

Desecrating Our Darling

The Sydney Morning Herald of 22 December 2012 gave extensive coverage to the proposed redevelopment of Darling Harbour. It provided illustrations of the architectural designs that the developers have prepared. The developers, the Darling Harbour Live consortium, have since displayed models of their intended buildings.

As residents of the Chinatown precinct, we have some serious concerns about this redevelopment, which are four-fold:

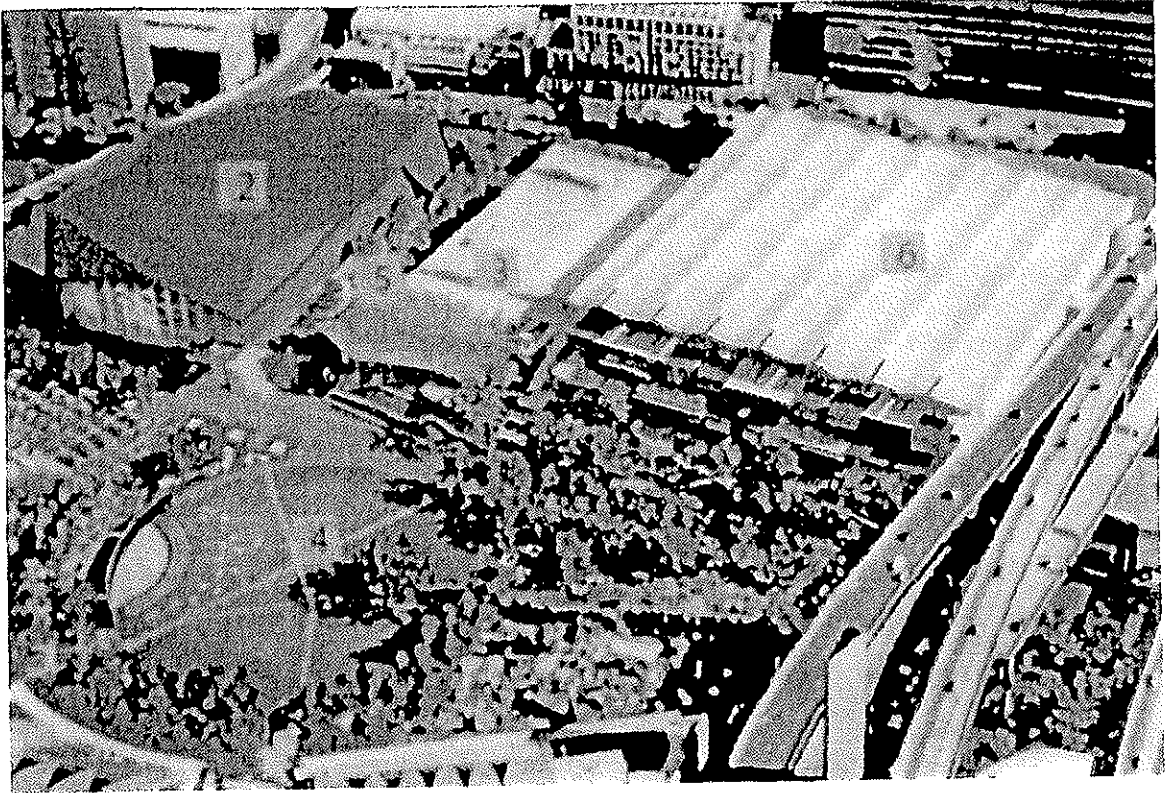
- the destruction of buildings of architectural merit that should have been given heritage value, and their replacement with buildings which have no such merit;
- the pedestrian and traffic congestion that is threatened by the diminution of road access and parking facilities, including the half closure of the only road providing western access to the Darling Harbour facilities;
- the disregard for, and apparent overruling of, the height restrictions that apply to the whole of the Chinatown precinct to serve the advantage of a commercial, profit-orientated residential development. While Darling Harbour is not contained in the SCC area of Chinatown, both Chinatown and the Chinese Gardens will be dwarfed by high-rise towers;
- the extraordinarily costly redevelopment of facilities that are, and remain, manifestly adequate to their purposes: but funded by the taxpayer to the extent of some two and a half billion dollars.

1. Architectural Merit.

There is little merit in the architectural quality or originality in the designs demonstrated in the Destination Sydney consortium's drawings and models. These were most disappointing, exhibiting a paucity of architectural imagination - commonplace, unexciting and undistinguished, messy, deficient in architectural freshness and ingenuity. The Sydney Morning Herald gave some prominence to architect Philip Cox's condemnation of the destruction of the Exhibition Centre as "an act of vandalism".

When the Sydney Opera House was in its planning stage a competition invited architects worldwide to provide design concepts for the proposed building: this resulted in the exalting originality of the new theatre. Surely, if we were to tear down the Darling Harbour bicentennial buildings, this could only be justified by our constructing replacements that are architecturally original and exciting - elating! Therefore, should not the consortium have been in the very first place promoting a means whereby our most creative, innovative and distinguished architects be invited to propose designs that are comparable in originality and architectural ingenuity to

those of the Sydney Opera House and of the most celebrated contemporary buildings erected in major international cities?



2. Access

Has Government considered that transferring the Entertainment Centre into the middle of Darling Harbour will take pedestrian pressure from its patrons' access routes from the Central Station area via Chinatown, placing this pressure instead fairly into the far more congested Town Hall area?

Similarly, has it considered the impact of halving the width of Darling Drive to a single, and presumably one-way, lane to make space for its proposed new structures?

The present multiplicity of high-rise constructions, both recently completed and underway, on the Broadway/Ultimo Road/Quay Street areas are likely to accelerate the local traffic congestion and parking difficulties with which both visitors and residents are trying to cope. Parking for private vehicles is already problematic in this whole area - a problem that will be exacerbated by the multiple apartment blocks proposed with limited parking facilities. Is there a traffic management plan for the commercial retail, 1,400 residential units, plus public and disability, parking?

3. The Purpose of Darling Harbour

Darling Harbour is Sydney's tourist, pleasure and recreational area. The proposed redevelopment injects a gross and totally unacceptable invasion of our City's

regenerative park by a high-density warren of tenements, threatening to compromise the predominant purpose, cogency and efficacy of the entire Darling Harbour.

Are we prepared to allow this commercially oriented, profit-seeking Consortium to throw up mercenary monstrosities immediately adjacent to, and blocking, the whole of the South-Eastern end of Darling Harbour, overshadowing the heritage-listed, height-controlled area of Chinatown, and creating a precedent for the further destruction of this pleasant environment with the possibilities of a multitude of future high-rise blocks of flats? Has an Environmental Impact Statement been prepared in relation to these 1,400 units, plus 1,000 student rooms, hotel, shops etc?

These proposed blocks are designed to absorb totally the Entertainment Centre Forecourt that currently separates Paddy's Market from the present Entertainment Centre, constructing solid walls and shopfronts right up to the tramline alignment and Harbour Street. We strongly suspect that the profits to be derived from these flats is the overriding - if not the sole - purpose of the planned and almost total destruction of Darling Harbour, including the monorail facility, as it was created only twenty-five years ago to celebrate the Australian Bicentenary.

The deal between the Government and the developers is "Commercial in Confidence" - just as were Bangaroo and Packer's Casino!

(If there is really such pressing need to provide apartment blocks adjacent to the city, then there is a substantial area of unused space beyond the Anzac Bridge which could be utilised for high-rise apartments without destroying the integrity of Darling Harbour. The White Bay Glebe Island site has been vacant for years; a plan was proposed for some 1500 units on the industrial wasteland at Glebe Island.)

4. The Fallacy in the Reasoning for this Project.

The *raison d'être* of the entire project, we have been told, is based upon the contention that Sydney is missing out to Melbourne on major national and international conferences being held in Australia because we do not have a venue large enough to accommodate them.

Thus we are to destroy the present Convention Centre in order to build a rather larger one. But even this is not planned to accommodate really large conventions. These, it is forecast, will be held in the proposed new Entertainment Centre.

Conversely, we are to destroy the present Entertainment Centre because it is too big! We are to build a new, smaller Entertainment Centre, this new one (it is argued) being able to accommodate conventions that will be too big for the new Convention Centre!

Why on earth can we not retain and extend the present Entertainment Centre's very large meeting room with additional breakout and dining areas and hold the large conventions there!

We, the undersigned, feel exceedingly strongly about this desecration of Darling Harbour; about the high and unnecessary costs of this whole scheme; about the overruling of the height restrictions that apply to the Chinatown area in respect of the proposed high-rise residential developments; and the profit-orientated, long-term contamination of the Darling Harbour reserve that will be caused by this proposed injection of high-rise blocks of residential flats and the accompanying traffic congestion.

Yours Sincerely

Name Signature

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