

These photographs show how a group of houses which were in very poor condition have been replaced. The photograph at the top left, showing the original houses, was taken in the late 1960s. The new houses, built in the early 1980s, have been designed to blend with existing styles. The photograph at the lower right shows the street front view of the new houses.



Progress on the new plan was slow at first. There was a lot to be done, gathering information, and discussing arrangements for putting money into the project.

In June 1979, the council set up a Renovation Advice Office in the valley. An architect was there to give advice and help people with their plans for renovating or upgrading their homes.

At the end of that year, the Government announced a new scheme called the Community Housing Improvement Scheme. It emphasised the upgrading of existing houses, and the improvement of residential areas in general. Under this scheme, Aro Valley was named a Neighbourhood Improvement Area. It was selected because of the amount of poor housing, and the low incomes of many of the residents. Under this scheme, Aro Valley residents were able to go to the advice office in their area to get help with the assessment of the condition of their house, suggestions for improvement of the property, help in working out a budget, advice on costs and on building bylaws and permits, and assistance in arranging for loans or grants.

Into the 80s

Redevelopment of Aro Valley is an evolutionary process, and so change will come

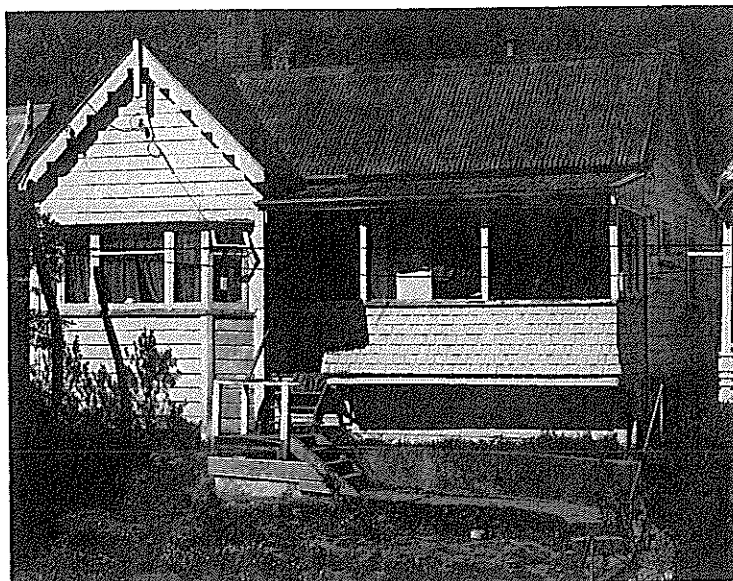
slowly. A number of homes have been renovated both by the council and by residents themselves. One large council housing scheme has been completed—Pukehinau Flats. Some street beautification has taken place. The community centre is the focus of community activities, such as fairs, play groups and an after-school homework centre. A new supermarket is being built. Both the council and the Housing Corporation are involved in building infill housing, with attempts being made to blend the new homes in with existing architectural styles.

Conclusion

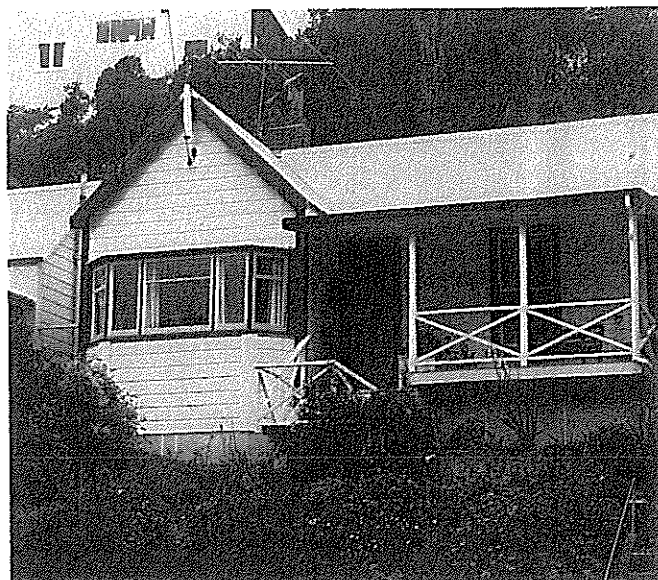
This was the first time that this type of joint planning, by both the council and the people, had been tried in New Zealand. City councils were learning that it is best to find out what their people want, even if those people live in poor districts, before bringing about changes in towns and cities.

At the same time, ideas about town planning were changing. Renovating and upgrading existing buildings have come to be seen as preferable to bulldozing. In this way, the character and heritage, particularly of inner city housing, can be preserved.

A house in Aro Valley, before renovation and after.



Clare Bowes



Charles Fearnley



The Dominion

The time came for the council to call for objections to the plan, as they had to do by law. Most of the residents did not know how to go about this, so the Action Group arranged for a lawyer to help people who wanted to object. A large number of objections were made.

After a time, the city councillors decided to drop the plan. Instead, they opened a community house where Gary Maskill, as town planner, could work with the residents and help them to draw up a new plan. For the city council, this was a new kind of planning.

Gary first talked to the people in the Action Group. They decided to divide the area into street groups. Each of these would hold meetings and discuss the improvements and changes they would like in their street. Gary says, "I went round to some of these street group meetings. One of my jobs was to tell them what the law would let them put in their plan."

The ideas from the street groups were sent on to the Action Group, which then tried to make up a plan which would satisfy everyone. Gary was closely involved in the discussions.

"We just sat around at someone's place and talked about what we wanted. I was just another committee member, so I merely sat and listened while they came up with the ideas. That's the important thing for planners—to be able to listen to people, because the residents know their area better than any planner can ever know it."

So Gary's job as a town planner changed. Before, he had made up plans for people to fit into; now he was an equal partner in a planning group, although still an expert adviser. He had to write the technical instructions, for example, for engineers and builders. But the real ideas and aims of the plan came from the Aro Valley people themselves.

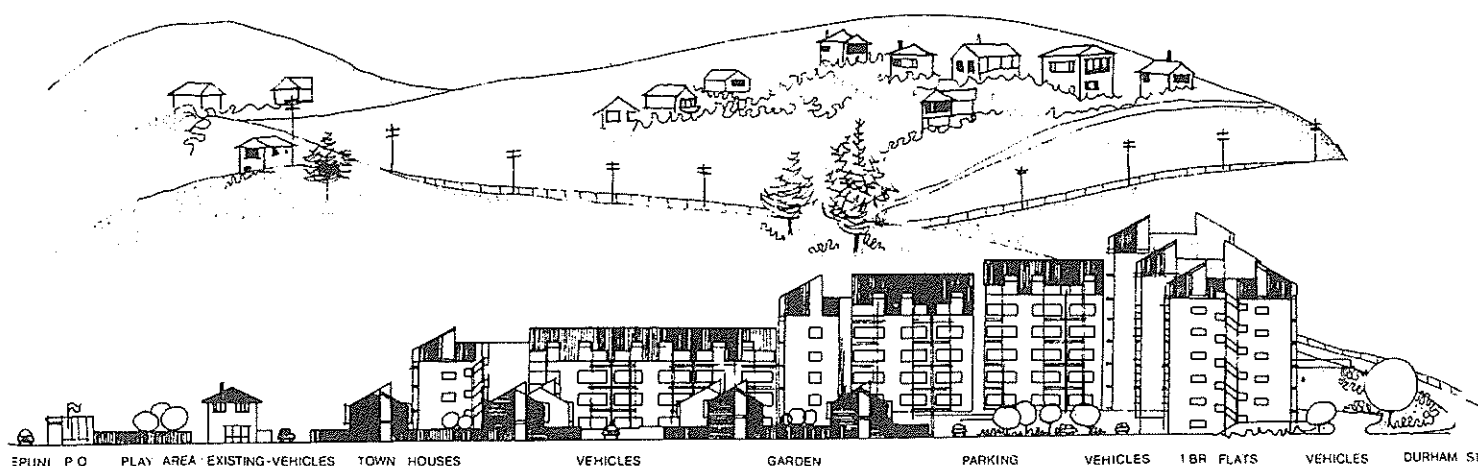
After months of work, the plan was complete. It was utterly different from the original one. All the old houses were to be kept and improved, except for a few so bad that it would not be worthwhile renovating



Ans Westra



Ans Westra



One of the sketches of the Wellington City Council's plan.

The residents could see what effects such a plan would have. Many of the houses to be demolished were suitable for upgrading. The people who rented or owned houses in the area would lose their homes; and, if they wanted to live in the new flats, they would have to pay a higher rent to the council. Many of these people would not be able to afford the higher rents, and would have to move away from the area altogether. Richer people would come and take their places, and the whole community would be destroyed.

Many of the Aro Valley residents were very angry. Gary Maskill, who had just been appointed as an assistant town planner, had the difficult job of answering their questions about the plan. He says:

"I was in a house which had been

converted into an information centre. People from around the area came in to look at the plans pinned on the walls. There were plenty of complaints. Many people glared at me, or swore at me. I felt terrible."

Over the weeks that followed, community feeling grew. Groups of residents got together, then public meetings were called. People in the Aro Valley came and criticised the plans. City councillors who attended the meetings were yelled at and booed.

"There were some moving moments," says Gary Maskill. "An old bloke who had lived in Aro Street all his life got up and addressed the meeting. Then he burst into tears, and had to be helped out of the room."

At one of the meetings, an Action Group of residents was selected to find ways of persuading the council to change the plan. The members of this group—a social worker, two sociologists, a teacher, a salesman, and a plumber—all lived in the area. One of the first things the Action Group did was to survey every household in the area. They asked questions about numbers of residents, ages, occupations, race and level of income. They asked for opinions about Aro Valley and about the houses there.

They found out many things. For example, there were many more families with children than the council had said. They also found that most of the houses had been well built and were still solid, even though they were old.



Evening Post

Front cover: Clare Bowes
Back cover: Ans Westra