

"Kings Cross conveys the image of Sydney as a diverse and cosmopolitan city; its economic viability as a major urban playground must be preserved, encouraged and enhanced . . . what will usually do for other parts of the City will not be good enough for the Cross."

"Surry Hills residential precinct is a miniature representation of all the problems and opportunities of inner-city residential living. It would seem desirable to encourage the restoration of terrace houses and re-development in the form of town houses."

"The action plan for West Surry Hills . . . aims to sort out the conflicts between residents and office-industrial activities. Much of the area's terrace accommodation has been eliminated with the growing demand for commercial and factory space."

Kiss of life for the Cross

By IAN HICKS

THE REALITY: It is nearly midnight on Saturday. A grumbling centipede of cars wriggles slowly up William Street. Wrapped in a smelly haze of exhaust fumes, it inches its way into the crowded streets and lanes of Kings Cross, Sydney's after-hours playpen. There's nowhere to park and the driver who lets his eyes wander is brought back to the reality of a traffic jam with a jolt.

THE VISION: Same time, same place a few years hence. Cars sweep up revamped William Street to large car parks on the perimeter of the Cross. Tourists meander along Darlinghurst Mall and all parts of the Cross through inter-connected walkways. There are open-air cafes and restaurants set beneath trees. In Fitzroy Gardens, which have been extended across Elizabeth Bay Road into Barnacleuth Square, fountains tinkle as background music to a performance in the new Theatre-Under-The-Stars.

Indeed a vision, as anyone who has visited the Cross only to have a night out spoiled by the demands and the mere presence of the almighty motor car, can attest.

But that vision is in the process of being turned into fact. Plans now before Sydney City Council aim to convert the present reality into a past nightmare and to bring to full flower the obvious potential of Kings Cross.

They were drawn up by the council's consultants, Urban Systems Corporation, which has also prepared two sets of plans for another part of Sydney where potential is hidden by grime and decay — Surry Hills.

The three plans, outlined in illustrated, loose-leaf booklets and shrouded in the gobbledygook beloved of systems planners, seek a long-term transformation of the two areas following approval from the council.

The Kings Cross plan starts by recognising the obvious — that the area is being subjected to a massive injection of private and public capital investment, that residents want improved amenities before new strip-clubs, that the existence of the Cross is a vital part of the flavour of Sydney.

The plan depicts the Cross as an amalgam of houses and tourist facilities, a fabulous misshapen lizard sunning itself on the ridge of Hawkesbury sandstone.

It seeks to keep that urban

lizard alive by banning tall buildings which would blot out the sun, by keeping automotive cholesterol out of its veins and arteries and by balancing commercial appetites against community needs.

"The concept is based on a perimeter traffic movement system feeding peripheral parking stations and allowing traffic within Kings Cross to be controlled to achieve some separation between vehicles and pedestrians," the report says.

"Macleay Street would become a tree-lined boulevard with new buildings set back from the roadway to allow ground floor retail and entertainment facilities to extend out into the sidewalk.

"Most of Victoria Street could become an exclusive residential street with a mixture of retail and commercial developments at the south end."

The plan first recommends a re-zoning that would preserve older buildings which give the quieter areas of the Cross their own unique charm, keep commerce out of residential areas and provide new areas of open space.

Darlinghurst Road, Springfield Avenue, Lankelly Place and Orwell Lane would be closed to traffic while several other streets would be widened to improve traffic movement.

Existing limits on the height of buildings would be tightened to keep the sunlight in the streets.

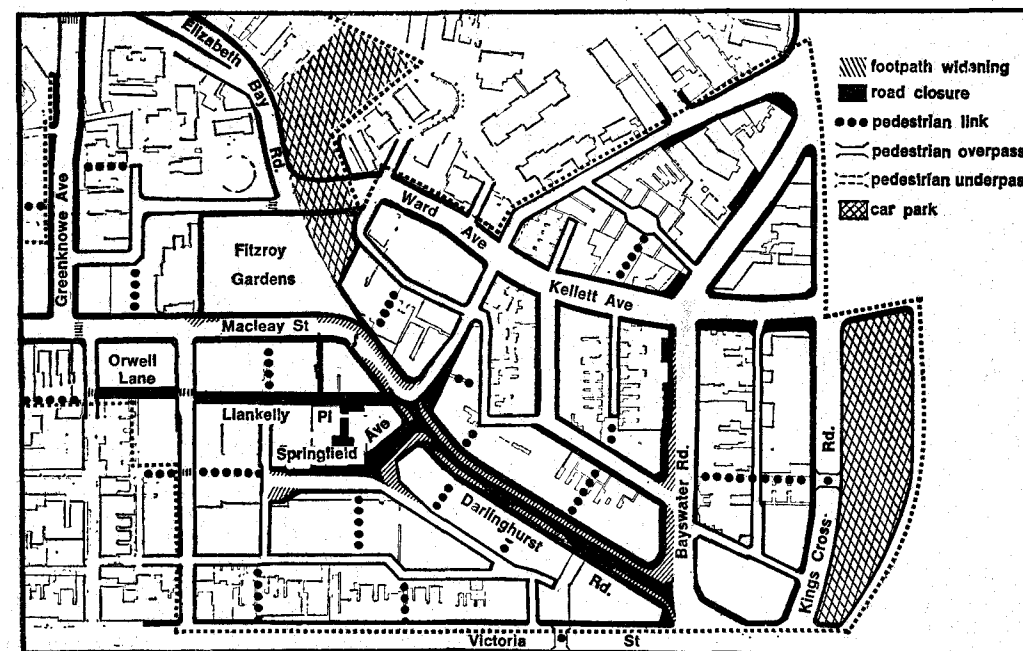
The plan envisages an 800-vehicle carpark above Kings Cross Road tunnel and another park of similar size underground at Elizabeth Bay Road. Space for more than 600 cars would be provided in six smaller parking stations scattered around the fringes of the Cross.

Having dented the hegemony of the motor car, the plan moves on to more positive ground — to the focal point of the Cross, Fitzroy Gardens, and into Darlinghurst Road, Macleay Street and Elizabeth Bay Road.

It wants the gardens expanded to about twice their present size with seating, gardens and fountains, and a tourist information centre that blends with the landscape and the open-air theatre.

The extension of the gardens across the present carriage-way of Elizabeth Bay Road would require a major traffic link along Ward and Kellett Avenues (both of which would be widened) between Elizabeth Bay Road and Kings Cross Road.

Other streets would be converted into one-way roads with widened footpaths and hump-



Part of the Kings Cross plan. The car park at Elizabeth Bay Road is underground.

ing or corrugations to reduce speeding.

Darlinghurst Road would get its facelift in two stages, with the first including one-way traffic and widened footpaths.

"All future redevelopment on either side of Darlinghurst Road, between the Kings Cross intersection and Macleay Street, should incorporate as a condition of consent a two-level colonnade of retailing and/or entertainment facilities," the report says.

The council should encourage new attractions along the road through extended shopping hours and open-air cafes and restaurants.

Stage Two would see Darlinghurst Road closed to traffic, although the report warns: "Full road closure . . . should be monitored and if necessary re-evaluated during the course

of this staged program of action."

For the whole Kings Cross area, the report recommends heavy tree plantings, particularly along Darlinghurst and Bayswater Roads, Macleay Street and the proposed new road linking Elizabeth Bay and Kings Cross Roads.

By comparison with the grand scheme for the Cross, the two sets of plans for Surry Hills look rather pale. Yet their implementation would play a major part in transforming acres of seedy disrepair into a vibrant residential area.

The main thrust of the plans is to block the encroachment of commerce and industry in residential areas whose roots are in the nineteenth century.

In the main residential areas west of South Dowling Street, there is the largest continuous segment of low-rise residential

development within the city boundaries.

Residents and conservation groups want the unique terrace houses retained as they are; private developers, however, are buying up old properties and amalgamating individual sites into large areas suitable for high-profit redevelopment.

In West Surry Hills, the report notes a kind of urban guerilla warfare.

The defenders are the occupants — migrants, students, pensioners — of run-down terraces nearly 100 years old. The invaders are the developers who take advantage of broad-bush zoning to replace low-rise terraces with multi-storey office buildings.

In both areas, the consultants recommend changes in zoning so that the character of this village within a city can be made to flower once more.

Through traffic would be diverted around the edges of both parts of Surry Hills with major roads widened to speed the traffic away from residential areas and streets within those areas used only by internal traffic.

Both plans contain a rude surprise for suburbanites who park their cars in Surry Hills and then take a bus to the City.

The consultants want a two-hour parking limit enforced within Surry Hills. They want local residents to be given permits excluding them from that limit (which raises the intriguing possibility of a black-market in Surry Hills parking permits).

Trees would be planted throughout the area, minor roads freed from through traffic closed and converted into landscaped parks and playgrounds, and footpaths widened to create mini-parks near schools and community centres.

It is hard to fault the plans and their long-term view of Surry Hills as another Paddington. Yet a niggling doubt remains when one considers that prospect.

What is happening to the people who for years have made Surry Hills their home — migrant labourers, pensioners, low-income factory workers and students?

As hard-nosed developers and the trendies move in with wads of cash at the ready, the traditional occupants of Surry Hills — people who wouldn't know a Resident Action Group if they tripped over one — are being pushed out.

Do they want to leave? Nobody knows.

Where are they going to and at what personal cost? That's not known either.

Shouldn't somebody be trying to find out?