

'Management is as important as design'

By JOHN EDWARDS

THE FIGHT FOR CONTROL OF THE CITY

PLANNING progresses beyond the zoning scheme—but can the network of city Government cope with planning progress?

Although Australia is one of the most highly urbanised nations in the world it is only now that we are beginning the long quiet revolution to take control of our cities. Against the stolid inertia of a thousand committees imaginative planners are testing new techniques for achieving livable environments.

In all the major cities Governments are confronted with the old range of problems. They include pollution, the acceleration of flat development, and traffic congestion. But they also include new demands from their constituents, particularly for participation in decisions affecting local areas.

The typical local solution to problems of this kind, and the solution still reverentially deferred to by State and local governments is the sacred Statutory Zoning Scheme—the coloured map marking off residential and industrial areas which is the cornerstone of local government response to physical planning.

In one form or another most of the new demands on local government stretch beyond zoning to traffic planning, pedestrian planning, and local welfare facilities—the neighbourhood environment. All are initially problems of planning, and with the limitations of most present planning few problems get beyond this initial stage.

According to the younger planners, the zoning scheme is a white elephant. Says Jim Coleman, a former academic now with the Sydney firm Urban Design Associates: "Statutory zoning schemes have failed to relate the twin tasks of planning for movement and planning for an adequate environment."

George Clarke of Urban Systems Corporation agrees: "Twenty five years of statutory planning has shown that it does not produce community satisfaction. I don't want to be argumentative, but it would appear that there is something wrong."

Clarke defines three problems with zoning schemes: "They lack any process for establishing the communities' goals and values; they have no provision for the participation of citizens in the formative stages; and they try to solve delicate detailed problems by broad brush techniques."

Some new planning styles are based on the recognition of planning not as the establishment of an armoury of controls, regulations and codes designed as minimal standards for development, but as a process of co-ordination. As one planner put it: "The management function should be as important as the design function."

In N.S.W. the State Planning Authority (S.P.A.) endorsed this concept of planning with its Sydney Region Outline Plan, published two years ago. It remains to be seen whether the S.P.A. ("the Authority without authority" to its critics) can, in fact, achieve the objectives set out in the plan, but it did popularise the idea of indicative planning.

On a more detailed level the State Planning Authority maintained the principles of management planning when it prepared a development plan for Woolloomooloo for the City Council. The plan is for a process of redevelopment of the whole area, with a boulevard along William Street to be gradually formed out of the setback that new developers in that street will be required to leave.

For the port area and Kings Cross there are still more precise three dimensional plans. The port will have offices, shops, accommodation, and two large passenger ship berths, and there will be large areas of open space landscaped as the plan is implemented. In Kings Cross the plan aims at the creation of a traffic-free plaza above the proposed railway station.

Implementation of such a far-reaching plan, straining to the limit the powers of the city council and involving the co-ordination of thousands of private owners and developers over a period of years, is essentially a

management problem—and a big one. Some critics contend that the plan cannot be implemented within the present decision making arrangements in local government.

The plan will rely heavily on a box of bargaining counters that are left to the administering authority by the flexibility of the plan, particularly bonuses in height for extra public space on the ground, and bonuses for site amalgamation and block redevelopment.

In that plan a balance is sought between private developers and public authorities, with the emphasis on the flexibility of the plan pointing to the probability of continuous bargaining between them.

S.P.A. philosophy stresses long-term management. Other new styles of planning are interesting in the emphasis they put on community participation and the range of planning aims involved.

The exemplar of this kind of approach is George Clarke's dynamic firm of private planners, Urban Systems Corporation. Clarke has an ideal of a planning approach which he has carried through on the Gold Coast. The planning ideal has three stages.

First there is the strategic plan which establishes principles and priorities. Clarke says that a plan "is a model of a desired future situation together with a strategy of achieving it," so the early part of the plan will emphasise the discovery of the affected communities' values, the range of alternatives available, and the structures through which any detailed plan can be achieved.

The second and third stages lead the plan through consultation, reduction of its principles to codification if possible, and the preparation of detailed

plans, perhaps three dimensional, for particular problem areas.

Urban Systems Corporation is currently working on a strategic plan for the City of Sydney. Some initial results are shown in the decision-making diagram; it is part of the function of strategic planning to locate governmental influences on the area.

Alderman Andrew Briger, vice-chairman of the City Development Committee of the Sydney City Council, is one of the driving forces behind the re-vamping of the council's planning structure. The zoning scheme for the City, which is soon to be gazetted is, he says, "essentially negative."

The need, claims Briger, is for a definition of objectives—and this is the object of the strategic plan. Some of the things he hopes to see resolved by the plan are:

- how open space can be provided in the city
- a solution to the problem of car parking—whether it involves banning cars, or installing mini-buses, or tightening up car-space requirements on new constructions
- ways of achieving a better balance with residential and commercial buildings
- the kind of techniques the council should use to achieve its detailed aims—incentive, velopers, or sanctions
- the priorities in council action. For example, Surry Hills appears to need urgent attention
- an analysis of the way Sydney is administered.

The strategic plan when completed will be a guide to council and to other authorities with an interest in the city. Although it will be officially adopted by council, perhaps after amendment, it will not be inflexible. It is a preliminary to more detailed action planning for particular areas of the city.

The kind of detailed action

planning that is now being tested by planners, in built up areas, is typically the three dimensional redevelopment control plan.

This kind of plan is relatively new. In Sydney the Willoughby Council is in the forefront with its comprehensive redevelopment control plan for Artarmon, a largely middle-class single dwelling area which before the adoption of the plan in January, was being penetrated by unco-ordinated flat development.

According to John Mair, the Chief Engineer of Willoughby Council, the plan sets out to achieve:

- adequate open space about buildings;
- regulation of flat development;
- a variety of flat types to prevent Artarmon from becoming a segregated area for the elderly [Included in the development are town houses and cheaper units.]

Participation and consultation were stressed throughout the formation of the Artarmon plan, and this serves two functions. One is that such a complex plan simply cannot succeed if the community is hostile. The other is that values can affect the nature of a plan, and the values of the people affected should mould the over-all determination of priorities.

Since most of Artarmon land is currently held in small blocks by individual owners the buildings shown on the model will require amalgamations. Willoughby Council is determined to maintain the rule that without amalgamation there can be no development approval.

Both kinds of planning—vast in scale and detailed in scale—are indicative of a growing maturity and breadth of vision in the planning profession. They also show the way in which local government is widening its role in response to more sophisticated demands. However, it is not at all clear that the planning power structure—the network of local councils, and metropolitan authorities—is equipped to handle the new planning responsibilities.

The possible complexities are diagram of groups, indicating if all these groups are co-ordinated—and most are in fact unco-ordinated—the planning position is intolerable.

Jim Coleman insists that "the problem of metropolitan government will have to be studied and solved before there will be any improvement in the way we deal with the metropolitan problem."

Interestingly, Professor Ruth Atkins of the University of New South Wales, is about to embark on just such a study, to try to find out who makes what decisions in a city as vast as Sydney.

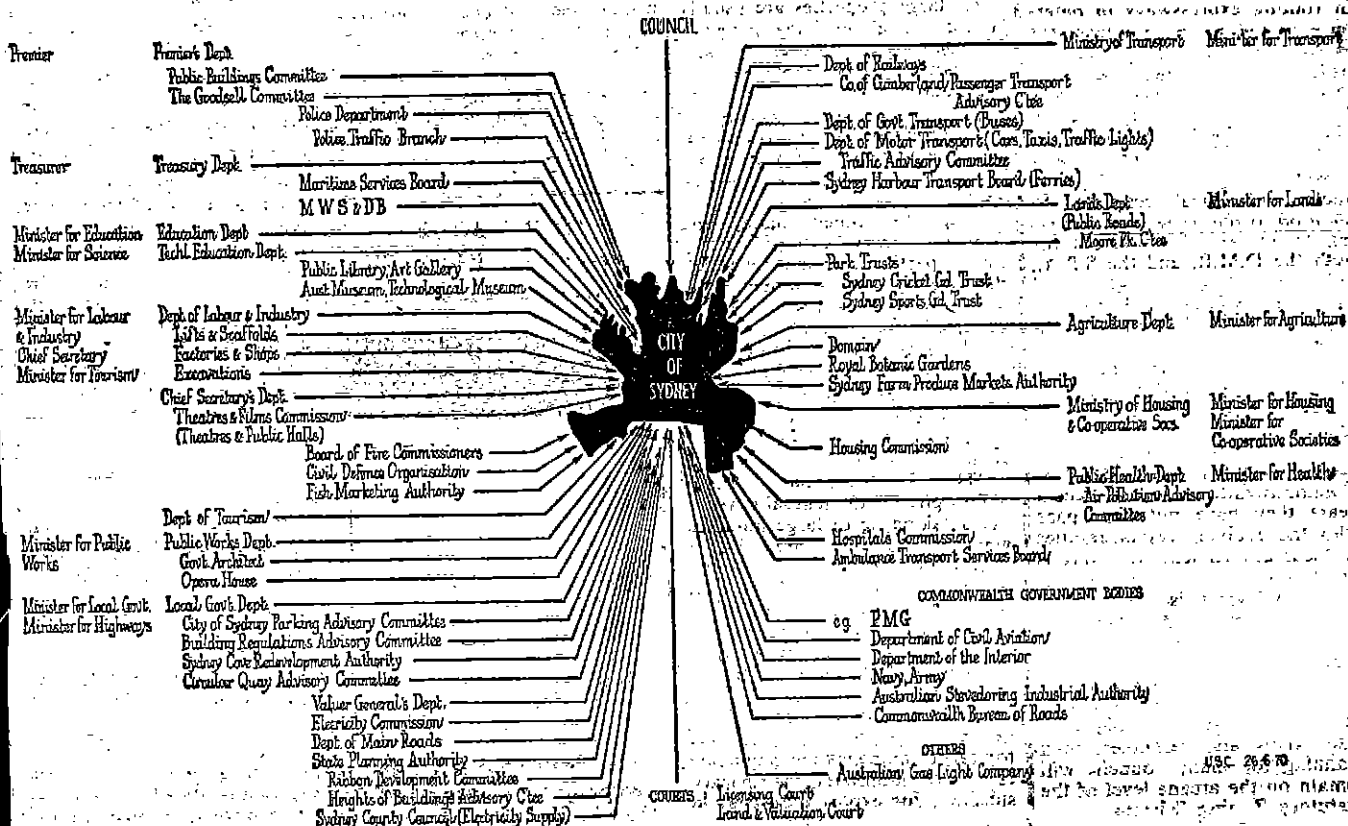
In N.S.W. the ostensible co-ordinating body is the State Planning Authority, but the Department of Main Roads has not surrendered any of its freedom in routing expressways in deference to the S.P.A. Similarly the Housing Commission is not co-ordinated with the D.M.R.—residents thrown out by new roads may, or may not, be rehoused by the Commission.

The problem of an obsolete power structure is still more acute with local councils. In addition to the irritations of having to act as tax collectors for both the D.M.R. and the S.P.A., and yet having no real control over their policies, and the conflicts of the multitudinous metropolitan authorities which occur in their municipalities, they have the additional problem of not enough money and not enough skills.

Although rate collections have increased faster than State or Commonwealth taxes in recent years they have not kept pace with the evolving responsibilities of local government. Planning is essentially a local government responsibility; it is the key to controlling the rapidly increasing demands for livable environments.

But, until local government itself is loosed from limitations of finance, and can command sufficient skills and resources, then planning for many councils will remain on the arcane level of the Statutory Zoning Scheme.

PUBLIC BODIES HAVING CONTROL OR INFLUENCE OVER SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF CITY DEVELOPMENT



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