

EDGECLIFF PLANS

DPS COMMENTARY

WHO AM I?

I have been a resident of Darling Point for over 40 years. My father was a pioneer in the development of Double Bay, opening up Knox St in the 1960s, while Deputy Mayor. I am presently the vice-President of the Darling Point Society.

THE DARLING POINT SOCIETY

The Darling Point Society was formed to look after the resident's quality of life, that means the conservation and protection of amenities that make life worth living. The DPS sees the Edgecliff scheme (or schemes) as inimical to the preservation these of amenities. The look and feel of the built environment, the ready access to open unspoilt green space, adequate facilities for the elderly and infirm, separation from the noise and pollution of heavy traffic, they are all just as important.

MY POINT OF VIEW

I have the point of view of a long-time resident, not a town planner; however, in 2010 I moved to university studies as a mature-age student, and lately as a research scholar in Architectural History. Part of my research has been into Modernist design and European and American master planning and the New Urbanism.

I don't believe historicism is a crime, neither is ornament. Modernism, where it becomes ideological, is ill-equipped to provide the urban built environment appreciated by residents, without a degree of local authority intervention. The views of the resident should be taken into account. This includes the DPS and the DBRA plus.....

In other words, respect the context, don't let architects or developers build what they feel like building. Impose certain restrictions on modernism.

THE EDGECLIFF SCHEMES

I would like to speak about quality of life issues and the difficult question of architectural style. These have been overlooked I think, in the focus on metrics, zoning and plot-ratio-speak. Of course such matters are centrally important, but I think they have been addressed by Merrill Witt and others.

Their findings are simply expressed: the Woollahra LGA doesn't need a huge uplift in density at Edgecliff to achieve the 2036 new dwelling target of 1,200 units. This suggests medium density for forward planning: no high rise should be necessary.

MASTER PLANNING: AN OPTION FOR EDGECLIFF

As an architectural historian I see a wasted opportunity looming ahead. In studying the work of master planners in Europe I have found a radical way of balancing quality of life and aesthetic issues that has the possibility to produce good outcomes for present and future residents of Woollahra. The key difference is that, under the master plans I have studied, constraints on architectural style have been the key factor in producing a coherent and memorable outcome. The architecture in these schemes has been 'polite', following certain prescribed guidelines to achieve design harmony in each block and each precinct. The guidelines should be formulated by a panel comprised of informed residents and some architects (but please, not all architects).

METRICS AS MEASURE OF SUCCESS?

Discussion to date has been about zoning and density and plot ratios. To me this means the outcomes will be judged by the developer's and planner's metrics, and by the amount of expensive rateable accommodation that can be crammed into Edgecliff and New South Head Rd. To me and to the DPS this is not an acceptable measure of success. One measure of success would be visual harmony and the imaginative use of a limited palette of forms, colours and textures.

'EXCELLENCE' IN ARCHITECTURE ?

'Excellence' is not a quality that comes to mind when I see the bland modernist buildings presented in the ECC graphics and the models. Why can't the residents have architecture which has some aesthetic coherence, and which is pleasing to see and to drive past. How about some evidence of imagination and historical awareness in the concept development?

I am suggesting that modernist schemes be subject to contextual constraints and also to design approval by a panel of informed residents. There is good modern design and poor modern design. Historicism is not a crime neither is ornament. Modernist buildings should not be 'impolite' in the streets they occupy. Why not look to revived Art Deco?

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