

## THE ISSUES

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# Riverside project deserves support

THERE has been no shortage of plans for the redevelopment of Perth's central city riverside over the years. But there has been a shortage of action.

It has been evident for decades that one of the major planning flaws in the development of central Perth was building a road next to its most spectacular natural asset — the Swan River. Riverside Drive is a barrier to the river and ruins what should be a tranquil haven a few minutes' walk from the commercial heart of the city.

The lack of integration between the city and the riverside has contributed to Perth's reputation as a city without a heart, because the central area cannot attract crowds outside business hours.

Premier Richard Court's plan for the Barrack Square area offers an imaginative and practical solution to this problem. It is a more detailed version of the proposal in the Government's overall strategy for the revitalisation of the city, which was released four years ago as the document Perth — a City for People.

It is to be hoped that another four years do not pass before there is substantial progress on putting the plan into action.

Mr Court says he wants the proposed tower for the historic Bells of St

### **The West Australian**

PERTH TUESDAY OCTOBER 20 1998

Martin-in-the-Fields to be finished in time to ring in the new year in 2000. But he should also treat with some urgency the proposal to sink part of Riverside Drive, because this is the key element in integrating the city with the riverfront.

Making the bells part of the redevelopment is a good idea and will attract many people to central Perth. But Mr Court should think again about the size of the proposed belltower — a structure as high as the Statue of

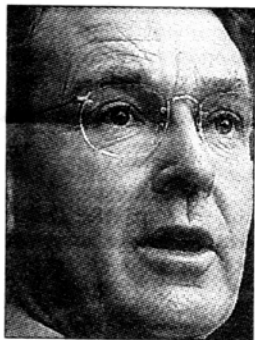
Liberty seems grandiose for the Perth riverfront and would be out of scale with the city.

Critics of the plan are short-sighted. Certainly, there are pressing social needs that demand attention and funding by the Government. But the Government also has obligations to help to provide an attractive city environment in the capital.

Its proposals will provide jobs, as will the commercial opportunities they generate. And a development that includes one of the most famous sets of bells in the world is bound to attract tourists.

The plan deserves support.

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Mr Court

## A mental aberration, Premier?

IT WAS bad timing for the Premier to announce the spending of millions of dollars on a bell tower during Mental Health Week.

The money could be better spent on accommodation, hostels and drop-in centres for the de-institutionalised mentally ill.

My schizophrenic, suicidal, depressed son has to pay half of his pension for a small, shabby flat as well as pay instalments on a loan from Homeswest for the \$340 bond, leaving him with little for the rest of the fortnight.

We, his elderly parents, usually have to provide food and extra money out of our pensions. We watch his depression deepen. Cheap accommodation would go a long way to relieving his depression and would help to make his life a little worthwhile.

There are hundreds like him and their families are left to flounder and work out how to cope through trial and error. De-institutionalisation has produced a group of homeless, mentally ill people who move in and out of sub-standard, rundown accommodation.

I'd like to see us go into the new millennium with a fair deal for these people, not a white-elephant bell tower.

NAME and ADDRESS supplied.

## Bell project is a clanger

YOUR editorial (Riverside project deserves support, 20/10) could not be further from the truth. Such a grandiose project at this time of world economic turmoil could be expected only from somebody living in an ivory tower away from reality.

It appears that when one is using other people's money, in this case the WA taxpayers' loot, one can spend it willy nilly on any scatter-brain idea that sounds cool and is the in-thing.

The community is bleeding from the economic restraints that have strangled the world's economies, especially in Asia, and the world hovers on economic collapse, yet we continue to build multi-million dollar structures as if we live in a utopia and away from economic rationalism.

If our Government is not acting responsibly in spending taxpayers' funds on the real needs in our society, then is it any wonder the people lose trust in the people they vote into office and who turn the affairs of state into a teddy bears' picnic?

P. MULLINS, North Perth.

## A tower of vision

THE tower proposed for Barrack Street is a wonderful example of what can happen when a Premier has a real sense of vision and history.

Concerns voiced in recent letters to these pages are but a reflection of natural worries about the future. Such reactions should not prevent the erection of the tower. It is the role of our leaders to provide civic buildings of significance which will form a part of the national and international architectural heritage.

The controversy over the Sydney Opera House did not overshadow the significance of this building to the world. The bell tower will provide a wonderful resource to the Education Department for the integration of curriculum units in physics, in the chemistry of the ancient bronze bells and in the mathematics of the changes.

Bellringing at the tower will provide the opportunity for the public to see and hear an ancient art that evokes the full spectrum of human emotions associated with celebrations of our national days and public mourning. After 10 years of waiting I am delighted with the Premier's decision and look forward to ringing the bells.

IAN D. MacLEOD, bellringer,  
St George's Cathedral, Perth.

## It's too extravagant

I AGREE that the river foreshore could do with some improvements, but there is no need to house the bells of St Martin-in-the-Fields in the outrageously extravagant belltower.

Our Government has its funding priorities askew once again. Surely some of the funding for this project could be used instead to extend the passenger railway system to Rockingham or to help with the resuscitation of our ailing health system?

RAYMOND PALERMO, Alfred Cove.



CONGRATULATIONS to the State Government for an imaginative and workable plan for the revitalisation of the river foreshore at Barrack Street. Next to the desecration of St George's Terrace, the alienation of the city from the river was the biggest planning blunder in Perth's history.

Let us proceed with the development without delay, including sinking part of Riverside Drive. Perth will then start to enjoy some of the advantages of waterfront cities such as Sydney and Hobart.

M. S. WACKETT, Ardross.

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WILL they ring the bells each time a long-suffering patient dies waiting for admission to our crowded hospitals?

FREDA HATTON, Yanchep.

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THERE is an old saying that doctors can bury their mistakes but architects can only grow ivy over theirs. It will take a very big amount of ivy to cover that bell tower.

MALCOLM TYRER, Mt Lawley.

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THERE was never a good economic time to build the Eiffel Tower, St Paul's Cathedral or Notre Dame. There was only a right time.

In this city we have no bells to keep us company. Anyone who has lived in a city with bells knows we are strangely silent in Perth. Let us rejoice in these wonderful bells from St Martin-in-the-Fields and let them ring out across the river to welcome the new millennium.

JUNE TURNER, Shenton Park.

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THE Premier admits that WA has a huge heroin problem. His solution is to build the world's biggest hypodermic needle on the Barrack Street foreshore and to fill it with bells so we can ring in 2000 and really celebrate our status as drug city.

W. M. CASTLEDEN, Margaret River.

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WASN'T it ironic that while West Australians were asked to dig deep for Telethon for the benefit of sick children, our Premier announced an \$88 million facelift for Riverside Drive and a belltower? With many government institutions sadly lacking funds, surely our State taxes could be spent more wisely?

J. W. SPENCE, Merredin.

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SO, Richard Court has a bell with his name on it (report, 21/10). It's a pity the inscription does not mention the people of WA who make all these things possible.

TIM GRAHAM-TAYLOR, Nedlands.

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IF, ONCE the new bell is installed, there is the need to grind off any metal to tune it, there will be no prizes for guessing which bit should come off first.

BRUCE J. CRANE, Willetton.

## THE ISSUES

# Court fiddles in belltower farce

THERE is probably a place in the farce being played out over Perth's belltower for Robert P. McCulloch.

Mr McCulloch was the man who had the loopy idea of buying London Bridge and taking it to the Arizona desert to span a man-made channel. The project cost more than \$10 million in the late 1960s. The bridge and its ersatz British surroundings became an attraction for tourists with a taste for the bizarre.

Premier Richard Court's belltower proposal cannot hope to compete with the McCulloch project on the magnitude of its absurdity. But the proposed belltower shares with the Arizona eccentricity a sense of crazy incongruity.

Unlike Lake Havasu City — which Mr McCulloch founded and made notorious with the transplanted bridge — Perth does not want to be renowned for a tasteless architectural curiosity.

Mr Court's proposal — as it now stands — is too big for the site and absolutely unconnected to WA's history, lifestyle or aspirations. The proposed steel-and-glass extravagance would be representative of nothing that is recognisably West Australian.

And yet the so-called belltower community support group is already talking of making it an international

### **The West Australian**

PERTH TUESDAY JANUARY 12 1999

symbol of Perth. How Perth could ever become famous for some second-hand bells is beyond comprehension.

What the booster group lacks in sensitivity to the ethos and history of Perth, it more than makes up for in hyperbole and impertinence.

Its comparison of the proposed belltower with the Eiffel Tower, the Sydney Opera House and the Golden Gate Bridge (it unfortunately omitted London Bridge) suggests that its members have misplaced expectations of grandeur which is totally unsuited to Perth's riverside.

And to dub as the "people's belltower" a project that Perth people simply do not want is an affront to West Australians. A Westpoll has found that 77 per cent of respondents — 80 per cent in Perth — oppose the project and only 16 per cent support it.

An even bigger insult to West Australians is the group's arrogant assurance that it will "enlighten" the wider community on the belltower proposal. Will this campaign of so-called enlightenment also be directed at Deputy Premier Hendy

Cowan and deputy Liberal leader Colin Barnett, who have criticised the belltower design?

There is nothing wrong with the idea of housing the bells of St Martin-in-the-Fields in the colonial heritage area of Barrack Square. The bells — a bicentennial gift from the cities of Westminster and London — are associated with the British part of our heritage.

But a belltower of its present design — as high as the Statue of Liberty — would be grotesque in that site. It would be completely out of tune with its surroundings.

Whatever some architects and the so-called community group might say in support of the project, the people have shown their usual common sense in realising this.

It may well be the case that Perth needs a distinctive architectural feature by which it could be recognised instantly internationally. This is not it.

Mr Court should step away from this hobby horse with as much grace as he can muster. He should accept that a new design is needed — one that is acceptable to the people and in harmony with the area.

Mr Court escaped Global Dance. Global Bells ring a warning.

## THE ISSUES



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# Ask not whom the bells extol

**C**ONSIDER this: what postcard image would you send overseas if you wanted to convey the idea that Perth was an interesting and entertaining city to visit?

Don't even think of black swans on the river that was named after them — they are distinctive Perth emblems but they're no tourist magnet. And forget about London Court — it is a derivative piece of kitsch which draws attention only because of its incongruity.

Naked bottoms at Rottneest are not really distinguishable from naked bottoms in the south of France — or anywhere else in the world.

The truth, let's face it, is that Perth lacks a distinctive feature whose image would be associated with the city instantly around the world.

This thought came to me when I revisited some of the cities of Europe and looked at parts of the Middle East recently. Look at the evidence: a picture of Trafalgar Square or Big Ben says London; a spectacular Parliament House reflected in the Danube means Budapest; St Stephan's Church and a giant ferris wheel help to give Vienna its identity; there is only one true Western ("Wailing") Wall and it is in Jerusalem; the Palace of the Popes signifies Avignon; everyone knows what the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe stand for, and so on ...

What Perth needs is some sort of architectural eccentricity that cannot go unnoticed. And that is precisely what it is getting in Premier Richard Court's proposed belltower on the riverside.

Now Mr Court's belltower will be nothing like the one designed by Giotto as a work of architectural art near the Duomo in Florence — probably the most famous

**□ ZOLTAN KOVACS argues that the controversial belltower plan is a benefit to the city of Perth and to all West Australians.**

building of its type in the world. But in a world where a skew-whiff tower can bring fame and fortune to Pisa, Mr Court's project will draw attention.

Don't forget that it is to house what have been described as constituting the biggest musical instrument in the world, the historic bells of St Martin-in-the-Fields. This might not be a big deal for many West Australians but it is bound to excite the interest of music lovers everywhere.

At the very least it will be an international curiosity; at best a drawcard for musical conventions and festivals.

Here is an admission: the views presented here are those of a recent convert to the belltower idea. It took a few second thoughts and a lot of travel to dissolve my initial opposition.

The key question is whether Perth will be better off with this distinctive building with its huge green copper sails (enclosing the bells) and glass spire. The most likely answer is yes, because it will attract people to the riverside and bolster the tourism industry.

The most potent argument against the project is that the \$5.5 million that is to be spent on it could be better used in health or education, where there are urgent needs. The amount seems a lot but dwindles when put in the context of an annual State Budget of \$7 billion.

Our health and education systems have their deficiencies but \$5.5 million would have little effect if it was spread across

them. (If Mr Court was able to cut spending by and on politicians and senior public servants by a similar amount, this argument would lose its sting.)

Governments' responsibilities go beyond the provision of health, education, roads and other services. They have responsibilities for culture, heritage, the city environment and so on. If the basic premise of this anti-belltower argument was to be accepted, it would logically follow that governments should stop allocating even bigger amounts of money to what might be termed inessentials to life — such as art galleries, museums and so on.

They are elected to make decisions about how to allocate public funds among a wide range of demands. If they don't achieve the right funding balances, they get thrown out.

**M**R COURT probably knew when he decided to go with the belltower that he would be seen from the future either as a visionary who got Perth a splendid tourist attraction or a vainglorious bungler who afflicted Perth with a monumental white elephant.

He might have been encouraged by the memory of how the furious criticism of the Sydney opera house, when it was just an architect's idea, dissipated as it became a reality and the building became one of the most recognisable landmarks in the world.

He has been criticised for indulging in an exercise of self-aggrandisement, but the point is irrelevant. The only real question at issue is whether this belltower will be good for Perth.

If it is and some credit reflects on Mr Court, so what?

At least Perth will have the image of something unique, man-made and interesting to put on its postcards.



# Crowds sing bells' praise



**Up on high:** Six-year-old Charlotte Pugh, of Belhus, admires the view over Perth Water from the belltower. PICTURE: ROD TAYLOR

## Compliments aplenty for controversial \$5 million belltower

■ **By Jolly Read**

**HUNDREDS** of people who queued from early yesterday for the first public tours of the belltower gave it a ringing endorsement.

Comments that it was impressive and a tourist asset were the overwhelming responses of groups of about 90 people as they finished their 20-minute tours.

Many had arrived early to catch the first tour at 7am. Alan and Bet Kraemer, of North Perth, woke at 5.30am to beat the crowds. "We love the building and it's going to be a wonderful asset for Perth," Mrs Kraemer said.

Applecross residents Michael and Jill Robertson also got up early to visit the tower. "Our kids, Austin and Lili, woke us at 5am, so we thought we would make the most of the day and come and have a look," Mr Robertson said.

Kip Grieve, of City Beach, was one of the first in. By the time he had reached the bells on the fourth floor he had made up his mind. "It's good stuff despite what the sceptics say," he said.

Daglish resident Shirley Loney thought the tower should have been built on a different spot. "It's a pleasing structure but it's a pity that it is plum in the middle of the Barrack Street view to the river," she said.

Jack and Ellen Samson, of St James, said opponents of the tower should stay away. Daughter Donna said the family had been supporters of the project from the start. The same sentiments were shared by Kathleen and Ernie Whiteman, of Kwinana, who said they were

impressed with the outcome. "We need something like this, don't we?" Mrs Whiteman said. "Especially as we are just a quiet little backwater."

For Kayla Evans the tour was a special way to celebrate her 13th birthday. Her grandmother, Ainslie Evans, brought Kayla from Katanning to see the tower and find her name among the tiles signed by schoolchildren.

And how did Kayla feel? "It's good but I liked going shopping for my presents better," she said.

But Barbara Turner of Gidgegannup was not impressed. "I think it's really boring," she said. "I thought it would have a lot of galleries of WA art and things but it's really just a pile of stairs."

For the next four months entry to the belltower will be free. Admission is between 8am and 7pm.

After April, entry will be \$5.50 for adults and \$2.50 concession. The bells will ring once a day at noon or 6pm.

### What they said



**"It's good but I liked going shopping for my presents better."**

— Kayla Evans with grandmother Ainslie



**"I don't think opponents should visit it to say boo. They should stay away."**

— Jack and Donna Samson



**"I think it's really special."**

— Judith Winslade



**"I think it's really boring . . . a pile of stairs."**

— Barbara Turner

