

'Loo proposal meshes with SPA strategy

By LANCE NORMAN

AUSTRALIA'S biggest real estate question now that the Rocks plan has been unveiled and the William Street boulevard portrayed is what will happen to Woolloomooloo.

The proposal for the redevelopment of the Loo basin by the Londish consortium which now owns a major part of the land is being put before Sydney City Council today.

The escarpment behind is another matter—up there, the obviously impending renewal is expected to be predominantly residential, but as far as the basin is concerned any sentimental attachment to the tumble-down cottages, miscellaneous workshops and bawdy pubs had best be forgotten in Mr Sidney Londish's view.

There are hotels, a trade centre, regional shopping, a theatre, "Tivoli" style gardens well above the ground, sports facilities, medical suites, and offices in his plan—but not a single dwelling.

Sydneysiders, despite the town's rather raffish and anti-Puritan atmosphere, really care for their city—indeed, it's quite as much because of that atmosphere that they have a feeling very different in flavour from, say, Londoners' for London, but as strong anyway. And the 'Loo is one of the best loved parts of that aspect. It makes such a nice walk, romantic actually, between the City and Kings Cross.

Although the populace keeps this feeling disguised as a rule, there is bound to be an outcry now over the proposal to pull down their 'Loo and turn it into a non-residential modernity at that.

But, to be practical, the fact that a railway viaduct and an expressway will be operating across the basin by 1973 has already settled that hash.

The 'Loo could never be the same again after that. The intimacy will be gone. The area will be cut up drastically.

A point that is likely to be lost, though, in the impending future is that just as the railway and the expressway only affect the basin, so does the Londish consortium's plan.

Also, it has to be conceded that Woolloomooloo basin never has been a high rent area—handy as it is, the summers are too hot, too steamy, and you don't see the Harbour from there.

The airy escarpment above, up those flights of old stone steps, is going to be modernised too—at least one owner of a few acres at the Potts Point end has some grandiose plans for high-rise development, but that will be residential.

Mr Londish considers the land up there ideal for residential use, but, for the land his consortium owns, it is just not feasible, principally for economic reasons, but also from the point of view of suitability.

In this, he clashes with the Sydney Strategic Plan's diversity ideal, but accords instead with the State Planning Authority's "county centre" approach—a zoning category which envisages, shops, restaurants, theatres, professional offices, houses and the like all mixed up together.

A county centre is not a district that rolls up the sidewalks after five o'clock at night; nor, Mr Londish and his partners assert, after an intense, year-long study that has cost more than \$100,000, will their Woolloomooloo basin.

What the consortium owns at this stage is 11 acres, aggregated surprisingly easily since November, 1969, and it confidently predicts that it can acquire another four acres spread in bits and pieces throughout its plan when they are ready.

Headed by Gateway Development Pty Ltd, which is equally owned by Associated Securities Ltd and Londish interests, with Australian Guarantee Corporation Ltd and Rothschilds of London also coming into the picture to a small extent, the consortium is not acquiring the remaining land at present because it is already paying holding charges on \$25 million to \$30 million and the income is barely covering the rates.

Including the patches yet to be acquired, their boundaries extend from one block behind William Street back to the Government land around the bay and from the Domain across the basin's 70ft dip to Forbes Street, three blocks short of the escarpment.

Street part of the Rocks plan, and the Woolloomooloo Redevelopment Project dovetails in with the new William Street specifically.

Another parallel with the \$500-million-plus Rocks scheme is the way in which the \$400 million Woolloomooloo project will be financed and organised.

Just as the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority will lease sections of its 53 acres of Crown land to private developers who must fit in with its envelope conception of heights and uses of buildings, the Londish consortium does not intend to put up all of the Woolloomooloo Redevelopment buildings either.

The private consortium will sell freehold parts of its land to other developers who will tie in with its "totally planned concept" for its area.

Mr Londish said the consortium was considering constructing three of the buildings itself—"the eye of the needle," block D, with a floor space of 700,000 sq ft as compared with the Pentagon's 900,000 sq ft, and two smaller sectors on the periphery of the basin.

Not all of block D's enormous area will be devoted to offices, hotels, or any one thing. This is the building which will contain the trade centre (200,000 sq ft), the regional shopping centre (one-million sq ft), basement parking for 2,500 cars, the Tivoli gardens (the actual name will be more original) right across one level, a theatre, two cinemas, an international hotel of 300 rooms and a motel of 900 rooms, also 500,000 sq ft of office space.

About half of this office space will be penthouse style in the lateral body of the building and the other half in the tower section, with development going ahead in stages.

Regarding the much-discussed glut of office space facing Syd-

ney, Mr Londish said: "It would be interesting to see a survey of how much space has remained vacant if a building is built right and in the right place. Experienced developers have seldom burnt a finger."

"If I thought I was competing with the Rocks, I would be worried, but I do not think we are. Apart from its tourist and entertainment aspect, I see the basin as a commercial district in the sense of all the trading that has to go on in support of the central business district."

"I see large organisations having their head office in the Rocks, now that downtown is largely built out, and their State office in Woolloomooloo, where it is envisaged rents would range from \$6 to \$7.50 a square foot,

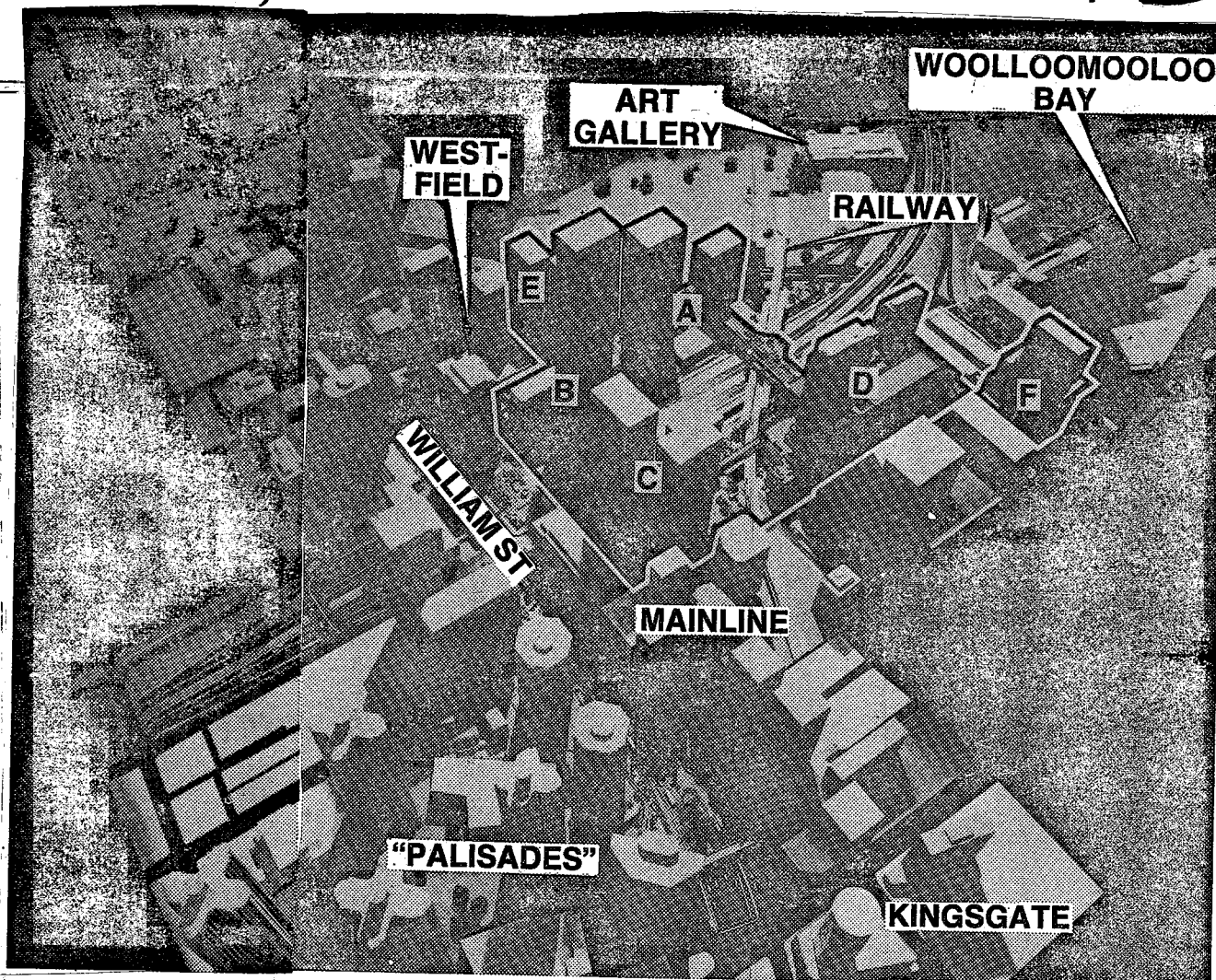
However, the submission for development approval looks like another Rocks plan or City of Sydney Strategic Plan—a large, handsomely illustrated book—and takes in the Government's bayside potential as well, embracing an extensive transportation study and public utilities appraisal into the bargain.

It is the first time in this country anyway that a private firm has undertaken town planning on this scale, but then this is the largest urban renewal program ever undertaken by private

enterprise in Australia.

Just as the book looks like another Rocks book, and the scale, of construction proposed promptly draws comparison with the neighbouring William Street "Champs Elysees of the South Pacific" collection of projects, Mr Londish turns out to be an admirer of both.

Moreover, the physical appearance of some of the terraced buildings and the raised walkways and podiums bears a distinct resemblance to the George



as against \$9-\$10 or more Downtown."

In other words, Mr Londish does not agree with the Strategic Plan's "central spine" concept, with tall office buildings stretching back from Circular Quay towards Central Station.

Of the other two sectors the consortium proposes to develop itself, one, block F, is primarily tourist orientated.

Its podium levels will contain a bus terminal, a motel/hotel complex of three separate units with 250 rooms each, and roof garden, and a 14-storey office building rising from the motel.

In line with the extensive pedestrian links throughout the whole project, proposing to make it possible to walk from the Domain to the Cross without encountering traffic, this sector would be linked with the foreshore by an overhead walk-way.

Across on the other side of the basin, behind Westfield Development Corporation Ltd's now rising William Street project, the other sector that Gateway is contemplating doing itself is seen as two 19-storey towers containing offices, doctors' and dentists' "wet suites" and some shops, the whole linked by a two-level plaza at the base.

The envelope plans for the sectors where the consortium intends to sell the land to other developers comprise:

- A—starting across the road from the Domain, behind Skandia's development — a 28-storey office building and six-storey "podium" building with a multi-level interior mall and space suitable for real estate agents, bank branches, travel agencies and the like.

- A 12-storey office block could be built on top of the podium at a later stage.

Two models of the same scale have been put together to produce this montage—William Street in the foreground, the 'Loo basin beyond. The Gateway consortium is considering developing sectors D, F, and E itself. The land for A, B, and C would be sold freehold to other developers, provided they would tie in with the overall plan. An interesting point is the plaza on William Street across the expressway. Gateway suggests that this replace a national building in the Sydney City Council's boulevard concept to key in the two areas.

be a few hundred yards from the Cross station under Kingsgate, but so are St James and Museum stations only about 1½ minutes' run apart.

Less important is a monorail, running from the William Street end down to a hypothetical ferry terminal, if the SPA's idea of converting the bay to a passenger liner terminal from the present predominantly cargo use reaches fruition, with a branch across to the Domain.

The monorail would no doubt have to be a government facility

but the consortium is leaving the holes for it.

So, that is what will become of Woolloomooloo — the basin, that is — in the view of the Mr Londish and his Gateway consortium colleagues.

So far as the trade centre is concerned, Mr Londish says that if the Pyrmont one goes ahead, Sydney will have two.

If City Council approval is granted, it is proposed to make a start early next year and it is estimated that the full development would take 15 years.

- B — behind William Street in the angle of Westfield's corner — a long seven-storey podium building with space for show-rooms and some low rental offices, and an adjacent 40-storey office tower.

The two would be linked by four plaza levels and again pedestrian bridges would link the entire sector to other parts of the area.

- C — behind the Bank of NSW's and Olivetti's projects on William Street — three office towers of 34, 26 and 11 storeys, with sports centres, open plazas and roof gardens once again.

Very important to the consortium is the question of whether there will be a Woolloomooloo railway station along the viaduct — to the extent that it is prepared to contribute \$800,000 to have one.

The 'Loo station, above the centre of the basin, would only