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WOOLLOOMOOLOO AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Excerpts from a Statement by Alderman Gerard Draper to Council of the City of Sydney on Monday, May 22, 1972

My Lord Mayor:

On behalf of the Australian Labour Party group in Council, I move that redevelopment proposals for Woolloomooloo be rescinded, on the grounds that:

- (i) The proposals constitute a gross overdevelopment of the area and are contrary to the recommendations of the City of Sydney Strategic Plan, particularly in relation to transport facilities, as referred to in Action Priority 2B, Action Priority 2E, Action Priority 5B.
- (ii) The proposals are contrary to the City of Sydney Strategic Plan's recommendations, Action Priority 2B, Action Priority 2E, Action Priority 9A, Action Priority 9D concerning residential development in the Woolloomooloo area.
- (iii) The proposals will mean the divergence of office development from the City's North-South Central Spine which was recommended as the office development area for the City as recommended in Action Priority 2B.
- (iv) The proposals will result in the demolition of Bossley Terrace, recommended by The National Trust of Australia and The Royal Australian Institute of Architects as a Class "C" preservation structure.
- (v) The proposals call upon the Metropolitan Water, Sewerage & Drainage Board to upgrade significantly the facilities to an extent unwarranted, bearing in mind the Board's facilities already existing in the southern area of the North-South Central Spine, and, consequently, to divert urgent funds required for sewerage and drainage in other areas of the Sydney Metropolitan Area.

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- 1. Historically, the Woolloomooloo basin has been a residential area with some commercial intrusion in the latter years. All redevelopment proposals, up to 1968, were based on residential development and yet, with a change in State government followed by a change in the composition of the City Council, that basis changed dramatically to one of outright commercial exploitation.
  - 2. The Woolloomooloo area has been "frozen" in the Town Planning sense since 1964. No owner or other interested individual or group has had access to any decision making authority to determine their position at law in respect to this area.
  - 3. No official exhibition conforming with Local Government requirements of the S. P. A. - City Council redevelopment proposals has taken place and, thus, no opportunity has been afforded individuals or groups to object formally to the redevelopment scheme.
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One might ask, why hasn't the Labour Party acted earlier in this matter? Why have we left it so late?

Along with many other people and organisations we were placed in a position of false security by apparent Civic Reform determination to implement the Strategic Plan.

For example, on 17th November, 1969, Professor R. N. Johnson, writing as President of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, N. S. W. Chapter, advised the Council that the N. S. W. Chapter was unable to endorse the Woolloomooloo Redevelopment Scheme for the following reasons:

- ... the lack of co-ordination with those areas which adjoin it and for which no plans then existed (or do now!!!)
- ... the lack of logic in the boundaries chosen for the area to be studied.
- ... William Street should not be considered a boundary and that the area to the south of it cannot be isolated (i. e. south to Oxford Street)
- ... the fact that the Scheme incorporated proposals of various autonomous authorities with conflicting interests, thus reinforcing the Chapter's view that there was an urgent need for strong and positive planning by a co-ordinating organisation with adequate authority.
- ... the area bears a strong relationship to the Kings Cross residential district and to the city and its open spaces ... provides a wonderful opportunity, which should not be missed, for introducing comprehensive mixed residential development into this part of the city and of creating a vital link between the C. B. D. and the high density residential development of Kings Cross.
- ... other reasons relating to Woolloomooloo Bay and proposed wharf developments, and the need for a station under the Domain.

The response to Professor Johnson from the Lord Mayor on 15th December, 1969 makes very interesting reading.

"... the Council is aware that certain deficiencies exist in the Scheme ... the whole matter of the Scheme is before the City Development Committee ... the Council is conscious of the pressing planning needs of the city ... has appointed Ald. Leo Port as its representative on the S. P. A. ... Ald. Andrew Briger has expressed the urgent need for a planning programme and (the need) to commission the preparation of a Strategic Plan ... closely followed by a series of specific Action Plans ... the parameter of these Action Plans will be defined in the Strategic Plan which will incorporate a programme of priorities in such Action Planning to deal with the city's problems and deficiencies ... it is our objective through the preparation of sound research based proposals as outlined in the Strategic Plan to seek the support of public opinion of organisations such as your own, of statutory bodies and Government Departments ... we believe Council will assume its proper role as the co-ordinating body for City Development and as the functional and psychological centre of the Metropolitan Region."

We submit that there could have been no stronger indication than this response by the Lord Mayor that the Strategic Plan would be implemented by Civic Reform. It may be of some minor consolation that we were not the only people taken in by their protestations of sincerity.

We have now a situation which completely undermines this Council's standing in relation to overall planning principles and, more particularly, the implementation of the worthwhile features of the Strategic Plan or, at least, what's left of the Plan now that it's being reduced to tatters.

How ironic that the Council which had such high ranking motives, in terms of "co-ordinating City Development as the functional and psychological centre of the Metropolitan Region", now cringes in despair at the first onslaught; an onslaught as guileless as it is unsupportable by any other than those bent on supporting development at no matter what cost.

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### Specific Objections

As indicated in our rescision motion, our specific objections to the development as proposed are based on six main points, and I will deal with them individually and not necessarily in the order of importance we attach to them.

#### 1. Gross Overdevelopment

The proposal approved by Council is to permit development up to a floor space ratio of 10 : 1, with any ratios in excess to be examined separately. This indicates there is a strong possibility that the 10 : 1 ratio will most probably be exceeded, at least in some areas of the development.

The area involved in this development represents approximately one eighth of the developable area in the Woolloomooloo Scheme. Thus, any development approval for this area must be viewed in light of the precedent which will be established for development in the much larger remaining area. For example, the William Street Boulevard involves development in excess of 10 : 1, so that the considerable area adjacent to the north of William Street and tied in with the William Street Boulevard concept, and equalling an area approximately 60% of the area presently under consideration, will be developed to a density at least as great as that currently under consideration. The area at the northern end of Victoria Street has been approved by Council for mixed office and residential development to a floor space density of 10 : 1. The area of land over and adjacent to the Kings Cross railway is being considered for development at a floor space ratio approaching 10 : 1. The Commonwealth also intends to develop its significant property holdings, and there will be little point in seeking constraint from them with this massive development as a precedent.

Thus one gains the impression of massive high rise development almost equal to the obvious overdevelopment at the northern end of the Central Business District. Such overdevelopment in the C. B. D. area may find some support from the "progress" supporters, although certainly not from us. However, its extension to Woolloomooloo is just plain unsupportable.

One has only to calculate the number of people attracted by the proposed commercial activity to envisage a commuting population of at least 100,000 people - a figure confirmed by the Council's own Strategic Plan (page 83).

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When one appreciates that the whole C. B. D. area from Circular Quay to Central, from Macquarie Street/Hyde Park to Darling Harbour, currently attracts about 260,000 commuters, the objection to the series of developments which will attract a commuting population equal to almost 40% of this current C. B. D. workforce, can easily be substantiated.

Alderman Briger based the second keystone of his argument in support of Civic Reform capitulation on the theme that the developers were working within the concept of the Woolloomooloo Redevelopment Scheme.

We have already indicated that there is significant legal doubt concerning that Scheme but, assuming that we can expect continued Civic Reform protestation that they are bound to the Scheme, let us examine the degree of development envisaged by the S. P. A. when they prepared it.

The S. P. A. has already indicated that their Scheme envisaged a maximum workforce in the Woolloomooloo basin of 35,000 commuters, including 15,000 for the Commonwealth Centre. However, the intensity of development of the present proposals means that we can expect a minimum commuter workforce of 80,000, not including the ancillary service workforce nor the commuters contained in surrounding development areas.

We have mentioned the Commonwealth and their proposed development. It will be of no avail for Council to seek restraint in development density from them when they are finalising their plans. We must remember that Council has little or no jurisdiction over the Commonwealth. We can expect nevertheless compliance with the overall concept to which Council is forcing developers to comply. It need only be added that the Commonwealth now has an almost open go; exactly that which we have given the developers - put it up and we'll comply with your requirements.

A further point of interest and concern from our point of view, involves Council's approach to the Commonwealth concerning the possible conversion of the Garden Island area to open space. The Commonwealth already has indication of Council's sincerity (or lack of it) in desiring open space when we sold the Elizabeth Bay houses resumed to create public parkland on the waterfront. Now they have the example of Council capitulation in the face of overdevelopment of Woolloomooloo, and the ridiculously small area of public open space being provided by Council, as envisaged in the roadway proposal adopted in principle two Council meetings ago.

## 2. Transport

The Strategic Plan recommends, in Action Priority 2B, that the highest density of commercial life should be concentrated in the Central Spine District between the Circular Quay and Central Railway transport interchanges so as to be capable of accommodating the projected year 2,000 workforce of approximately 400,000.

The Strategic Plan indicates that a number of alternative patterns of dispersed and concentrated growth had been postulated and tested during its preparation. The Plan's investigations were based on the proposition that over 80% of the workforce would need to travel to work by public transport. It thus reached the obvious conclusion that the resultant public transport demand could not be met without assistance from rail services due to the limitations that road capacity imposes on

It might be argued that the location of the Eastern Suburbs Railway would indicate the accessibility of the Woolloomooloo area for commuters. However, the Strategic Plan points out that this line does not have direct connections to the railway line serving the major growth areas of the Sydney region and presents formidable problems in providing adequate transfer facilities at the Town Hall Station, the logical transfer station. The Plan's studies indicate that about 60% of all rail commuters to Woolloomooloo would have to change trains at Town Hall, Central or Redfern with probably about 50% changing at Town Hall. A workforce of 100,000 in the Woolloomooloo Scheme area, which the development proposal before us, together with the other development proposals for this area, will produce, means that an additional 10,000 to 12,000 commuters will need to change trains at Town Hall during the peak hour. This equals approximately 60% of the current number of people using Town Hall during peak periods - one need only ask any peak hour user of Town Hall to appreciate that the facilities are already at bursting point.

The Strategic Plan, in Action Priority 2E, spells out in even more detail the problems associated with and the undesirability of high density commercial redevelopment in the Woolloomooloo area. It suggests that a workforce of 35,000 (as envisaged by the S. P. A. for this area) would leave 25,000 to travel by bus and rail and that even this number of commuters will require the enlargement of currently envisaged transport facilities.

To date the State Ministers concerned with transport have resisted attempts to incorporate a Woolloomooloo station in the Eastern Suburbs Railway. Whilst their reasoning has probably been based on technical and operating conditions, one must also question the desirability of siting a railway station so that the area becomes that much more attractive to the development of office space which must result in overdevelopment. Action Priority 5B spells out this problem in graphic detail.

I would like to refer briefly to the problem of access by car. The Strategic Plan indicates that up to 20% of the workforce can be expected to travel by car and that, together with visitor cars, a ratio of one car per four workers can be anticipated. This will represent a daily car population of some 25,000 cars in the Woolloomooloo Scheme area. Two meetings ago the Council approved in principle road proposals prepared by Council's officers. It is no criticism of them (or the officers) to say that they have been forced by the limitation of Council's resources to work basically within the existing road pattern. Some roads are to be closed, others widened and some small additional roads constructed. Nevertheless, the total road area will be very little changed from that presently in existence.

Council did not undertake any traffic feasibility studies nor did it assess the likely traffic density patterns during peak hours. As mentioned previously the road system approved in principle is merely a juxtaposition of existing facilities. It resembles all too well the type of road pattern in the C. B. D., and we all know how inadequately that operates.

The main outlets for this significantly increased car population will be the Eastern Distributor and the Kings Cross Road Tunnel. Bearing in mind existing tendencies for a significant percentage of the car population to come from the executive-class Northern Suburbs, the most critical strain will be imposed on the Cahill Expressway. One doesn't have to do much research to appreciate that the Cahill Expressway is already incapable of handling peak hour traffic both to

The effectiveness of the Kings Cross Road Tunnel has yet to be evaluated, but, again, this project has all the hallmarks of an expressway to nowhere, resulting in the transfer of the traffic jam at the top of William Street to an even larger traffic jam at Edgecliff. This will be compounded by the proposed Eastern Suburbs Transport Interchange complex, located in the Edgecliff area.

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### 3. Residential Development

My brief historical outline indicated the long standing residential development in the Woolloomooloo Scheme area.

The Strategic Plan has also indicated the absolute desirability for residential redevelopment. It states, in Action Priority 2E, that Woolloomooloo was Sydney's first residential suburb, that the largest single land use is still residential, while other land uses include essential service trades and facilities supporting the C. B. D. The Strategic Plan points out that for the future economic well being of the city as a whole the valley of Woolloomooloo and the Victoria Street ridge should be redeveloped as much as possible for predominantly residential uses.

In Action Priorities 9A and 9B the Strategic Plan develops the theme of residential redevelopment for the city. It calls for the protection of existing residential areas from inappropriate intrusion by non-residential business uses and for the seeking of opportunities to increase residential zoning and uses throughout the city.

One of the Labour Party's major criticisms of the Strategic Plan at the time of its adoption was the complete neglect of the opportunities available to Council to involve itself in residential development. This Council has a very long and proud history - unequalled by any local government authority in Australia - and yet the Strategic Plan fails to mention the opportunities available for residential redevelopment undertaken directly by this Council. To that extent we believe the plan failed to put forward proposals concerning residential redevelopment to our complete satisfaction. Nevertheless, the plan acknowledged that the future well being of our city must rest on a strong, healthy residential population - not merely on a day-time commuter workforce.

The Plan called for the re-zoning of the Woolloomooloo Valley and the Victoria Street ridge for residential redevelopment or at least for the introduction of a control regulation to limit floor space used for offices. The floor space code introduced in Council, together with the Strategic Plan, on July 20, 1971 limited office development to 50% of the bonus space earned under the proposed code. This code, combined with the priorities contained within the Strategic Plan, gave hope for significant residential redevelopment. However, the floor space codes presented for adoption in November, 1971 indicated a significant withdrawal from the earlier stance supporting residential development, so that the new code proposed that the "Responsible Authority will determine permissible floor space ratios as and when necessary."

As indicated above the legal position indicates that this Council has the responsibility to propose the development scheme for the Woolloomooloo area; the S. P. A. 's position has been one of Consultant, for which Council has paid appropriate consultant's fees.

One must ask whether there is any significance in the date of submission to Council of the current proposal, namely 20th October, 1971, and the date of submission of the final floor space codes, namely 29th November, 1971. Did the preparation of these development proposals have an overriding influence on the final formulation of the Strategic Plan codes?

The Strategic Plan sets out quite clearly the need for residential development. The Labour Party has continually emphasized to this Council that any residential development must contain provision for a mixed income composition of tenants.

Such proposals have obviously failed to penetrate the office building phobia surrounding Civic Reform. Let Alderman Harris speak on behalf of that lobby, "... there is a constant and steady stream of development applications (for office buildings) from people who visualise Sydney in the years to come as one of the greatest cities of the world, ...."

Enlightened people have acknowledged for a long time that large numbers of people, who live in and use the city both day and night, form the basis of truly great cities. Long distance commuters, who through no fault of their own, find night time access to the city an increasingly difficult and expensive proposition, can contribute little to the cultural life of that city. The rapid sprawl of our city tends to make this problem of a commuter-dominated dead-heart city all the more real and apparent - apparent that is to all except those defending the world of "developers and financiers with neither the desire nor interest to develop any section of the city other than Woolloomooloo.", to again quote Alderman Harris.

I believe the Labour Party's strongest objections are based on overdevelopment and this failure to ensure that residential development is the dominant feature in the proposals. Not only have we no attempt to ensure a satisfactory income mix in residential development, we have no residential development at all.

#### 4. Divergency of Office Development

We again refer to Action Priority 2B in the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan projected the C. B. D. workforce by the year 2,000 as almost 400,000. It argued that this workforce could be contained wholly within the Central Spine District namely, the Tank Stream, Midtown Hub and Brickfield Hill precincts, at a floor space ratio of 9 : 1. As the floor space code allows ratios up to 12 : 1, and as most recent developments tend towards this maximum, we can expect ample area for absorption of any workforce expansion significantly larger than that projected by the Plan.

The Strategic Plan emphasized that concentration of office development within this Central Spine would leave the outlying Woolloomooloo area "... available for substantially residential development mixed with hotel, retail, etc. ..."

The Plan goes on, "extensive redevelopment for the predominantly office uses of the Woolloomooloo valley would be principally at the expense of the southern half of the C. B. D. If future office growth is concentrated in the 'Loo, major elements of the rail system would continue to remain under-utilised, while others burst at the seams under the impact of the unevenly distributed traffic load that any pattern of city development, other than a strong north-south Central Spine..."



Action Priority 5B, as mentioned previously, indicates the results of rail usage surveys. It suggests that "a system at Woolloomooloo could overstimulate the growth of offices in a Precinct where predominantly residential, hotel, entertainment and support commercial uses should desirably be encouraged . . . Use of a Woolloomooloo Station by peak hour commuters could seriously affect the capacity of the city railway system, particularly at the Town Hall Station, where within thirty years, if offices sprawl unchecked into Woolloomooloo, about 10,000 persons could be forced to change trains during the peak hour to reach a Woolloomooloo Station."

"However, a station at Campbell Street could stimulate desired commercial redevelopment in the southern part of the C. B. D. spine, without compounding the problem of rail system capacity."

The Strategic Plan also indicates that future expansion of the office space sector could continue south beyond Central Railway, where adequate rail access would still be available.

Thus, everything from a planning viewpoint points to the containing of office space in the North-South Central Spine. But the Strategic Plan Consultants weren't aware of Alderman Harris' own planning rules. What "the developer or the financiers" want so they must have; to quote him again, "... there is no suggestion that the developer or the financiers of the Woolloomooloo Scheme have the desire or intention to develop any section of the city other than Woolloomooloo."

This is no ordinary alderman addressing the Editor of the S. M. H.; it is the Chairman of Council's Works Committee. Many people must have hoped that the day, when the City Council would use, to quote the Lord Mayor, "the sound research based proposals as outlined in the Strategic Plan", was upon us. Alderman Harris has certainly undermined any such hopes with his arguments for capitulation to the developer and financiers merely because they aren't interested in any other area. Surely if this developer and these financiers won't, then some of the other "leading developers in the City of Sydney with their constant and steady stream of development applications", referred to by Alderman Harris, will.

The opportunity is there we must make the choice now between, a city with some semblance of forward planning based at least on proposals researched and evaluated in line with some town planning principles, and a city dominated completely by anarchy in the marketplace and the associated selfishness of those speculators and developers stoking that particular fire.

##### 5. Preservation and Conservation

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This is not the time to canvass the method adopted by the National Trust in rating buildings for preservation. It is adequate to remind us all that their methods are conservative, to say the least, and are based on structures in isolation and not in relation to their surroundings.

In evaluating the Woolloomooloo area, the Trust singled out very few structures as worthy of preservation. Those chosen as worthy of preservation were the Aquatic Club, the Eye Hospital group of terraces and Bossley Terrace. Each of these structures has been given a Class "C" rating.



It is significant that in the whole Woolloomooloo area only these structures have been singled out for preservation by the Trust and that each of them are now threatened by demolition.

The Trust's conservative approach prevents them adding factors for scarcity within a locality but, to the layman, this would seem a particularly important consideration.

Woolloomooloo is one of Sydney's historic residential areas; very few examples of earlier residential development remain, and yet we find Council approval for a development which will ensure the demolition of these last remaining links with the past.

It cannot be emphasised enough that Council must take a stand for preservation. Observation of the Register of Worthy Places and Structures in the Strategic Plan indicates that, of 178 places listed, no fewer than 18 have been demolished already or are under threat of demolition.

This rapidly diminishing number of places worthy of preservation makes it even more important that those remaining are preserved.

We have a small sector along the western boundary of the Woolloomooloo area singled out by the Trust for special consideration. The S. P. A. has indicated that it considered that this sector should be utilised for residential development.

The opportunity for a long overdue Council stand on preservation is with us. Failure to act now in a positive manner will condemn us before all who express concern at the loss of our heritage, and who look to the Council for leadership in this very important aspect of our city's development.

#### 6. Unwarranted Demand for Facilities

The final specific objection we raise to the proposals concerns the unwarranted demand being placed upon the M. W. S. D. B. to amplify their sewerage, drainage and water services in the Woolloomooloo area.

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I recall the words of the Lord Mayor, "... we believe Council will assume its proper role as the co-ordinating body for city development and as the functional and psychological centre of the Metropolitan Region." But the reality is something quite different.

The Board approached Council in November, 1969 expressing concern at the intensity and extent of proposed development in Woolloomooloo, to which Council responded, in August, 1970, that it was not our business and that the Board should consult the S. P. A. and the Minister.

It might be argued that that was pre-Strategic Plan and that we're good planning boys now. But are we?

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The immediate outcome of all this, as far as the M. W. S. D. B. is concerned, is that that Board must now find \$10 million from its scarce funds to provide adequate amplification for the intensification

It might be argued that this amplification would have been required anyway, in the long run. It is doubtful that anything approaching \$10 million would have been necessary had low intensity residential development been the basis for development, or even office space at the much lower intensity envisaged by the S. P. A.

But, more importantly, very adequate facilities exist already in the southern end of the C. B. D. Minor amplification work only will be necessary to meet foreseeable office space expansion in that area. Alderman Harris may not be able to envisage development in other than the Woolloomooloo area; but, if the rest of this Council is to act responsibly, it must ensure that office expansion is in the C. B. D. Spine so as to utilise existing facilities and prevent unnecessary duplication.

It must be pointed out that that part of the developer's submission covering the sewerage and drainage services was prepared in part by the partnership firm in which Alderman Port's interest is involved. This submission sets out quite clearly their expectation that the M. W. S. D. B. will undertake any necessary amplification at the Board's own cost.

It need only be added that the \$10 million the Board will need to find to undertake this amplification work in the Woolloomooloo area would be sufficient to provide sewerage facilities for 16,000 presently unsewered houses.

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### Summary

I have merely skimmed the surface of the innumerable reasons why we should reject outright the current proposals.

I have limited myself to the Strategic Plan and Woolloomooloo Scheme proposals because I wanted to bring home very forcibly the extent to which we are departing from the policies we adopted some 10 months ago.

The Labour Party aldermen must make one point clear. When the Strategic Plan was adopted, we expressed concern firstly, that it merely channelled the obvious current overdevelopment into the Central Spine without offering any firm policies to control and redirect that overdevelopment to decentralised outer city areas and, secondly, that it did not go far enough in ensuring adequate future residential development. These very basic objections still remain our prime concern and merely contribute to the intensity of our objections to the present proposals which allow the overdeveloped city centre to spread to another adjacent city centre area and which prevent forever the hope for worthwhile residential development in this near city location.

Our very strong objections to the Woolloomooloo Scheme, prepared by the S. P. A., have not changed. The basic decision to change from comprehensive residential to comprehensive commercial redevelopment will never be condoned by us. But our above submission has illustrated quite clearly that the present proposals form the basis of development three times as intense as that envisaged in that S. P. A. Submission.

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