

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Building a great city?

SIR, — B. Whitting (Letters, October 19, 1971) said: "The City of Sydney Strategic Plan is about to receive its first massive attack." The City of Sydney has now surrendered without firing a shot, although Alderman Harris has apologised for its capitulation (Letters, May 15).

Despite what Alderman Harris says, I understand that the scheme was not fully investigated in detail by council officers and the recommendation was in fact perfunctory and bald in its presentation.

Most noticeably absent from Alderman Harris' letter was any indication whether those aldermen who declared their interest in the scheme at the Works Committee voted on it in full council.

I do not agree that the "recommendations of the City Planner of April 21, 1972" should exonerate the council from its action in approving the plan "in principle" (whatever that means) and thereby supersede the Strategic Plan. The proposed development does conflict with the Strategic Plan and Alderman Harris only has to read pages 83, 84, 89, 100 and D3 of it to confirm this conflict. Briefly these pages say that the area should be utilised predominantly for residential uses but not to the complete exclusion of restricted commercial usage. Further the introduction of a major office and shop complex would severely overtax the transportation system of the whole CBD and in particular the rail system. The Strategic Plan which cost in excess of \$100,000 would now appear to be in part obsolete. Now even before Dr. Nielsen has completed the Sydney Transportation Study commissioned by the State Government also at an estimated cost of \$1.4 mil. the authorities are undoubtedly aggravating our severely overtaxed transportation system.

It is surprising that the firm of planners responsible for the Strategic Plan have not been more outspoken on this matter.

I was of the opinion that council avoided an expression of opinion on commercial aspects of development applications. However, Mr Harris in his letter says the City Planner in his report of April 21, 1972, which was adopted by the council recommended that "any reduction required in floor area be made to commercial office use." Does this imply that the council has conducted a market analysis of the proposed uses and the above conclusion was reached? Having read the submission prepared by 4D Planning and Design Pty Ltd for the developers of this scheme, I do not believe that they have conducted a particularly comprehensive market study to support the 1.2 million square feet of retail space that is planned. Knowing that the retail floor area at Bondi Junction is about to be doubled and many new retail projects are under construction in the city, I believe that the major demands for retail space in Woolloomooloo would be far less than 1.2 million square feet, and primarily of a service nature. Further, assuming that the massive 10:1 index is approved, I would venture to suggest that the scheme will not be completed within 15 years, not with the uses now proposed and certainly not with the 1.2 million square feet of retail space. Rather, most of the space will be constructed as office space, and by that I mean more than the 55 per cent currently envisaged. This, together with the sheer density of the office content already proposed, will not result in Sydney becoming one of the greatest cities in the world as visualised by Alderman Harris and "courageous developers" with their "shoulders to the wheel" but rather another Chicago or Los Angeles.

The United States has proved that it takes more than big buildings to create a great city in which people wish to work and live. In fact this is a major issue upon which the forthcoming US elections are to be fought. It will be unfortunate if our Premier is unable on his current overseas

trip to make this observation of the so-called great American cities.

No, Alderman Harris, I do not consider that your defence on behalf of the City Council advances Sydney as a great city, nor will this scheme improve its environment.

P. G. HOWARTH
Hunter's Hill.

SIR, — It is reported that the State Government is to set up a sub-committee to examine the proposed \$400 million redevelopment scheme at Woolloomooloo. This is encouraging and it is to be hoped that the scheme will be thoroughly examined in all its facets and its impact on the well-being of the rest of the city.

The members of the committee should be drawn from the best brains available in the appropriate fields and its evaluation should be made available for public comment before final decisions are made. The NSW

division of the Royal Australian Planning Institute would be pleased to have an opportunity to participate and assist.

There is a limit to how much of this type of development the market can support, and if saturation point is reached and maintained, scattered and unco-ordinated piecemeal development would result. In this regard the redevelopment of the depressed downtown areas, which is so essential, may be delayed, or not take place. Certainly the city's balance would be changed dramatically. So far as the Woolloomooloo scheme is concerned, there is a feeling that commercial development should be kept close to William Street, and that the Valley area, redeveloped as a mixed residential.

This division of the RAPI sees a great opportunity, if not an obligation, facing the State Government to take a lead in stimulating the growth of regional employment and retail centres. It is difficult to accept the stated intentions of the Government with regard to decentralisation when schemes for central area development such as the Woolloomooloo project are given official blessing.

If the case for decentralisation is thus weakened, so too are the many arguments relating to journey to work and transportation improvements within the metropolitan area.

It would be politic before embarking upon or continuing with major schemes already commenced, such as the Rocks redevelopment, the proposed olympic complex at Moore Park and the Woolloomooloo redevelopment to await the report of the Sydney Transportation Study Group. It would be very useful if Dr Neilson could comment at this stage.

The foreshadowed great increase in the city work force and the buildup of office space is pushing desirable cultural and entertainment uses out of the city, thus excluding those things which give a city life and sparkle for 24 hours a day.

The NSW division of the Royal Australian Planning Institute is very concerned. There should be a pause and a hard look taken at where we are heading. It is suggested that a truly independent body such as the Australian Institute of Urban Studies, which is engaged on research in NSW and in Sydney in particular, be asked to assist.

JACK NICHOLLS.
President, NSW division,
Royal Australian Planning Institute.

North Sydney.

Oct
1971
SMH

Criticism
of City
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for SPA
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See Judgement by
Mr Justice Ash
in NSW Supreme
Court - the "San
Sebastian" case

