

47

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Return to  
G. Clarke

## THE GRAND DESIGN . . . 2

# What about Woolloomooloo

By HAMISH McDONALD

SOON AFTER the City of Sydney strategic plan was published on July 20 last year it became evident that the biggest immediate threat to it would come from developers buying up the shabby terraces, warehouses and workshops of Woolloomooloo.

In the statutory planning scheme for the City, gazetted a few days before the strategic plan was released, and the State Planning Authority's Woolloomooloo study of 1969, Woolloomooloo was zoned blue—for "county centre"—as was the central business district across the Domain.

"County centre" meant, in effect, gradual development as a business area. With encouragement from the authorities, real estate investors took this as a go-ahead. They managed to achieve a degree of site amalgamation that shocked even the SPA. The big building plots they had accumulated would allow huge buildings under the SPA's floor-space ratios and bonuses.

The strategic plan tried to stop this. It recommended that development in Woolloomooloo be mainly residential, with the bulk of office development taking place in the City's "spine" between Circular Quay and Central Railway. The original floor-space ratio code, submitted to the council by its consultants simultaneously with the strategic plan, proposed a basic building ratio of 4:1 for Woolloomooloo, with bonuses much harder to earn than elsewhere.

Less than three months later, on October 15, Mr Sidney Londish, leader of a business group which had acquired 11 acres of Woolloomooloo since 1969 and sought four acres more, unveiled his own grandiose plan for a \$400-million development that would, if fully carried out, set the tone for the whole precinct.

By amalgamation of his pro-

perties he had managed to achieve floor-space ratios of up to 12:1 under the regulations then in force. The 1.75 million sq ft of retail space, the motels, theatres, parking stations, sporting facilities, bars, restaurants, the railway station, the monorail, were to dress 3.5 million sq ft of office space.

The scheme received the endorsement of the Premier, Sir Robert Askin, who remarked at the announcement that "as always when you are dealing with progress and development you get a few critics about."

The council put up little fight. When the floor-space ratio code came up for formal adoption on December 6 the consultants' recommendation of a 4:1 ratio was dropped. Instead, the council decided to "administer development control" in the light of the 1969 study.

Approval of the Londish scheme in principle followed in May, obviously with reluctance. Sir Robert's prediction was subsequently proven correct, if understated.

Not only was the council attacked for its go-ahead to Mr Londish, it was savaged for its helpless attitude to the proposed Commonwealth offices on five acres of Woolloomooloo that would accommodate 15,000 workers. The attitude seemed to be that, if goaded, the Commonwealth would re-

vert to its original plans (dropped after much cajoling) to build a naval store on its Woolloomooloo land.

Happily, criticism from many other quarters appears to be working on the Commonwealth. The Federal Opposition has promised to re-site the offices (at Parramatta), and it is understood that some members of the parliamentary sub-committee which investigated the project favour a recommendation along the same lines.

The criticism of the developments has been based partly on the probable loss of all-too-rare residential areas to offices, but mainly on the growing evidence that transport facilities would be unable to cope with the workforce of more than 80,000 which such high-density development could eventually house. By comparison, the present Woolloomooloo workforce numbers only a few thousand, and that of the whole City about 240,000.

Certainly the build-up will extend over several years. But foreseeable transportation could not possibly cope. Mr George Clarke, director of the team of consultants who prepared the strategic plan, says that even the Woolloomooloo station on the Eastern Suburbs Railway that Mr Londish has proposed and offered partly to finance would be quite inadequate.

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