

No Dowel 139

CARLTON CENTRE (PROPRIETARY) LIMITED.

SUMMARY OF CASE TO BE PRESENTED TO
THE TRAFFIC AND WORKS COMMITTEE ON
17TH SEPTEMBER. 1964.

CARLTON CENTRE (PROPRIETARY) LIMITED

MEMORANDUM FOR THE TRAFFIC AND WORKS COMMITTEE, JOHANNESBURG CITY COUNCIL, ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPOSED CARLTON CENTRE AS A FOUR-BLOCK TRAFFIC-FREE, PEDESTRIAN PRECINCT:

This memorandum is submitted by Anglo American Corporation of South Africa, Limited, and South African Breweries, Limited, the owners of the four city blocks bounded by Commissioner, Von Weilligh, Main and Kruis Streets, in support of an application for the closing of portions of Fox and Smal Streets where they intersect these four blocks.

The memorandum sets out the following:-

- (1) The promoters' objects in securing such a development.
- (2) The architects' objects and civic obligations in designing the development.
- (3) *The civic and urban advantages that flow from such a development.*

Annexure I, prepared by Mr E.W.N. Mallows, head of the Town and Regional Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand, sets out the urban objects of the proposed road closing.

1. PROMOTERS' OBJECTS:

- (a) The four city blocks were purchased with the object of erecting a multi-purpose complex of buildings in spacious surroundings including shops, offices and residential apartments and having as its focus a new luxury hotel of international standards. The four city blocks were acquired at considerable cost after lengthy and complicated negotiations. The prime object of assembling these properties was to create, through the closure of portions of the roads in question, an harmonious and integrated complex of buildings in a traffic-free pedestrian precinct, incorporating pedestrian malls and open piazzas, with arcades, trees, pools, fountains and sculpture, thus establishing a new concept for central Johannesburg.
- (b) The conventional type of building development in Johannesburg consists of saturating the ground surface of the site with buildings, constructed up to the building line and converging on congested pavements and creating canyons on the streets, with dingy and dirty internal courts behind the buildings. These standards are aesthetically and functionally undesirable. In seeking to provide Johannesburg with an international class

luxury hotel and convention or conference centre, the promoters realise that the superior architectural design of buildings is not enough in itself, and that the standards now current overseas for such hotels require a generous and attractive setting back from conventional building lines, with the addition, where possible, of trees, fountains, or sculptures in the surrounding open spaces.

- (c) In addition, it is desirable that residents of the hotel should have at hand as many amenities and facilities as possible, including convention and conference facilities, department stores and a comprehensive range of specialist retail shops, parking facilities, restaurants, night club and other entertainments, etc.
- (d) In order to achieve a balanced socio-economic basis for the investment, it is essential, in our opinion, that the hotel and conference centre should form part of a multi-purpose development where all the buildings and the functions they perform are mutually inter-dependent. We have deliberately set out to design these buildings in such a way as to negate the image of the concrete jungle that is so often associated with Johannesburg.
- (e) In a multi-million rand venture of this kind, it is essential that we should be satisfied that the project will have a sufficient dynamic, both in terms of economics and aesthetics to justify the magnitude of the investment. Our assessment of the project leads us to believe that our objectives will not be achieved unless the roads intersecting the four blocks can be closed. If these portions of the roads are closed, we are willing to provide for increased width to the streets surrounding the total site area, to the extent already indicated by the City Council's officials.

2. ARCHITECTS' OBJECTS AND CIVIC OBLIGATIONS:

(a) Freedom of Planning

If a complex of buildings of architectural significance is to be created, it is important that the planners should have as much freedom of planning as possible. This freedom would clearly be inhibited if the roads were not closed.

The objects of the promoters will only be achieved if the site is not over-crowded with buildings and, after a survey of the architectural possibilities made by our American

architectural advisers, it is apparent that the number of buildings on the entire site should probably be limited to three, in order to create satisfactory areas of open space for trees, fountains, pools and sculpture.

(b) Shopping

It is economically vital to the scheme that a sufficient shopping area be created. Architectural studies indicate that this can only be achieved by providing a substantial area of shops on the lower ground floor level, below the level of the piazza.

It has been conventional in Johannesburg to provide shops up to the perimeter of the street blocks. Development of this kind would not command sufficiently high rentals to make the project economically viable, having regard to the relatively depressed nature of the area surrounding the site, which is not yet a part of the retail core area of Johannesburg. In order to make the scheme economically viable, a new concept of shopping centre layout will be required. It is intended to develop shopping promenades at the lower ground floor level, immediately below the piazza level, with access to the surrounding streets and by means of large, open areas punched through the piazza.

(c) Parking

Sufficient parking facilities have to be provided not only for the parking requirements that will be generated by the project itself, but also by those citizens using the shopping, hotel and ancillary facilities. To meet this need, it is proposed to provide at least four basement parking levels, which if developed over the entire area of the four blocks including the intersecting streets, could accommodate 2,000 cars. This represents one car space per 600 sq. ft., of lettable space, instead of one per 1,100 to 3,000 sq. ft., or approximately double the rate formerly provided in Johannesburg.

To ensure easy ingress and egress from these parking basements, discussions have been held with the Chief Traffic Officer, as a result of which, it has become apparent that it would be essential to plan all movement in or out of the parking basements through robots at the existing street intersections.

Ramps of considerable length will be required in order to cater not only for the

difference in levels that would occur between the first parking garage level and the existing streets, but also to create "reservoir" space for cars awaiting parking.

(d) Possible lowering instead of closing of Fox and Smal Streets

The difference in levels makes it almost impossible to lower Fox and Smal Streets by taking them through below the piazza level. Moreover, this would completely frustrate the creation of a piazza which is level with Commissioner Street and of providing a shopping promenade level immediately below. In addition, it would render extremely difficult the effective staffing and operation of the parking garage and necessitate the construction of double the number of ramps to the lower parking levels, thus reducing the amount of parking which could be provided from 2,000 to 1,500 cars.

3. CIVIC AND URBAN ADVANTAGES FLOWING FROM THE CLOSING OF THE STREETS:

(a) Change in the Character of the City

The consolidation of four city blocks, together with the intersecting roads, into one site developed as a pedestrian precinct with a limited number of buildings, is likely to have a dramatic impact on the central city scene. It should provide a public amenity and a sense of space hitherto lacking in the city and it is hoped that other property developers might be encouraged to join in contributing towards the general uplift of the central business area.

(b) Increase in Value of Rateable Property

The portions of the roads closed would become rateable property. It is suggested that the architectural impact of the proposed building complex, and the business generated by the hotel, offices and shops in the complex will, during the course of time, result in improvements in the value of rateable property in the surrounding area. This should have a beneficial effect on the city's income from rates.

(c) Sun, Light and Air

Substantially improved light, air and sun will be available to the surrounding buildings and streets than would be the case if the four blocks were developed in the conventional piece-meal manner.

(d) Improvement in Traffic Flow

The reduction in the number of street intersections and the increase in the length of streets between intersections will improve traffic flow and reduce congestion substantially. City Council officials have advised the town planning consultants retained by the promoters that Fox and Smal Streets do not form part of the proposed system of one-way streets for the central business district of Johannesburg and all the indications are, therefore, that it would be beneficial to traffic circulation, and not detrimental, to close these roads where they intersect the four blocks.

(e) Increased City Parking

The provision of substantially increased parking facilities for office buildings, shops and related land uses on the south-east of the central business district, where such facilities are at present completely absent, will assist in balancing the development of the central area. It should materially relieve the present congestion caused by traffic cruising the streets in search of parking and reduce the strains imposed on the present street parking facilities.

ANNEXURE I.

MEMORANDUM ON THE PLAN OF CENTRAL JOHANNESBURG BY
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The problems of the central area of Johannesburg are the problems of a plan* being used for a purpose for which it was never designed. It is a case of the Metropolis of a sub-Continent having to grow up in the strait-jacket of a mining camp. Into the framework of this mining camp has been poured not only the activities of a great financial, commercial and business centre but also the traffic that today has to go with it. The result is that the plan of the central area is today completely unworkable, it is not only the caricature of a proper town plan but in fact a disaster and no one in their right senses would ever defend it.

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* Historical evolution of central area plan, Johannesburg.

The plan of central Johannesburg i.e. the original plan on the piece of Government Ground (it was never a farm) called Randjeslaagte - was the plan of a diggers' village or mining camp. Under the old Gold Law of 1885 any digger, on any public diggings was entitled to rent a piece of ground (his "standplaas") not more than 50 Cape feet by 50 Cape feet on an area where there was no gold or precious stone and pay rent for it to the owner of the ground - in most cases the local farmer on whose farm the diggings had been proclaimed.

In the case of Johannesburg the place chosen by the Government (i.e. Randjeslaagte) was their own property so they laid out a miners' camp in the usual way here and the "standplaas" licences were paid to the Government. So temporary did the Government consider the whole operation that these licences as originally proposed were only for a five years' tenancy; as a result of protests this was extended before the sale of licences to 99 years: but in any case freehold was never for a moment considered. In this way originated the small 50' x 50' "stands" and to increase the rents the maximum number of corner stands were called for resulting in the very small blocks either 200' x 200' or 250' x 200'.

What has to be done is clearly to increase the size of the blocks - to do what the Transvaal Government of the day would undoubtedly have done if for a moment they had considered the founding of a town was required and not a mining camp - namely the establishment of much larger street blocks. The plans of the older towns all prove this : Potchefstroom with blocks 1200' x 600'; Rustenburg with blocks 600' x 300'; Pretoria with blocks 720' x 440'; all these and many others - Bethal, Nylstroom Carolina etc., - show the standard pattern. It is time the plan of Johannesburg was adjusted to get into line with this older Transvaal tradition of town planning which designed for an older and more gracious age is far better for modern large-scale development and modern traffic. One has only to go to Pretoria to see the enormous difference there will always be in visual dignity and urban character in a town based on a proper plan and the ugly appearance of the concrete canyons arising out of a mining camp. It is common cause among visitors and citizens alike that Johannesburg is not only one of the ugliest cities in the world but also one of the most unpleasant and inefficient to work in.

The present proposal is, for the reasons already stated, the first step - but only the first step - towards a solution. It is in fact a pilot study to show in detail how the mining camp can in time be transformed into a proper town. Some space to give dignity to buildings: some safe and quieter places for citizens to walk in and do their shopping: some sites where offices can be withdrawn away from the noise of the streets: and above all some reduction in the number of street intersections to permit both the free flow of traffic

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in the town as a whole and some ease of access to multi-basement car parks to get the traffic off the streets. None of these benefits can possibly occur unless the street blocks are closed and blocks at least 400' x 400' - and probably much bigger - are formed. For this reason from the strictly town planning point of view the importance of the present proposals cannot be over-estimated: for on this type of proposal the future of Johannesburg will depend.

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JOHANNESBURG.
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