This has been an almost inconceivable 24 years in the making.

The strategic plan will be "received" by the City Council on July 30, and could be adopted within the following few weeks. There could be delaying

tactics from Labor, although Labor can hardly declare itself wholeheartedly against it; one must generously assume that if Labor had remained in power this is the sort of plan it would now have achieved. Council elections are on September 18 and the plan should serve as a platform for Civic Reform.

All the Council needs to do to get the plan under way is to adopt part of it—a statement of objectives, policies and priorities for action. This statement then acquires formal status and can be used not only to guide the Council and its staff but by other Government authorities and by courts in case of appeal against Council decisions.

The Strategic Plan breaks up into four objectives — *management*, which helps you achieve the other three: *accessibility*, which isn't much use without *diversity*—"If when you get there there's no there there"—and the *environment* — "Not the last but the ultimate objective." Then come 16 policies and 83 action priorities. The plan also divides the city into five districts and 32 precincts. For example, the Central Spine business district, roughly the Quay to Central Railway, has ten precincts, including the Tank Stream, or northern business precinct, and so on.

The plan goes all the way from large concepts—"The city is the key unit in the management of the environment,"



"Sydney is an interlocking, interdependent series of environmental areas connected, separated and yet bound together by a transportation system planned and built by other authorities and by a series of major open spaces predetermined by history"—to specific recommendations on the sort of minor matters which are the stuff of Local Government, such as layback kerbs and ramps for wheelchairs and prams.

It outlines how the character of Sydney is changing. It sees Sydney as increasingly the headquarters of national and international commercial and other concerns. The fact that Melbourne was the first stop for ships from the United Kingdom in colonial days daily grows less important than the fact that Sydney is closer to Asia and North America. It also points out that the shops now largely serve the city workforce and not the shopper from the suburbs and that that is their only future.

A firm conclusion is that there is still plenty of redevelopment land within the boundaries of the city, even on the central spine. Those Sydneysiders who have seen sterile office blocks take over from Hunter Street to Martin Place to King Street might be pleased to know that it is here that the planners hope to call a halt. The Midtown Hub precinct might be only two blocks, King to Park, but it is likely to retain its present character of shops, arcades, cinemas and cafes.

The planners want to contain office

development to the areas north or south of this Midtown Hub and stop them spilling into Woolloomooloo and other inner, partly residential areas.

Between large concepts and paternal concern for the people who live, work and grow old in the city, the Strategic Plan demolishes some conventional planning wisdom of the past few decades and disapproves some large projects of the State authorities, but so bland and reasonable is the writing that it is difficult to be sure whose toes are being trodden on. Local Government so often means lambs lying down with lions.

The arch-enemy might seem to be the State Planning Authority, but the plan-makers do not seem to see it that way. They see strategic planning merely as a light on the way.

If there is one body which does seem in the way of better redevelopment, it is the Heights of Buildings Advisory Committee. However, it may be something of a paper tiger because the Council, reinforced by a statement of intentions, could set most of its own rules and the Committee just arbitrate on them.

The plan questions the accepted idea of requiring city buildings to supply off-street parking. Up to a point this gets cars off the streets, but in higher densities it simply puts more cars on the roads than the traffic can bear.

One seemingly sacrosanct plan which

the Strategic Plan opposed is the extension of the Warringah Expressway. (The Local Government Minister gives as his reason for going on with it the fact that it has been planned since 1947.) The strategic planners see the Warringah Expressway (as do most motorists) as only pouring more cars on to an overloaded Bridge.

An early strategy of the strategic planners has been to do some showy window-dressing. The pedestrian area of Martin Place came from some of the team; few Sydney people would now feel that this was not an inexpensive success. Another idea under way is the widening of William Street by requiring new buildings to be set back. This in the plan is part of a grand scheme to have a boulevard linking the Fitzroy Gardens, with its puffball fountain, at Kings Cross with the Sydney Town Hall, but the manageable bit in the middle is enough for Sydneysiders to go on with. Other evidence that things can grow better is the decision to keep and restore the Queen Victoria Building. These are action priorities already in action.

Two more bright ideas depend on getting variations in the statutory plan and in the floor-space ratio code to be set down for each section of the city.

The first is to include historic buildings as "development" in the statutory plan ordinance, so that developers have to get permission to demolish. Also, it might legally be possible to allow the transfer or sale of permissible floor space from a historic site to another one so that the building and the developer's investment remain intact.

The other idea is part of creating better times for the pedestrian; partly, it must be admitted, by driving him underground. The planners have a whole series of subways, bridges, colonnades, malls and parks in their minds which developers, with bonuses in their floor-space ratio code, may be persuaded to provide and are already doing so at Centrepoint and Australia Square. These would enable walkers to go, say, from Kent Street to Pitt or from Martin Place to the mall above a redeveloped Harrington Street in the Rocks without once brushing up against a car.

A fair part of the way they would be in what is still known as the Wynyard tunnel, which was used originally for trams crossing the Bridge and then as a parking station. George Clarke sees the tunnel becoming a brightly lit, attractively decorated arcade leading workers on from public transport at Wynyard to office jobs in a rebuilt The Rocks. He does not see it as another of those graveyards of aldermanic good intentions—the series of pedestrian subways Sydney already has which almost nobody uses. It might require an effort for anyone familiar with the tunnel to see it as Mr. Clarke envisages, but perhaps, as the strategic planners believe, with proper planning anything is possible.