

# Shadows cast on development

By Marc Checkley

Inner city residents in Auckland's Emily Place have been thrown a lifeline after the council stalled plans to build a commercial property on their door-step.

But questions still remain about the site's future.

Property investment company City Estates wants to build an apartment hotel on a vacant site straddling Anzac Ave and Emily Place.

Council have asked the developer to revise the design for the 16-storey complex, based on the opulent Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai, as it did not suit the existing character of Emily Place.

"Council has asked the applicant to produce a design more complementary to the neighbouring properties," says a council spokesperson.

"Consent will not proceed until further information has been received from the applicant."

In June last year, the council proposed revisions to the district plan, aiming to curb the spate of substandard and poorly designed apartments that have made an eyesore of the central business district over the past decade.

The plan specifies new minimum requirements for developments, such as floor space, boundaries and use of environmental design principles to make areas more attractive.

It also seeks to protect the rights and outlook of the city's existing residents.

The council's stymie of the Anzac Ave development is a relief for Frances and Richard Nelson.

The couple own a three-bedroom apartment in the adjacent Four Seasons Plaza, originally the Paykel Building.

The Nelsons moved into the 80-year-old building two years ago when the newly renovated apartments came up for tender.

In January they heard of City Estates' plans to develop the site into a hotel, linked with international hotel chain Accor.

Nelson says the 16-storey design would see her lose the use of three of her four windows.

Over the past eight months the couple have tried unsuccessfully to meet with the council and Mayor Dick Hubbard to voice

their concerns.

She is relieved to know the project is on hold but is still concerned about the future plans for the site.

"This is good news but it's by no means over yet. The developers are still permitted to build there."

Sanjay Pratap, managing 1-5 Anzac Ave on behalf of City Estates, says the company has every right to develop the Emily Place site.

"They talk about their property rights, what about our property rights? Under the current district plan we're entitled to build there."

"There's a lot of bullshit going on. It's economic sabotage. If the residents have \$6.5 million, we'll sell it to them."

Pratap says the proposed revisions to the district plan have made it unviable for developers to build in Auckland City.

"If we had a choice we wouldn't build in Auckland," he says. "It's too difficult."

"The existing residents should have done their homework. The site was earmarked for development before they moved in."

Pratap says realtors are the ones the residents should be pointing the finger at.

Paul Archer, northern regional manager of Accor Hotels New Zealand, which manages a number of City Estates' properties, says developers are getting mixed messages from the council.

"Apartment style hotels are what the market is demanding. If the development has been given prior approval then it's a council issue."

Archer says it's unfortunate the residents' outlook from their apartments could be affected.

"A developer has a moral obligation to other residents but it's entirely in their hands."

Pratap says many development issues regarding light and outlook stem from Auckland's geography.

"The contours of the city dictate how and where we build. Some win, some lose."

"The CBD is the commercial hub of Auckland. If the project were to go through it would create jobs, create revenue. It's forward thinking."

Nelson says people will be wary of moving into the city if



PHOTO: MARC CHECKLEY

STALLED: An Emily Place hotel development will have to wait as angry residents protest.

tussles between residents and developers remain.

She says the rights of residents living in the city still fall short of those living in suburbia.

"This doesn't happen in the suburbs. The smallest thing has to be notified."

"I'm disappointed at the council's lack of consultation. City residents don't have a voice."

"We do like living here, it's a lovely building. We're just worried it will become untenable."

Pratap says City Estates wants to do its best by the Emily Place residents and adds the design is still being worked on.

"The final design will have mitigation incorporated even

though under current rules we don't have to mitigate the light and air space."

He says no one from the Four Seasons or the neighbouring Britomart building have approached City Estates personally to discuss the project or seen the proposed design plans.

"We want to do what's best for Auckland. It would make me happy if the residents just bought the property."

"We don't need to build in Auckland City, it causes too many headaches."

Pratap says if the revised district plan comes into force Auckland will not be ready for the demands of the World Cup in

2011.

Further revisions to the district plan require new developments to secure outlooks over either parks or roads or within the application site.

"However, existing developments or buildings are required to have legally secured their own outlook," says a council spokesperson.

She says residents in Emily Place have not done this.

The Council is yet to decide if changes to the Anzac Ave/Emily Place development will proceed on a notified or non-notified basis.

A hearing for the new district plan will be held later this year.

## Overcoming the blues by helping those in need

By Jacqueline Smith

If New Zealanders don't know how lucky they are then why do they have one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the world?

Twenty-year-old Rebecca Low blames young people's self-obsession and believes she can make a difference with her new campaign called "There's more to life".

The ex-Orewa College student, who now lives in Kingsland, knew three people who committed suicide in the space of a month. She decided something had to be done to give people more to live for.

She has developed a website offering avenues to voluntary work within New Zealand and in Third World countries.

Youthline chief executive Steve Bell supports Low's new initiative. He says involvement in the community is fundamental for young people and it has been proven to help those suffering from depression.

"Young people who are involved are less likely to feel worthless," he says.

For the past three years Low has travelled back and forth from the orphanages, brothels and slums of Thailand and India. Now she has stopped to study in Auckland, she says she realises that New Zealanders are really good at closing their eyes to

issues.

"Every day in the Third World people struggle through their day, but the same is actually happening here too. It's just a different kind of struggle," she says.

Over the years, Low has worked with orphans, prostitutes, the homeless, the elderly and people with disabilities.

"I've come to the point to believing that people need more to fulfil their lives and not have everything so sugar-coated," she says.

She hopes to "make it cool" to want to volunteer, and is designing clothing, badges and bumper stickers advertising "There's more to life".

Bell says it is important youth

are the ones helping youth because they bring their own personal leadership skills and also a perspective unique to themselves and unique to young people.

He says the youth-orientated personality of the Youthline service has been proven to facilitate engagement.

"We should aim for young people to become central partners in the community," he says.

Low has high hopes young people will learn to reach beyond themselves and help others, at the same time enriching their own lives.

"I hope that when people see what one person is doing it will motivate them to do the same," she says.

Because of her age, she gets

mixed reactions from people when they find out what she wants to do.

"People used to think, 'This is just some crazed teenager', but now they take more interest when they see what I've done and realise I'm really serious."

She says her aim is to get as many people involved as possible. Ultimately she would like to change the world, or at least how people view it.

"They say it only takes one person to change a nation, but if there were a million of these 'one persons' think of what we could achieve."

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