

# AWB plans to anchor city project

By ROYCE MILLAR

The Australian Wheat Board is set to move to a new head office on the old 3AW site in La Trobe Street after the developer agreed to change the design to preserve nearby residents' views.

The Victorian Administrative and Appeals Tribunal cleared the agreed alterations yesterday. Planning Minister John Thwaites is likely to sign planning approval this week.

The Wheat Board will be the anchor tenant at the redeveloped 380 La Trobe Street in a pre-commitment deal in which an office building of about 22,500 square metres will be built over two sites at 374-384 and 386-392 La Trobe Street.

Last month Mr Thwaites issued a notice of his intention to grant planning approval for the project, but two residents of the nearby Republic Tower appealed to the tribunal. The residents said the project would interfere with their views.

Major delays were averted when design changes, approved by the appellants, saw the matter resolved at a tribunal directions hearing.

The design has been modified to set the building further back from the western and eastern boundaries. It is believed the building's height has not been altered.

The tribunal has written to Mr Thwaites to direct that a planning permit be issued. A tribunal spokeswoman confirmed that a "consent order" had been made and that the minister had been directed to grant a planning permit for the project.

The first site at 374-384 La Trobe Street was once home to 3AW, the other housed a three-level car park. To be known as 380 La Trobe Street, the project is a joint venture

between the Australian Property Network and Hatford Pty Ltd, a company connected to Liberty Oil. Hatford owns both sites.

The Wheat Board will take up about 50 per cent of the space when it leaves its Lonsdale Street headquarters.

Liberty Oil, Australia's largest independent petrol retailer, is owned by David Wieland and David Goldberg, who were behind the 1970s and 1980s independent group Solo.

Planning approval and pre-commitment for the project is a big boost for 380 La Trobe Street and places the project in a strong position to secure tenants.

Work on 380 La Trobe Street is expected to take 18 months, starting in August and with completion scheduled for early 2003.

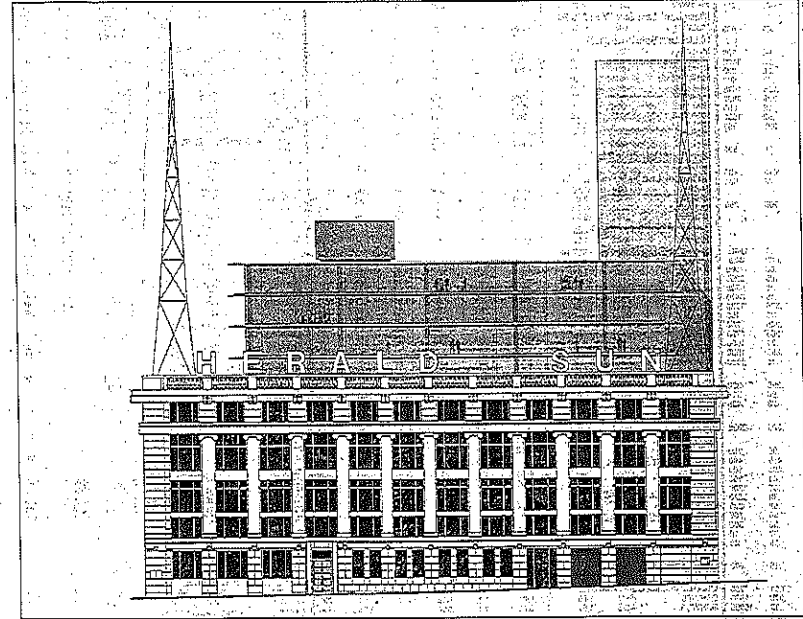
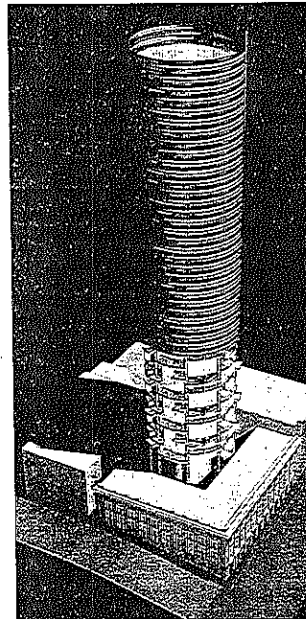
The 22-storey building will provide A-grade office space for AWB. The extra 12,000 square metres is yet to be committed.

The developers hope to finish the building ahead of competing projects in the office market, including Grocon's Queen Victoria Village, now under construction.

They will use the planning permit and short construction period as major selling points as they pursue tenants for the remaining 12,000 square metres of space.

AWB spokesman Peter McBride said the board was happy the planning problems had been resolved and that a permit was about to be issued. He said the board was looking forward to moving into its new headquarters in early 2003.

Colliers Jardine spokesman Simon Hunt would not comment on the project.



The Herald project, as it was to be, left, and Denton Corker Marshall's reworked plan, which emphasises the existing building.

## High office towers out of fashion

By ROYCE MILLAR

The modern era of office skyscrapers seems to have drawn to a close with developers shelving plans for "tallest ever", slim structures in favor of squat, "campus-style" office developments.

The Age can now reveal new plans for two CBD development sites: the former Lend Lease site on the corner of Bourke and William Streets, and the Herald and Weekly Times building in Flinders Street.

Both sites are owned by building industry superannuation fund C+BUS following the fund's split last year with developer David Marriner. The fund and Marriner were partners in the joint venture vehicle, Staged Developments Australia.

SDA had earmarked both sites for star-reaching towers. The Bourke Street site was to get the 60-storey, \$350 million Grand Central, designed by modernist architect Harry Seidler. Marriner had promoted the Grand Central as the CBD's tallest building.

SDA had proposed a 50-storey, \$200 million circular tower for the heritage-listed HWT site. That project met opposition from residents, Heritage Victoria and Planning Minister John Thwaites.

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal is considering planning approval for the HWT proposal. But both projects seem to have been beaten by an even more menacing opponent: the marketplace. A new design for the Lend Lease site by architect Bruce

Henderson has seen the 60-level tower scaled down to two adjoining towers of 35 stories above ground, with some underground car parking. The new towers are likely to provide around 50,000 square metres of office space each.

In a major reworking of the HWT project, a new design by Denton Corker Marshall emphasises the existing HWT building with an extension on top of just a few levels.

Both new schemes feature large office floor-plates, a configuration much sought after by tenants in Melbourne's office space race. This week, C+BUS fund secretary Helen Hewett stopped just short of shelving the two skyscraper proposals when she said the "overwhelming" interest in the market

place was for smaller buildings with large floor-plates.

Ms Hewett said some players in the market were still keen on taller buildings with executive levels and separate offices. "But our experience of people out in the market at the moment is that there is more interest in the campus style."

Ms Hewett said there was strong interest in the Lend Lease site, but specifically in a lower-rise project, not the Harry Seidler tower. She said the large floor-plates and open-plan offices were more appropriate for younger employees who liked to be mobile with mobile phones and laptops.

Ms Hewett said the fund was optimistic it would soon sign a pre-commitment for the Bourke Street site sufficient to justify construction.