



VILLAGE VOICE

QUEEN STREET & WEST WOOLLAHRA ASSOCIATION NEWS BULLETIN

JUNE, 1978

IS THIS WHAT WE WANT FOR WEST WOOLLAHRA?*

After having produced what the association believed to be definitive planning proposals for West Woollahra – which the association helped to form and then largely supported – Woollahra Municipal Council has decided to have a second bite at the planning cherry.

It has recently produced another scheme, "A Proposed Action Plan for Woollahra West", which contains a number of important changes in zonings from those originally proposed.

Most disastrously, in the association's view, the Council is now proposing to allow the erection of four and six storey blocks of flats or units along Oxford Street, facing Centennial Park.

One of these would completely block off Wallis Street which would become closed to traffic.

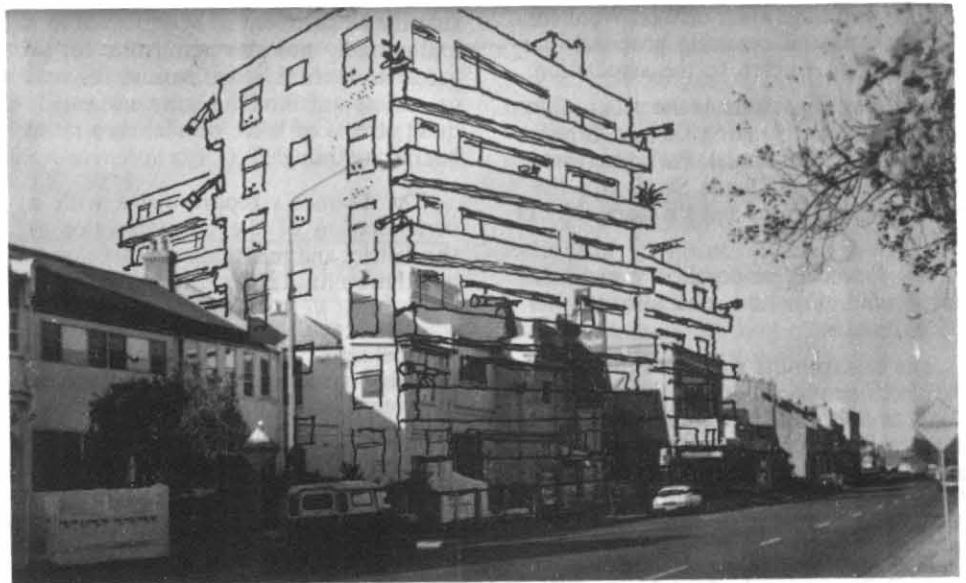
At its meeting in May, the association's committee resolved that it should publicly and emphatically express its opposition to these proposals as being contrary to the association's aims, as set out in its constitution.

On the more general aspects of the plan, the committee decided to commission Mr. P. J. Devery, BSc, MTCP, a distinguished town planner, to produce an independent report.

Mr. Devery knows something of the background as he was engaged by Woollahra Council to report on one of its earlier plans for the area.

Mr. Devery's report will be used as background for a general submission which the association will make to Woollahra Council on the new plan. When this

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* SORRY WOOLLAHRA COUNCIL –
WOOLLAHRA WEST!

IS THIS WHAT WE WANT?

CONTINUED

submission is ready, the association intends to call a public meeting where the matter can be thrashed out.

Meanwhile, the committee's initial reactions to the new plan are discussed more fully in the following article by committee member Tom Wilhelm who lives in Wallis Street.

This issue of VILLAGE VOICE also includes a report on the association's architectural and planning sub-committee's reaction to the new plan, a report on the public meeting Woollahra Council called to discuss it, and a comment from the association's former president, Robin Brampton.

Committee members have now had time to study the Woollahra Council's "Report accompanying preliminary planning proposals and objectives for Woollahra West" which was released on April 5.

The proposals are quite wide-ranging and concern large areas of West Woollahra. However, several rezoning proposals are of particular concern to the association.

The most important is the proposal to rezone three sites along Oxford Street overlooking Centennial Park, between Ocean Street and Queen Street, for the construction of four and six storey blocks of flats.

The Council's proposals, if ever carried out, would turn that area into another Cook Road.

The easternmost site takes in the old Parisian Laundry building, the centre site takes in the "flat iron" building at the corner of Wallis Street and Oxford Street, and the westernmost site is the old "Diamond Horseshoe" nightclub in Oxford Street.

Not only does the rezoning take in these buildings, but it also takes in many of the surrounding private residences and closes Wallis Street.

This aspect of the plan is what so concerns the association and local residents.

Restoration trend

In the easternmost site, for example, some 25 residences are affected by the rezoning. At the western site homes, as well as several businesses, are affected.

Though many of the houses in the area are run down and in need of care, all recent sales have gone to people who are restoring and renovating them for private residences.

This trend is well established and, if left to run its course, will ensure that the area will be dramatically improved in five to ten years time.

The Council's proposals will instantly bring this positive development to a grinding halt.

In fact, the Council's proposals would undoubtedly cause further dereliction and neglect of property in the area for years to come, exactly the reverse of its avowed intention.

Residents in surrounding streets — Oxford, John, Moncur, James and Queen — would find themselves severely disadvantaged by these proposals for many reasons.

The large blocks of flats would intrude upon the privacy of surrounding gardens and yards, would bring large increases in traffic and noise, and would almost certainly decrease property values throughout the area.

Population drop

The proposed closure of Wallis Street, in order to make the two easternmost sites large enough for such large-scale development, combined with the fact that the Department of Main Roads would undoubtedly not give permission for car access to Oxford Street, would force all car access out into the lanes and small quiet streets of West Woollahra, a rather horrifying thought.

The Council's report opens with a consideration of the characteristics of the district and mentions the fact that its population has fallen in recent years as though this were a problem.

Most residents in West Woollahra would probably agree with the proposition that the area does not need large increases in population and yet the Council's plans will, if nothing else, do exactly that.

The Council has also been concerned recently with the large percentage of land in the municipality that is non-ratable.

It is difficult not to take the cynical view that the Council's proposals are merely an easy way to eliminate a few old buildings and small houses and at the same time increase the rate base of the district — a most shortsighted view.

Committee members applaud the Council's suggestion of a "Conservation Area" for West Woollahra, south of Jersey Road.

However, leaving out the area south of John Street for the construction of large blocks of flats is highly inconsistent and out of character.

All of West Woollahra should be included in the proposed Conservation Area and the few problematical sites that contain old buildings developed in a way that is in keeping with the existing character of the district, which is solidly *small scale* residential.

THE WEST WOOLLAHRA ACTION PLAN

From our architectural and planning sub-committee

Two years ago, Woollahra Council's planning officers prepared an interim plan for West Woollahra.

This association commented on it in detail, as it had on earlier proposals for the area.

However some aspects of the current plan differ significantly from previous proposals and are worth noting in some detail.

The Queen Street and West Woollahra Association has always held that the most sympathetic (and simplest) way to deal with West Woollahra is to zone the entire triangle 2G.

This is no radical proposal. The late Walter Bunning suggested it back in 1968, when he reported on the proposals to widen Jersey Road.

In their wisdom however, Woollahra's planning officers have, in our view perversely, chosen to ignore this suggestion and systematically go about a bits-and-pieces zoning system that leads one to believe that they are hell-bent on fragmenting this area.

Either that or they are committed to change for change's sake, a view supported by their irrelevant attempt to rename West Woollahra, Woollahra West (their proposals are called "The Woollahra West Action Plan"!).

The plan for this area has *never* been updated with a view to making it better. Merely to making it different.

One can understand how one planner would want to improve on the work of his predecessor (and four planners have now had a finger in the West Woollahra pie!), but the operative word is *improve* and we fail to see how the present plan is an improvement.

We are specially disturbed by the lack of consistent or convincing argument in favour of the proposed changes.

The volte face on 2G for the area bounded by Queen Street, Moncur Street and Jersey Road and Oxford Street is particularly disturbing.

The proposed mixed 2A and 2B zoning is, given that part of this area along Jersey Road is already zoned 2G, particularly puzzling and seems to serve no useful purpose.

Then there is the vexed question of highrise along Oxford Street, a proposal which this association rejects out of hand.

When the Council's chief planning officer proposes it and publicly suggests that residents might like to sell out for a

bundle, he merely demonstrates his total lack of comprehension of residents' reasons for living in this area.

And when he further suggests that residents move out because of the noise level while simultaneously recommending that the noise level be increased sixfold, it is difficult to take the Council's plan seriously.

It seems that each plan currently emanating from the Woollahra Council has a token bit of highrise to test the local temperature. If the residents resist, as they are clearly planning to do here, then the next plan will propose highrise somewhere else.

And so the "planning process" grinds expensively on, looking for lines of least resident resistance.

Plainly, there is no valid reason for the introduction of highrise in West Woollahra and it should be abandoned forthwith.

It is curious too that the new plan seems obsessed not only with highrise but with those other pet provinces of the contemporary planner, "densities" and "traffic".

The new plan overlooks the fact that whole areas like West Woollahra are restructuring themselves *without any help from the planners*. And the "densities" they are so concerned with merely retard natural restructuring.

The point is not to provide more amenities for fewer people but to retain existing amenities and allow more people to enjoy them.

This association further takes the view that Council should cease meddling with traffic problems and adopt a "laissez-faire" attitude until public and government attitudes crystallise.

It is ironical that Council officers are busy talking road closures and the like and yet one has never heard them, nor indeed the Aldermen, express concern that the new Oxford Street Expressway will restrict access to Centennial Park.

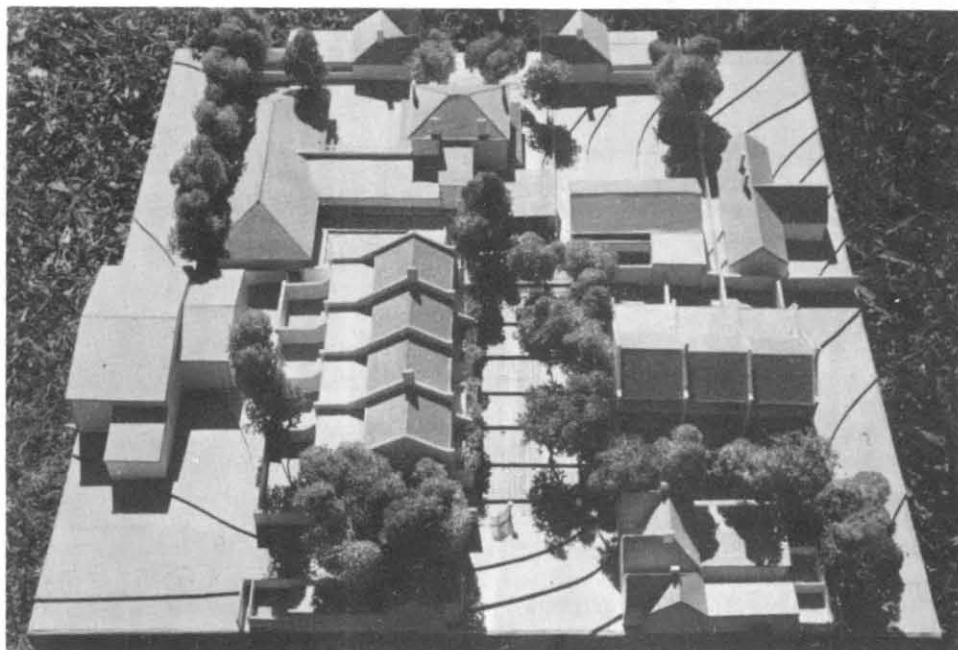
The car, at least in Woollahra, would seem still to reign supreme.

It is this association's view that the Council should support resident action rather than initiate major thrusts to change traffic patterns.

Residents of West Woollahra have made a conscious decision to live in this area.

It behoves Council to respect this choice by preserving the area very much as it is, to encourage upgrading of derelict buildings, to enhance existing amenities, to discourage highrise or traffic-generating business, to beautify the environment and to control the aesthetics of new buildings.

In all of these areas and in the proposals for the future of West Woollahra, the Council would seem to be seriously lagging behind resident opinion.



Helen Keller restoration scheme

This picture shows a model, looking from Woods Avenue, of the way the Helen Keller Hostel site will be redeveloped, with a full restoration of the magnificent Georgian house facing down Waimea Avenue, and the building of seven new town houses.

The scheme was the work of Allen, Jack and Cottier, architects who specialise in restoration, on behalf of Dr. Bill Kelly who bought the site from the Royal Blind Society of N.S.W.

After restoration, Dr. Kelly plans to use the main house as his residence, adding an annex at the rear which will contain a living room, a spacious kitchen and four bathrooms. In a newspaper interview, Dr. Kelly said he would like to transform the ground floor of the house into a museum of early Sydney.

Woollahra Municipal Council has now approved the scheme, though rather disappointingly, in view of the very altruistic and sympathetic way the site has been treated, the Council has asked for an "open space contribution" of \$12,000.

After its battle over many years to have the beautiful Helen Keller building restored, the association's committee has expressed its wholehearted support both of the owner and the architects for the effective way the core site has been preserved.

We are also delighted with the imaginative and sympathetic way in which the rest of the site has been developed with only seven town houses.

PLANNING PARALYSIS

Woollahra Municipal Council's Action Plan for West Woollahra was unveiled at a meeting at Forth Street School on April 5.

The meeting was hardly a triumph. Attendance was dismal and the Council's planning officers came in for a fair amount of flak from those interested enough to attend.

The most contentious element of the plan seemed to be the proposal for multi-storey development in Oxford Street between Queen Street and Ocean Street. The Council's display of photographs of the kind of development they envisage did little to allay residents' fears that whatever replaced the existing buildings would do nothing but destroy the character and seriously affect the amenities of West Woollahra.

Council's attempt to play traffic policemen was also strenuously opposed by Ocean Street residents who foresee their street becoming uninhabitable if Council has its way and multiplies the volume of traffic using it as access to Queen Street.

Faced with an unexpected amount of articulate criticism from the small but involved audience, Council officers, and indeed the Mayor himself, retreated behind semantics, declaring several times that the plan was merely a "proposal" formulated to elicit resident involvement in the planning process.

In which case, might we expect yet another "action plan" in two years' time?

One can only wonder how the City Council has managed to get its act together in South Paddington in roughly one third of the time it has taken Woollahra Council to deal with West Woollahra. And probably at a fraction of the cost.

A CASE FOR LEADERSHIP

by Robin Brampton

After all the careful thought and deliberation which has gone into the formulation of planning proposals for West Woollahra over the years, it is disappointing that one aspect of the latest plan smacks so much of expediency.

The idea of using three commercial building sites fronting onto Oxford Street for multi-story blocks of flats can only be interpreted as a bull-headed solution to a problem which needs much more delicate and imaginative handling.

The problem — admittedly an awkward one for Woollahra Council — is that for a variety of reasons, the three sites concerned can no longer be used, or used profitably, for their original commercial purposes.

In the case of both the Diamond Horse-shoe and Parisian Laundry sites, commercial alternatives proposed by their owners have proved highly controversial with local residents.

But it is still my belief that these two buildings could be imaginatively "recycled" by putting them to some non-residential use which would be neither incompatible with surrounding development nor a threat to the amenities of local residents.

The fact that this is not being done — and we are presented with the appalling alternative of multi-storey flats and road closures — demonstrates some of the defects of the present system of planning control.

We find that apart from setting down general guidelines, a council usually only exercises a negative or passive role in relation to each individual private development.

It tells a developer what he cannot and must not do, but how often does it suggest what he might do or might do better?

Recently I heard Victoria's energetic young Minister for Housing and Planning, Mr. Geoff Hayes, plead for a closer liaison between the planning process and the people affected by it.

He suggested that planning authorities should aim to help people to achieve their wishes, rather than taking a negative attitude to the consideration of applications.

In our own situation, how much more satisfactory it would be if Woollahra Council exercised some genuine constructive municipal leadership by getting together with the owners of the properties concerned and local residents to evolve imaginative schemes for the future of the buildings which did not impinge on the amenities.

If we wanted to be charitable, we might believe this is what the Council is trying to do. But to officially publish flagrantly



A view of Wallis Street, looking up across the intersection of Moncur Street, towards Oxford Street. Under the Council's Action Plan, the Oxford Street end of the street would be completely blocked by flats rising to six storeys. Several local residents have got together to mobilise opposition to the scheme.

controversial proposals which the Council must know will be totally unacceptable to local residents is no way to go about it.

COMMENT FROM OCEAN STREET

A detailed and well presented letter with a number of criticisms of the Action Plan has been sent to Woollahra Council by Mr. N. Prescott, of Trelawney Place in Ocean Street.

Mr. Prescott has also sent us a copy of his letter, for the information of our architectural sub-committee.

He believes that too much of the Action Plan relates to such matters as landscaping, commercial zoning, car parking, open spaces, etc, and that not enough reference is made to the living conditions of residents, and how they might be best maintained into the 1980s.

"As an example, the report tells us there is a car-parking problem in Queen Street commercial area," says Mr. Prescott.

"Two speakers at the Action Plan meeting said there was no significant problem and the feeling that came through at this point of the discussion is that the district should remain pretty much as it is."

Mr. Prescott's letter goes on to state his opposition to proposals to partly close Queen Street at Oxford Street, to close Jersey Road at Ocean Street, and not to reopen Edgecliff Road at Ocean Street.

"It is fatuous to state that access to properties in Edgecliff Road between Ocean Street and Trelawney Street has

been improved with the road closed for the bus tunnel construction," he says.

"Obviously it has; but at the expense of residents, pedestrians and all other road users in Ocean Street."

Mr. Prescott says that although the report makes a number of references to preserving the character of West Woollahra, intensifying traffic flow and noise destroys it.

"We submit the policy in regard to traffic flow should be that all streets and roads in the area which are capable of carrying traffic should assume their share of the total burden," says Mr. Prescott.

"In this respect, we suggest that Ocean Street, Edgecliff Road, Queen Street and Moncur Street in particular are all contributors to serving the major needs of West Woollahra."

YOUR NEW COMMITTEE

At the association's annual meeting in April, Leo Schofield was unanimously elected as the association's president in place of Robin Brampton who did not seek re-election.

The association's new secretary is Mrs. Monica McDonald, previously treasurer. No member stood as treasurer at the annual meeting, and as we have been unable yet to find a willing volunteer, Mrs. McDonald is combining the work with that of secretary.

Two new committee members were elected at the annual meeting, Sandra Cameron and Tom Wilhelm. To both we bid welcome.

WHO'S FOR A CARRIAGE RIDE?

It is hoped to give this year's Queen Street Fair a completely new flavour — with a re-creation of a Victorian street scene in the area between Victoria Avenue and Oxford Street.

Under the plan, the event will be divided into two sections.

The main part of the Fair, in the bustling modern form we have had for the past few years, with just over 200 stalls, will be laid out between Victoria Avenue and Ocean Street.

But from Victoria Avenue to Oxford Street, there will be a second, less crowded section in which the whole theme will be Victorian.

Horsedrawn transport, including probably a horsedrawn omnibus, will ply the street and offer rides to visitors.

Entertainment will include buskers, and hopefully a punch and Judy show for children.

It is also hoped that commercial buildings at this end of the street will be dressed in suitable bunting — perhaps in honour of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee.

Only a small number of stalls will be set up in the Victorian section of the street, and these will go by invitation to people and charities who are prepared to provide something in complete keeping with the Victorian theme.

The goods sold must be Victorian in character and all workers on the stalls must be dressed in Victorian costume.

Charges for these stalls will be purely nominal, to compensate for the trouble and cost the stallholders will be put to in order to make sure their offering is in keeping with the theme.

Such traditional touches as lavender sellers and flower girls will obviously be encouraged.

The scheme will depend on the approval of Woollahra Municipal Council, who are jointly responsible with the association for the administration of the Fair.

The new plan for the Fair has evolved from the feeling among the association's committee that the event needs a revitalising element to overcome the sameness of recent years.

The committee have also been disappointed recently by the lack of imaginative stall presentations.

It is hoped this problem will be overcome in the Victorian section by having a coordinated theme and giving stallholders a cash saving on their stall costs which they can spend on presentation.

If you are interested in having a stall at this year's Fair — either by providing a special Victorian stall with workers in



A folk singer entertains visitors at the Oxford Street end of Queen Street during the 1977 Queen Street Fair. Under the association's plan for the 1978 Fair, the whole of this end of the street would have a Victorian flavour, and such busking activities would be encouraged.

Victorian costume or by making a booking in the usual section of the Fair — you can register your interest now by writing to the Association at P.O. Box 16, Woollahra, N.S.W. 2025.

WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE . . .

The association's area includes five fully licensed hotels, some of which provide band entertainment and restaurant service.

Inevitably, perhaps, people living close to a noisy hotel sometimes feel they are losing the quiet enjoyment of their homes as a result — although the association has never felt the problem was serious enough in our own locality to warrant association action.

However the question arises: What action can residents take in protest?

Although amenity is usually a matter for the local council, in the case of hotels it is far more effective to protest to what is rather archaically known as the Licensing Bench and Licences Reduction Board of New South Wales.

This is the body which controls the granting of liquor licences throughout the State, and it has the full powers of a court in relation to licensing matters.

The secretary, Mr. Jim Kesby, assures *Village Voice* that the Board fully investigates any complaint about noise or nuisance.

The procedure is that the complaint is referred to the Metropolitan Licensing Inspector who obtains a report from the Licensing Police in the area concerned. This is then considered by the Licensing Bench and the complainant informed of the outcome.

It is also possible for a private citizen,

or group of citizens, to object to the renewal of a licence on June 30 each year on the ground that the premises are conducted in such a manner as to be a nuisance.

Although such extreme action has little chance of succeeding, recently the objections of groups of residents prevented three Sydney hotels from renewing their 57A licences which had enabled them to provide liquor with food after normal licensing hours and on Sunday.

The address of the Licensing Bench and Licences Reduction Board is Selborne Chambers, 174 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000.

YOUR WARD ALDERMEN

The whole of the area covered by the Queen Street and West Woollahra Association is in Woollahra Council's Cooper Ward.

We are represented on the Council by three aldermen. They are the Mayor of Woollahra, Alderman Tony Perry, and two members who joined the Council for the first time at last year's elections — Alderman Marcel Piat and Alderman Jock MacCallum.

If you have any genuine complaint or difficulty concerning the Council's administration, we suggest you discuss it with them.

Their home phone numbers are:

ALDERMAN TONY PERRY: 387 2184

ALDERMAN JOCK MACCALLUM:
387 3207

ALDERMAN MARCEL PIAT: 32 5802

THE QUEEN STREET AND WEST WOOLLAHRA ASSOCIATION

*A residents' action association covering
the area bounded by Jersey Road,
Edgecliff Road and Oxford Street,
West Woollahra, N.S.W.*

Address: Box 16, P.O. Woollahra,
N.S.W. 2025.

Subscription: \$3 a year. Life membership
\$25.

President: Leo Schofield

Vice-President: Robin Brampton

Secretary: Monica McDonald

Committee: Sandra Cameron,
Douglas Gordon, Mollie Lenthall,
Pixie Nolan, Grant Roberts, Tom Wilhelm.

Chairman of the Architectural Committee:
Douglas Gordon

Auditor: Michael Gilovitz

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contributions on local topics are invited.
The editor is Robin Brampton (357 1488
day, 32 4475 evening and weekends).*

AN INVITATION TO JOIN US

Every home in the area covered by the
Queen Street and West Woollahra
Association gets a copy of *Village Voice*.

If you're reading this and you're not a
member of the Association, please join us
by filling in the coupon below.

We need your support, both moral and
financial, in our constant fight to preserve
the architectural heritage of our area and
ensure that it always remains a pleasant
place to live.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The word "contribution" has always
had overtones of willingness.

Except for "contributions" to the
Policemen's Ball perhaps, "contributions"
are made voluntarily to causes a citizen
considers worthy.

One "contributes" to a newspaper
because one feels the literary environment
compatible. "Contributions" to charitable
causes are made freely, without coercion.

Local government bodies however are
busily re-shaping the meaning of the word
by requesting "contributions" from people
seeking to develop property.

Now such requests are probably fine
and dandy where the developer stands to
make a cool million or two from a scheme.

But where the "contributions" are
required of individuals embarked, some-
what more altruistically, on the restoration
of historic properties, then such require-
ments amount to little more than a polite
form of municipal blackmail.

The owners of the recently restored
and much admired Queen Street Galleries
had to hold up building work for over a
year while Woollahra Municipal Council
pondered proposals. And, after their
huffing and puffing, they "requested" a
"contribution" towards parking of \$25,000.

So far no provision has been made for
any parking for patrons of the Queen
Street Galleries and one can only assume
that the "contribution" has gone towards
the parking megamonster currently being
erected in Double Bay.

Even more alarming is the fact that
Woollahra Council has asked the new
owner of the Helen Keller Hostel, a man
who is committed to the total restoration

of this important building and sympathetic
development of the surrounding areas, for
an "open space contribution" of \$12,000.

Open space it seems is no longer free
even on one's own domain.

May we soon expect tourist "contrib-
utions" from people visiting West Wool-
lahra, dog "contributions" with a sliding
scale based on the size of pets, and
"contributions" towards other amenities
extracted under duress from residents.

The sinister aspect of this "contribution"
lark is that it genuinely inhibits decent
restoration of old buildings by discouraging
owners from undertaking work that is
costly enough without the added slug
from the municipal money managers.

We have recently seen, in Ocean Street,
the demolition of a fine late 19th century
building in Sandtoft and the only work
that has gone on since it was razed has
been the erection of a FOR SALE sign
on the vacant lot which is now used as a
rubbish dump.

Perhaps destructive developers should
be penalised in the same way as civic-
minded owners seeking to enrich the
community by civilised restoration.

Council could perhaps start by asking
the owners who levelled Sandtoft for an
eyesore "contribution".

QUEEN STREET COMMENTARY

A little bit of the Queen Street commer-
cial magic may soon spread to London.

Barbara Walker, of the House of Edward
Bear, now spends a great deal of time in
England and is considering setting up a
similar shop in the Old Dart.

But she assures us this would not mean
deserting Queen Street. Barbara will have
shops at both ends of the world and
commute between them.

The Association — and *Village Voice* —
have often emphasised the need for a hard-
ware shop in Queen Street.

So welcome to Screws which has set up
in Queens Court, providing not only screws
but all the odds and ends needed by the
home handyman — which we all have to be
these days.

Another newcomer to Queens Court is
Avanti Duo, a fashion boutique which sets
very high standards in presentation.

And more recently a Melbourne manu-
facturer has set up a well-stocked casual
gear shop, Country Road, in what was
formerly Dudley Gower's interior decor
shop.

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THE QUEEN STREET AND WEST WOOLLAHRA ASSOCIATION

ENCLOSED IS MY SUBSCRIPTION OF \$3 FOR ONE YEAR.

IF YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN A MEMBER, PLEASE PUT A TICK HERE

NAME

ADDRESS

POST TO: The Secretary,
Queen Street and West Woollahra Association,
PO Box 16,
WOOLLAHRA, NSW 2025.