

'Insects' would be wasteful-retailers

by MARG STORK

NOBODY appears upset over last week's decision by Dandenong Council to scrap the proposed \$50,000 Palm Plaza insects project.

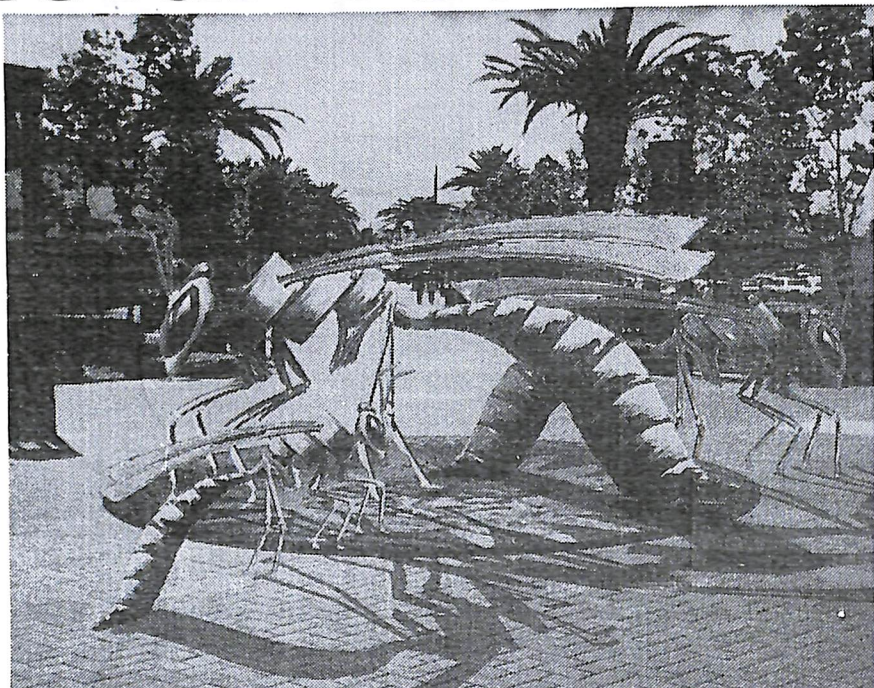
The general consensus among business and retail people to whom 'The Journal' spoke was that the idea was impractical and that the money should be spent in other ways in a bid to attract people back to the city.

As reported in last Thursday's 'Journal', the council has deferred until its budget discussions a plan to erect five big vandal-proof insect sculptures in the plaza and it appears almost certain the project will not proceed.

The president of Dandenong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Jamie Sturgess, said his concern had been over the possible spending of \$50,000 on such a project "at this time". He said, however, it was pleasing the council was at least looking at new projects and seeking to encourage people to shop in Dandenong.

Former chamber president Mr Graeme Mullens, the co-proprietor of Dandenong Central Florist in Palm Plaza, said: "A better idea of something to encourage people to shop in the central business district would be to offer more shopper comforts such as seating, covered areas and increased lighting and security, especially with the free Friday night parking."

"Perhaps the council could look at some sort of community project such as a bandstand or a covered podium where recitals and concerts could be held in



HOW Palm Plaza might look if the insects sculpture project goes ahead.

the plaza, other than static displays."

Mr Laurie Modica, of Modica Travel Service, who has been in business in Dandenong for 23 years and was among the first tenants of the Dandenong Hub Shopping Centre, said he had travelled the world and described malls in other cities as "beautiful... they are so well lit you could take a picture at any time in them without using a flashlight".

He said: "But after 5.30pm in Palm Plaza there is not a soul. We are afraid to open any more. Increased security and lighting is a must. I've lived in Dandenong for 40 years and McCrae Street was never so dark and desolate as it is now. Lighting is the key and the council should get rid of that monstrosity (sale ring hall) in the middle of the plaza. Spend

the \$50,000 on lighting and security."

Mrs Helen Mills, the manager of Bed Bath 'n' Table in Palm Plaza, said she was continuously dealing with the public and "know how they feel". Mrs Mills said: "The money should be spent on improved lighting. There are no lights and it's scary here."

"And if they want people to come to shop in Dandenong, the council should provide under-cover comfort and more free parking. People have to dodge gales and rain and put up with heat in summer. No wonder they shop at district shopping centres where it's cool in summer and warm in winter. They want convenience and that is one way to attract shoppers back."

Mr Stan Mavroudis, who has operated Stan's Mens-

wear in Palm Plaza for 14 years, said he was happy that the council acknowledged the problems and was prepared to provide money to promote the shopping centre. He said: "However, it would be better spent on providing an atmosphere which welcomes people to shop, such as extensive lighting and under-cover shopping in the plaza, providing 24-hour security, and entertainment areas and, most of all, creating a pleasant, bright, open shopping mall by getting rid of that white elephant in the middle of the plaza."

"Let's get with the times and modernise and resurrect Dandenong, which for too many years has been stagnating while others are surging ahead. We need retail doors to re-open and not to close, so let's get it right."

Ratepayers 'can't afford it'

DANDENONG ratepayers can ill-afford to spend \$50,000 on installing five large insects in Palm Plaza as a promotion for the city, according to Councillor Frank Holohan.

He made the comment after successfully urging the city council ('The Journal' last Thursday) to reverse a previous decision to instal the insects and to further discuss the project when framing its 1993-4 budget next month.

Councillor Holohan said that while he did not disagree with the concept of trying to "do things" in Palm Plaza, in a few months insects might prove "not to have been such a good idea".

He said: "What are they likely to do for the enhancement of Palm Plaza? It's a concept which is no more than an idea and I can't see how this city can afford an ad hoc idea which has not been thought through."

"Shops in Palm Plaza are empty and others are about to be pulled down (for the Lend Lease project). How many people are we looking at spending \$50,000 for? Perhaps Myer or Lend Lease might donate the \$50,000."

Quoting a council report ('The Journal' 5 August) that the project might, among other things, be termed controversial, Councillor Holohan said that because of the development about to take place in the area the insects project was "too early, the city cannot afford it".

He said: "We should wait, have a look and have a think about whether Dandenong can afford \$50,000 for insects in place of human hardship and need. It can't at this stage be justified and we should look again at estimates (budget) time."

Commenting on the membership of the Palm Plaza committee of management, Councillor Holohan said: "At least nine don't pay one cent of rates to this city, so it is pretty easy to spend money when you are not contributing to this city's rates income."

Opposing the move to abandon the "well researched" project, Councillor Greg Harris described the cost as "a smidgeon, a cat's whisker" in terms of the council's overall budget and referring to Palm Plaza as "a desert", said the insects project would attract people of all ages.

But urging his colleagues to be "fair dinkum in this day and age", Councillor David Kelly said money was tight and asked: "How do you justify, for instance, to kindergarten people putting \$50,000 into insects? There is no way that I have heard that the insects would complement the Lend Lease Development."

"I am sure that if we approached the ratepayers on this matter they would tell us where to put the insects — and we would find it hard to sit down. It is a waste of money."

However, Councillor John Kelly described the insects project as a way to promote Dandenong and bring people back to the city. He said: "In earlier discussions, we budgeted for this, but the free Friday night parking wasn't budgeted for, yet we

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"Insects" killed off

Dandenong Council reversed its decision on a project put forward by the Palm Plaza Committee of Management in August, the basis of which was the construction of five large insect models in the plaza as an attraction¹. The major reason for the reversal seemed to be that ratepayers' money would be better used elsewhere. Traders said that it was more important to have better lighting in the plaza². Another proposal for the plaza is the construction of a children's playground³.

1&2 *Journal* 23 August 1993

3 a council motion referred to estimates
