



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

R E P O R T

Relating to the Proposed

Erection of

ADDITIONS TO CUSTOMS HOUSE, FLINDERS STREET,

MELBOURNE, VICTORIA.

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R E P O R T

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, to which the House of Representatives referred for investigation and report the question of the erection of additions to Customs House, Flinders street, Melbourne, has the honour to report as follows:-

S E C T I O N I. - INTRODUCTION.

Historical.

1. The post war project for rebuilding the existing Customs House was first considered in 1944, when full Cabinet approved the recommendation for the erection of Commonwealth Buildings in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The Melbourne building was to be erected on the Customs House site, in Flinders Street.

Preliminary sketches were prepared for an 11 storey wing at the rear of the existing building, as the first stage of the proposal. The erection of this unit was to be followed by the demolition of the existing Customs House and the erection of a limit height building over the whole area. Part of the accommodation provided by this proposal was to be occupied by other Departments.

2. It was decided in 1948 that the Customs House site would not be used for general Commonwealth Offices, and new sketch plans were prepared for the Customs Department. This scheme comprised

the erection of 4 storey wings at the rear of the existing building, and one additional storey on the existing building, the scheme being designed to accommodate the requirements of the Customs Department only.

3. This scheme lapsed, and it was then proposed, in 1951, in order to relieve congestion, that investigation should be made of the possibility of adding two storeys in light construction to the existing building. The following investigation showed that there was practically no safety margin against settlement of the existing building under the proposed additional loadings. It was, therefore, agreed that the erection of a new building was the only practical solution, and that the development of an earlier proposal for the construction of a multi-storey building should proceed.

4. Accordingly, in 1953-54, preliminary sketch plans were prepared, based upon a comprehensive analysis of the space requirements of the Customs Department. These plans, together with a cost appraisal, were forwarded to the Department of Trade and Customs, in 1954, for examination. The proposal now under review represents the development of that design.

The Existing Buildings.

5. The site of the Customs House was allocated in 1835 as a Customs reserve, and a private house was erected on the site by J.P.Fawcner. In 1836 Mr. R.S.Webb arrived from Sydney as Customs Officer, and erected a wooden hut on the Customs reserve for use as a Government office. Eventually, in 1839, a contract was let for the building of a Customs Office which was completed in 1841 at a cost of £4,500.

6. The vaults and ground floor of the present Customs House were erected in 1856-57, and the Long Room and offices at the eastern end of the first floor were completed in 1859. The building, including the second floor, was completed in 1873-76, at a total cost of £90,000. Following Federation in 1900, the Customs building and site were valued at £140,000, and were transferred from the State to the Commonwealth in 1908.

7. Considering its age the existing building is in a very good state of preservation, and is regarded as one of Melbourne's historical buildings. The interior of the Long Room is a highly prized example of architecture, though the existence of the present partitions and facilities

for customs use obscure a great deal of attractive detail, and minimise its value.

S E C T I O N II - THE DEPARTMENTAL PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO
THE COMMITTEE.

The Annexe Project.

8. The proposal aims to provide a building comprising a rectangular block containing basement, lower ground floor, ground floor, and three upper floors, to occupy the whole of the available site formed by the courtyard at the rear of the existing Customs House, after allowance for light courts and easements. The building is to extend from Market street to William street, and, at an appropriate central position, a northern wing links on to the existing Commonwealth Laboratory.

9. The ground floor has entrances from Market street and William street, and is to be connected in an approximate centre position, with the present Customs House. The first floor is also to be accessible by a covered bridge from the existing Long Room.

10. The extensions have been designed so that, in the event of a future expansion of Commonwealth activities, they could form part of an overall site development.

11. The proposal provides for the building to be constructed of composite steel and reinforced concrete, but this will be finally determined after further detailed investigation of the operational areas and the physical peculiarities of the site. The foundations are to be of adequate size to permit of vertical extensions for additional floors.

12. Accommodation to be provided in the proposed additions will be sufficient for 244 persons, while subsequent renovation of the existing building will provide for an additional 188 officers. The total usable office space to be provided is 31,920.

13. The cost of the proposal is estimated at £630,000, and the time required to complete working drawings, specification, and final approval of tenders is stated to be approximately 13 months.

S E C T I O N III - THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.
General.

14. The Committee studied the plans and took evidence from officials concerned with the planning of the proposal in Melbourne. Inspection was made of the existing Customs House and other accommodation

as well as the proposed site and possible alternatives. A model of the project was exhibited for the Committee's information, and it proved very useful in considering the problems associated with the development of this confined space.

15. Evidence was also taken from officials of the Customs Department, the Chief Property Officer, Department of the Interior, the Chief Planner, Melbourne, and Metropolitan Board of Works, the Vice-President of the Town and Country Planning Association of Victoria, the Professor of Architecture of the Melbourne University, and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, Customs Agents Section, the Oversea Shipping Representatives Association, and the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. Representations were also made by the State Electricity Commission, whose building is adjacent to the Customs House, and evidence was given by the Assistant Secretary and by the Chief Architect, to express the views of that Commission.

16. The proposal brought to the Committee presented several difficulties, and the Committee spent a great deal of time in study and consideration of the factors involved. Use of this particular area as the site for the proposed accommodation for the Customs Department posed problems in connection with the foundations which caused considerable difficulty and delay in the early planning stages, and the necessity to design appropriate accommodation in the very confined space taxed the powers of the architects. Use of the present old building, which is an example of early historic architecture in Melbourne, as part of the ultimate total accommodation, proved a strong but problematical influence in arriving at the proposal chosen for development and presentation to the Committee. It was necessary to take a considerable amount of evidence in connection with the present building and its future possibilities before the Members of the Committee could resolve their final conclusions.

17. The influence of the old building, with its attractions and its disadvantages, was strongly evident throughout the inquiry, so that the difficulties experienced by the planning departments continued into the Committee discussions, causing considerable divergence of opinions and necessitating protracted study and consideration.

Necessity for the Building.

18. During the Committee's investigation, in 1953, of the proposal for the Commonwealth Administration Centre in Spring street, it was clearly stated that no provision was being made in that Centre for accommodation to house the Customs Department officials. It was explained that a concrete proposal for a new Customs House building was in course of preparation, and a decision had been made that space was not to be included at the Spring street centre for that Department. The Committee accordingly left consideration of that matter, pending completion of the separate plans and reference by the Parliament.

19. The present reference has been studied, accordingly, as in some degree complementary to the major accommodation project, as it concerns a section of the total official requirement included in the overall survey of accommodation presented to the Committee in 1953, and taken into account in the conclusions then presented to Parliament.

20. Present accommodation. - The evidence emphasizes what the Committee witnessed during its inspections of the existing conditions. The location of several branches away from the main section in the Customs House causes much waste of time to the Department itself, adversely affects its efficient operation, and causes much inconvenience to the large body of commercial people transacting their normal business from day to day. This is particularly important owing to the fact that many of the transactions connected with shipping movements are complicated and have to be done to comply with closely restricted time schedules. One third of the officials who should be located in the Customs House are in outside accommodation, and this extension project seeks to rectify this situation.

21. The overcrowded Customs House. - At the present time the branches in the Customs House are already severely overcrowded, and require to be relieved of present congestion to provide better facilities for functional operation of the day to day demands of the public. It is essential to provide better facilities for supervision, both at administrative and inspectorial levels, to help to maintain the degree

of efficiency required in present-day departmental operations dealing with such important commercial transactions. It was pointed out that the Customs Department in Melbourne has contact with members of the public to the extent of 10,000 visits per week, while revenue received there, in Customs and Excise, is \$1,750,000 per week.

22. The Commonwealth laboratory.- The present Commonwealth Laboratory was designed and built approximately 50 years ago for a small staff and a small amount of analytical work. In recent years analytical chemistry has made great progress, to keep pace with the continued growth of chemical industries, and laboratory methods and procedures have been revolutionised. In consequence the existing Commonwealth Laboratory, despite some minor alterations some years ago, is not a modern analytical chemical laboratory, and new sections to provide for the use of modern instruments are necessary. The only means of communication between the floors is by a winding staircase, which is dangerous when used for the transference of samples, chemicals and apparatus. There is practically no library, and many books have to be stored in passageways, or disseminated throughout the laboratories. New laboratories to accommodate optical and other special equipment are also necessary.

23. The scope of the Commonwealth Laboratory has outgrown its original conceptions, and it now contracts to carry out work for various departments and the Services, while, in addition, casual work is undertaken for many other Commonwealth departments.

24. Staff increase.- Figures submitted in evidence show that the Victorian staff of the Department of Customs has grown from 338 in 1933 to 790 in 1956. Of this total the headquarters component is 460, the balance being located at the various out-stations. These figures show an increase of approximately 70% in the staff of the Victorian branch in the 13 years between 1943 and 1956, but increases of this order are not envisaged in the future. Customs and Excise staffing is closely tied to the level of commercial and industrial activity in the community, and to national prosperity. The Department considers, following an examination of the relevant material, that increases of the order of

2½ per cent per annum may take place. On this basis the number of officers to be accommodated on the Customs House site would be approximately 500 by 1960 and nearing 600 by 1966.

25. Staff training.- Post war staff turnover and the anticipated retirement of many senior officers in the next few years, make it absolutely essential that present staff receive proper training in preparation for future responsibilities. The department is handicapped in its present accommodation by the lack of an adequate training area, and it is imperative that provision be made for this.

26. Inconvenience to the public.- Emphatic evidence was given by independent witnesses representing sections of the public having to transact business with the various sections of the Customs Department. Instances were given of serious delays and inconvenience suffered by senior and junior staff of the great many commercial houses needing to visit officials of the Customs Department. Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Customs Agents Section expressed the strong view, that the time-consuming inconvenience of having to walk to and fro between the Customs House and other buildings housing Customs staff should no longer be forced upon the great number of customs agents and other persons concerned.

27. In consideration of the various points enumerated above, the Committee is convinced that it is important to provide additional accommodation for the Customs Department in Melbourne as soon as possible.

The Site.

28. The Customs House site.- The site on which the Customs House is at present situated is an important one on the corner of Flinders street and William street, and extending along Flinders street to Market street on the East. It has frontages of approximately 179 feet to William street, 230 feet to Flinders street, and 179 feet to Market street. It is bounded on the northern side by the limit height structures of the State Electricity Commission and the Melbourne Harbour Trust.

29. The greater part of the site is at present occupied by

the existing Customs House, a building of brick construction with bluestone foundations, portions of which are 100 years old. In the courtyard at the back of the Customs House there are small buildings accommodating a seamen's shelter, stores, garages and toilets. Adjoining this courtyard, but at a higher level, and situated between the two high buildings of the State Electricity Commission and the Harbour Trust, is the Commonwealth-owned area containing the Commonwealth Laboratory building. This area has a frontage of 36 feet to Flinders Lane and a depth of about 111 feet. The Laboratory building on it is of solid brick with concrete floors, and was erected in 1909. There are a number of easements on the boundaries of the whole property, but the overall area of the Customs site is 39,686 square feet, plus 4084 square feet in the Laboratory portion of the site, excluding the easements.

30. Site for the additions.- The site available for building on the northern side of the existing Customs House, to accommodate the additions proposed in this reference, has an area of 14,054 square feet, excluding easements.

31. Site difficulties.- This site is a difficult one to develop for first class office space, compared with that for the Commonwealth Administration Centre, for example. This is principally because of its restricted width, the necessity to observe light easements on the northern side, and the provision for light courts to the existing building on the south side. There are costly drainage problems associated with the site, and it will be necessary to take up and re-lay existing sewers and storm water drains before any building work can be commenced.

32. Various foundation problems, caused by the proximity of the site to the river are anticipated, and considerable underpinning of the old structure, as well as the adjoining structures on the north, will be required.

33. It was stated that the normal course adopted by the Department of Works, after studying the economics of a site such as this one, would be to recommend the acquisition of an alternative site. However, in this case the Customs Department indicated that its business activities must be carried on at this site, and the design has been based on that premise.

34. It was therefore clear that, although the site was not ideal for the purpose of the additions, it was necessary to evolve the best plans possible for the new annexe on the limited space available, and to provide the accommodation required for the Customs Department as economically as possible under the circumstances. After planning and re-planning, a scheme was evolved which would allow for the space essential at the present time, with a possibility of extra floors to cope with the expansion in the near future. It was explained to the Committee almost from the outset, however, that in years to come it would be necessary to complete a comprehensive scheme of reconstruction, utilising the whole of the Customs site, and eventually replacing the existing Customs House. The present plans for the proposed annexe are intended to provide an integral part of the complete scheme.

35. As the inquiry progressed it became more evident that the plans before the Committee would barely provide for the present needs of the Department; additional floors, while possible, would be increasingly uneconomical to construct; and eventually the old building would have to be demolished to make way for the complete use of the site for a major building.

The Spring Street site:-

36. These facts brought the Committee up against the problems which had been facing the Departments for some years, and further evidence was sought to clarify the whole of the facts in the minds of the Members. The question of the demolition of the old building was a very important factor in the study of the matter, and this will be dealt with later in the Report. As there was so much doubt on the matter, it was natural for the Committee to consider further the desirability of moving the Customs activities to the new Commonwealth Administration Centre at Spring Street, even though this course had been deliberately rejected when the Spring Street proposal was before the Committee some years ago.

37. There were many points in favour of placing the Customs Department in the Spring Street Administration Centre, and, at first glance it would seem the logical course to take. Building would be more economical, the plans could be altered without difficulty to include the Customs

personnel, and many advantages would accrue from placing this Department in proximity to all the Commonwealth activities in the Centre. In spite of the very strong representations by the Customs Department and the numerous commercial interests in the vicinity of the present Customs House, the Committee therefore proceeded to investigate more closely the possibility of a move to Spring Street.

38. A considerable amount of valuable work was carried out by the officers of the Department of Works, in order to present to the Committee the facts bearing upon the problem, and a good deal of attention was paid to the various factors affecting the economics of the opposing proposals of the Flinders Street against the Spring Street site.

39. Alternative sites.- In an effort to resolve the difficulties posed by the conflicting influences of these two sites, it was natural for the Committee to turn to the desirability of finding a further alternative which would provide a more economical project, and at the same time satisfy the very strong representations to retain the Customs House at least in the close proximity of the Flinders Street site.

40. At this stage a request was made by the State Electricity Commission, whose large building abuts the present Customs House site, for earnest consideration to be given to the representations made some years ago, that no development should be planned for the present laboratory portion of the site without giving the Electricity Commission an opportunity to seek the use of the Laboratory site for extension of their present building. The Committee therefore heard evidence from the Assistant Secretary and the Chief Architect of the Commission, who made a very strong plea for the use of that part of the land, adjoining the rear of their building, and which could be used much more effectively and economically for extensions to their offices than for additions proposed by the Commonwealth.

41. Attention was also given to the possibility of using any other sites in the vicinity, in order to save demolition of the existing Customs House, and to facilitate decanting of the staff from one building to the other during constructional work. The question of the use of partly erected premises owned by the State Electricity Commission at 23 William Street,

Immediately opposite the main Commission building, also received some thought, but complications arose about its future use by the Commission, and the matter was not pursued further.

42. Evidence was sought from the Chief Property Officer, Department of the Interior, and other witnesses, regarding the possibility of acquiring a site in the immediate vicinity of the Customs House. Although some alternative sites were mentioned, none was put forward as available and suitable for the purpose, and it was stated that the Commonwealth would not compulsorily acquire a property to take the place of a property it already owned.

43. The question regarding the proper course to adopt for the Customs site was still one of great difficulty, and the various aspects concerning retention of the old Customs House, later use of the whole site, expense of maintaining the old building, the economics of the various schemes, and many other relevant points had to be considered carefully. Those points will be referred to in more detail later, but, for the purpose of pointing out the Committee's ultimate conclusion regarding the site itself, it must be stated that very strong arguments were advanced, both for and against the site. Several of the Members were strongly in favour of retaining the old building and moving to Spring Street, or some other location, and this was particularly so in the earlier stages of the inquiry

44. Site decisions:- The Committee was convinced that it had a definite responsibility, at this time, to make firm decisions which would enable the Department of Works to go ahead with plans for Customs accommodation, unhampered by conflicting influences and uncertainty. In the final analysis the Committee could not fail to be impressed by the multitude of important transactions, carried out by the hundreds of licensed agents, sub-agents, and the shipping and stevedoring companies located in this area, and by the necessity for visits to be made to the adjoining Harbour Trust organisation, in connection with exports and imports of goods before and after shipment. After weighing all the points for and against this site, the Committee agreed that the evidence was overwhelmingly in favour of the Customs Department remaining in the present locality.

45. It was also recognised, as has been pointed out earlier, that the evidence does not indicate any other really suitable site in the vicinity, and it is therefore recommended that the present Flinders Street site should be utilised.

46. Further reference will be made to the plans for the annexe which were put forward as the basis of this reference, but, so far as the site is concerned, the Committee emphasises that the use of the courtyard and laboratory area for the proposed additions, as referred to the Committee in the inquiry, demonstrates the thorough study which the designers had made of the matter. The proposal was a commendable effort to submit a compromise to satisfy very difficult conditions, but the Committee is satisfied that use of this portion of the site would result in a building which would be uneconomical and inadequate for the ultimate requirements.

47. It therefore follows that use of the full Flinders Street site should be considered and planned. In this connection the Committee is strongly of opinion that the Commonwealth should retain the whole of the rectangular block now housing the Customs building, with frontages to William Street, Flinders Street, and Market Street, and there is a responsibility to develop the area adequately for future use in this important part of the city. It is recommended, however, that the area between the high buildings of the State Electricity Commission and the Harbour Trust should be declared surplus to Customs requirements, and consideration given to disposal of it.

The Present Plans for the Annexe.

48. Design under review:- The plans submitted to the Committee for additions to the present Customs building provided for a building - referred to as the Annexe - occupying almost the whole of the restricted area to the rear of the existing building, and extending also over the area of the present Laboratory fronting Flinders Lane. The building was to be connected with the present Customs House building, both at Ground Floor and First Floor level, and would consist of a basement, lower ground floor, ground floor, and three upper floors.

49. The Annexe was designed so that, in the event of

future expansion of the Commonwealth activities, it could form part of the overall site development, and provision was to be made for future floors to accommodate increased Customs staff, while the design allowed for incorporation in complete development in the future. It was stated at the outset that the space in the new building would be sufficient for the next ten years, but it was subsequently established that addition of extra floors would be costly, and the building originally to be constructed would be filled to maximum capacity by the time it is finished.

50. In order to make maximum use of the site the long narrow building was planned to have wings extending slightly round the ends of the existing Customs building, and connected to it. This was one of the features of the design which received some criticism, as it affected the appearance of the old building and completely enclosed the northern facade with the stately long columns which form one of the most attractive aspects of the present historic Customs House.

51. The architects explained that the planning provided the maximum of open floor areas, as required by the Customs Department, but this requirement necessitated a change in the usual grouping in the centre core of lifts, stairs and services.

52. The whole proposal was acknowledged to be the result of a great deal of thought, study and re-planning, in order to provide sufficient working space for the Customs Department without having to leave that site, and at the same time retain the historic old Customs Building. One witness described this as an awkward site and an awkward proposal. The Committee feels that the designers have achieved most commendable results under such difficult conditions, but is convinced that they should be given a better opportunity to plan a building worthy of the site, more economical in cost per square of construction, and capable of providing adequately for expansion of the Customs staff for a reasonable period ahead. It is therefore recommended that the plans as submitted in this reference be not approved.

The Old Customs Building.

53. Value of the Building:- The evidence submitted to the Committee produced some interesting points concerning the old Customs Building, and it was definitely established that its historic association

with Customs activities for so many years in the past, together with its value as ^{an} important sample of early Melbourne architecture, made it a building well worthy of preservation. All members of the Committee were impressed with its historic and architectural value and experienced a keen desire to do everything possible to see that it would be retained for the future.

54. The first structure to be erected on the site was a private house in 1835, and a wooden hut for use as a Government office was constructed in 1836. The original Customs Building was completed in 1841 at a cost of £4,500, and various additions were made to it, the well known Long Room and offices being completed in 1859. The building, including the second floor, was completed in 1876 at a total cost of £90,000, and, following Federation, the building and site, valued at £140,000 were transferred to the Commonwealth in 1908.

55. Several of the features of the building are generally regarded as very fine architectural examples, and the Long Room, as well as the front and the rear facades were pointed out as possessing particularly attractive merit. The Committee was very impressed with the evidence given by Professor Brian Lewis, on behalf of the National Trust of Australia, and his opinions carried a great deal of weight in the Committee deliberations.

56. Some of his expressions were particularly emphatic in describing the value of the building. He considered the Customs House the most distinguished of the very fine group of public buildings erected by the State of Victoria, not excepting other fine buildings like Parliament House and the Government Offices. He regards the building as the purest and most continuous in the English colonial tradition. He also considers that the highest quality of workmanship is contained in the worked bluestone of the foundations and lower structure, and the whole building is a superlative work of art.

57. He pointed out, however, that a great deal of improvisation has gone on inside the building, with much of the original design being lost by the erection of partitions, and by division into smaller hallways. It is recognised as unsuitable for Customs work

today, but it was suggested that it would be suitable for an embassy or Melbourne headquarters of one of the major nations.

58. Professor Lewis was most impressive and emphatic in his evidence, and the Committee noted with appreciation the fine workmanship and artistry of various portions of the building, when the features referred to were pointed out during inspections. It appears, however, that there is very little support for his opinions from other sources.

59. Evidence was taken from many witnesses in various spheres, including the architects, town planners, customs and business agents and Government officials. All agreed that there was much merit in the historic old building, but they did not enthusiastically support the views of the National Trust. Some appreciated the architectural merit of the structure, but declined to place it in the highest category; others considered that its accepted architectural merit was not sufficient to warrant its preservation in the face of urgent city progress; while others again expressed their willingness for it to be demolished without delay, in order to establish modern and convenient Customs Offices on the site.

60. The Vice-President of the Town and Country Planning Association of Victoria, said that his Association does not agree that the building should be preserved. They do not attach sufficient importance to it, either for its architectural or aesthetic value, and there are many other buildings suitable for preservation in Melbourne. He pointed out that most of the exterior of the building is stucco, and most of its features could not be removed from their present position and preserved. Its principal value is historical.

61. Condition of the structure.- The structure of the old building particularly the blue-stone foundations - is reasonably sound, and it was stated that, with proper attention to maintenance, it could probably be preserved for about 100 years. The opinion was expressed that maintenance could cost in the vicinity of £2,000 per annum.

62. Alternative uses.- One factor which had to be considered in connection with the old building was the possible use to which it could be put, and the importance which would attach to the demand for a building such as this.

63. At the outset it was pointed out that the old building is unsuitable for office space, and it occupies an area which could be much more economically used for modern accommodation. Its retention in the original submission depended upon renovation of the interior which would allow it to be used for customs purposes until ultimate expansion demanded further additions and development of the whole site.

64. The desire to preserve the building, both on account of its historical, architectural and aesthetic merit, prompted the Committee to explore the possible alternative uses for which the building could be made available if retained for the distant future. One or two suggestions, including use as an embassy, for Federal Members' Rooms, or a museum, were elicited from the witnesses, but the general impression persisted that a building in that particular location would offer little inducement to occupation for any really important purpose.

65. Demolition recommendation.- The Committee gave a great deal of consideration to all the factors bearing upon the use of the old building, because the whole question of the satisfactory provision of Customs accommodation revolved around the use which could be made of this impressive old structure. All of the Members desired to retain it for its historic value, but as the inquiry proceeded, they became more and more impressed with the overwhelming weight of evidence in favour of retaining the Customs Department on the site and using the area more effectively. It was realised, moreover, that once a brick was placed in the construction of the Annexe building, it was inevitable that the old Customs House would have to give way in due course. Even to the last, one Member of the Committee maintained his opinion that the old building should be retained, but he did not press for a division of the Committee on the matter, in face of the weight of evidence against it. The Committee therefore, agreed to recommend that, as ultimate demolition of the old Customs House is regarded as inevitable, it is desirable to demolish it in the first instance and allow the designers adequate scope to develop a plan most appropriate and worthy for the site.

Development of the Site.

66. Future Action:- In dealing with this reference concerning additions to the present Customs House, and having received evidence pointing to the inadequacy of the plans submitted, the Committee felt bound to go a little further and explore the possibility of alternatives, as a pointer to the action which it is now desirable to take as a consequence. Evidence was sought, therefore, in connection with the general possibilities for development of the site, in order to present to Parliament an opinion on appropriate action in the matter. It was not considered within the scope of the present reference to seek a considerable amount of detailed evidence on complete alternative projects, nor was it considered desirable to delay the important decisions, indicated in the earlier parts of this report, any longer than was absolutely necessary. The officials ~~were, therefore,~~ requested to prepare some final evidence to inform the Committee on economic aspects of the Flinders Street proposal as compared to the Spring Street Administrative Centre. This resulted in the production, in a surprisingly short time, of some most interesting suggestions by the Department of Works, and a submission of evidence from other officials, in a form which should be of great value in the future planning.

67. Four Schemes were indicated to the Committee, and a brochure of pictures demonstrating possible methods of developing the site was submitted, together with sets of comparative figures as an approximate guide for the Committee's information. It was explained that no detailed economic analysis of the suggested methods had been possible, and the approach to the analysis submitted was based simply on comparative capital costs related to accommodation provided, expressed in terms of persons accommodated at 80 sq.ft. per person of net usable space. It was emphasised that the figures were only approximate and were produced merely as a guide to the Committee so that full and detailed economic study could be made at a later date, when the Committee had made recommendations in regard to the matter.

68. The four schemes brought forward were referred to as

A, B, C, and D, the first three relating to development on the Flinders Street site, and D scheme showing a method of providing the desired accommodation at the Spring Street Administrator Centre.

69. Scheme A indicated a possible development of the site as a continuation of the Annexe building at present proposed. This would provide for a modern multi-storey block along the William Street frontage to connect with the Annexe, and a low modern structure over the remainder of the area now occupied by the old Customs Building. The scheme would provide a considerable amount of accommodation in excess of the ultimate requirements of the Customs Department, and would involve placing the staff from some of the other departments in the remaining space. It would also perpetuate the difficulties, at present being encountered, in squeezing the Annexe into the space immediately available.

70. Scheme B suggested a modern building on the whole of the Flinders Street frontage, leaving a considerable area at the rear for future use, or for disposal. The accommodation envisaged would be more than is required by the Customs Department at the present time, but would be appropriate for the ultimate requirements of that Department, estimated for about 25 years ahead. In the illustration the proposed building was placed very close to the street alignment, to allow the maximum space at the rear of the building for disposal. This did not appear to be the most aesthetic use of the situation, and no doubt the building would be set back some little distance if the architects were to design the most appropriate structure for this location.

71. Scheme C indicated another variation of site usage which would place a suitable building on the corner of Flinders Street and Market Street, using about half the site, and leaving the important portion at the corner of Flinders and William Streets available for disposal. The main disadvantage of this scheme appeared to be that use of the disposed section for an important multi-storey private building would result in over population of the area and bring consequent difficulties, including traffic congestion, at this already difficult corner.

72. Scheme D was put forward as an alternative to the use of the Flinders Street site. It proposed early construction of the second unit building of the Commonwealth Centre at Spring Street, setting apart the first four floors for Customs use, and providing the remainder of the building for other departments urgently needing alternative space to their present rented accommodation. This would avoid the necessity to demolish the present Customs House, and help to develop the Administration Centre, but would pose the problem of severe inconvenience and trouble to the Customs Department and their numerous commercial clients, as well as create the necessity for finding a suitable and really worthy use for the old Customs building.

73. Consideration of the Schemes.- Although the Committee felt that detailed consideration of such important schemes, for major buildings as alternatives to the proposed one submitted for investigation in this reference, would not be justified, nor would it in fact be practical at the present stage, it was felt that the excellent work carried out by the officials concerned, in the short time at their disposal, provided a most valuable contribution to the problems on hand. There is no doubt, also that the preliminary study and formation of ideas involved in this work will assist materially in pushing forward the concentrated analysis and designing which will now be possible, and positive progress will be attainable without delay.

74. The Minister for Works expressed in writing some views upon the essential nature of detailed consideration in connection with the various problems involved. The Committee thoroughly endorsed those views, and recommends that full use should be made of the contributions now available in the Committee's evidence from the officers of the Departments of the Interior and Public Service Board, as well as all research carried out by officers of the Works Department along the lines indicated by the Minister. It is emphasized also, in this connection, that a considerable amount of the desired information is already available in the evidence taken by the Committee up to the present stage, both in this reference and in connection with the earlier Commonwealth Administration Centre inquiry, which is so closely related to this subject.

75. Having decided upon its recommendations directly concerned with the Annexe proposal under review, the Committee then gave consideration to the desirability of indicating to Parliament, in this Report, what is regarded as the appropriate course of action to be taken now, in consequence of the Committee's foregoing recommendations.

76. The final evidence submitted by the officers of the Department of Works, accompanied by the vivid illustrations in the brochure, gave the Members a fairly clear opportunity for comparison, on an approximate and general scale, of the four definite schemes placed before them.

77. While keeping in mind the tentative and approximate nature of the calculations, it will be seen that sufficient information is contained in the comparative figures on hypothetical population, and the Cost Appraisal Estimates, to allow a reasonably effective contrast of the factors involved. The comparative figures show that, on a cost per person basis, the Annexe scheme stands out as comparatively uneconomic, against the other schemes, which are approximately similar to one another in cost. On the cost per cubic foot basis, it is shown that a suitable structure could be planned for the Flinders Street area as economically as at the Spring Street Administration Centre, if freedom to develop the whole site is conceded.

78. The Committee is of opinion that sufficient evidence is available at this stage to prompt the recommendation that immediate steps should be taken to develop the Flinders Street site along the lines suggested in Scheme B, and the Committee recommends that appropriate action should be taken to design such a project and submit it, in due course, for final investigation by this Committee.

S E C T I O N I V - T H E C O M M I T T E E ' S C O N C L U S I O N S .

Summary of Recommendations.

79. The following is a list of the Committee's conclusions, in summary form only, arrived at after study of the proposal, evidence, and the problems involved. The full recommendations are contained in the body of the Report and may be referred to from the paragraph numbers quoted at the close of each of the following recommendations:-

1. It is important to provide additional accommodation for the Customs Department in Melbourne as soon as possible. (Paragraph 27)
2. The evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the Customs Department remaining in the present locality. (Paragraph 44.)
3. The evidence does not indicate any other really suitable site available in the locality. (Paragraph 45.)
4. The proposal for the Annexe in the Court Yard is a very commendable effort on the part of the designers to submit a compromise to satisfy very difficult conditions, but the result would be a building which would be uneconomical and inadequate for ultimate requirements. (Paragraph 46.)
5. The Commonwealth has a responsibility to retain and develop the whole of the site upon which the present Customs House is built, but the Laboratory site, between the State Electricity Commission and the Harbour Trust buildings, should be declared surplus to Customs requirements and consideration given to disposal of it. (Paragraph 47.)
6. As the ultimate demolition of the old Customs House is regarded as inevitable, it is desirable to demolish it in the first instance, to allow adequate scope for appropriate development of the very valuable site involved. (Paragraph 65.)
7. The plans submitted should be not approved, but the designers should be given a better opportunity to plan a worthy building for the whole site, more economical in

construction, and providing adequately for expansion of the Customs Department for a reasonable period ahead.
(Paragraph 52.)

8. The Committee endorses the view that full investigation is necessary by officials of the various departments involved, and recommends that the evidence available in this inquiry, as well as that connected with the earlier Commonwealth Administration Centre investigation, so closely related to this one, should be the basis for the further study now required. (Paragraph 74.)
9. Sufficient evidence is available at this stage to prompt the recommendation that immediate steps should be taken to develop the Flinders Street site along the lines suggested in Scheme B, and such a project should be submitted then for final inquiry by the Committee. (Paragraph 78.)

W. R. LAWRENCE.

Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,
Canberra.

Date.....10. OCT 1957.....