BIG harbourside development sites are the reality of dreams of planners and developers.

In the 1980s Sydney had 50 hectares of derelict portside lands, and Honeyeckle has transformed the city’s embrace of its harbour.

Now Sydney is debating plans for the redevelopment of 22 hectares of old shipping lands at East Darling Harbour, called Barangaroo too.

On Friday, the Hunter Development Corporation announced development plans for 62 hectares of prime real estate, the western strip of the old BHP steelworks site. The new development will involve a 96 hectare parcelfronting the South Arm of the Hunter River. This portside strip is controlled by Newcastle Port Corporation.

The sheer scale of the old steelworks site beggars belief. Together the two parcels are 150 hectares, the equivalent of 300 football fields.

But points out Newcastle’s entire downtown comfortably inside this 150 hectares. Or you could fit in six Barangaros, which would mean space for 600 workers and 66 hectares of harbourside parkland.

Unlike Barangaroo, though, Newcastle’s giant redevelopment site is largely unknown to the public, with the exception of passing boaties, and old steelworkers remembering their long daily walk from the front gates to their offices within that great dome chamber of heat.

But the site is massive. Its potential is infinite. There has never been a waterside redevelopment of this size in Australia.

Getting this land ready for development has been a painstaking, meticulous, expensive task. Eight decades of BHP occupation on top of the site unfit for human use. The land and water tables were polluted. The site was waterlogged. The berths were crumbling. The infrastructure links were ancient. The South Arm was toxic portridge.

On Friday, the Hunter Development Corporation announced that the 62 hectare parcel will be developed in partnership with the Baulkimb Group, a Newcastle-based company with a history of major industrial and urban redevelopment projects in NSW and Queensland. The major tenant announced for stage one of what HDC calls the Intertrade Industrial Park will be Toll Holdings. Toll is a giant Australian transport and logistics corporation.

The HDC announcement follows the recent commissioning by Hunter Ports of the Mayfield 4 berth. This berth is one of the resurrection of the 90 hectares on the harbour side of the Intertrade Industrial Park.

Mayfield 4 has passed its first test by landing two 250-tonne transformers on order for Bayswater power station.

The question is whether we are setting off in the right direction in the reuse of the city’s grand harbourside asset. The stakes are high. What we do with this asset will be locked in forever.

I have some grave concerns. The first is whether the industrial development announced by HDC is genuinely industrial, not people conjure up an image of manufacturing activity when they hear the word industrial. The reality is, though, that much of what gets approved these days under the category of industrial is in fact transport and logistics activity. And this means not much more than big sheds on solid concrete slabs serviced by heavy load access roads. Trucking parks are quick property development opportunities. This problem, in terms of economic development, is that transport and logistics developments only yield about 15 jobs per hectare. Genuine manufacturing investments and office park developments yield many times this ratio.

I expect the HDC and BHP to respond immediately to my concern. This is just stage one of the development. They’ll say in stages two and three we will attract a mix of investments, and higher jobs densities will flow.

Is it just as likely that stage two will see the Intertrade Industrial Park fill up with a mishmash of come-one, come-all, sheds are us renters? You then stage three with an influx of bulky good retailers and, inevitably, night-time brooked creepers sharing long dark streets with giant B-double trucks and hotted-up Honda Civics?

By then, will the opportunity for genuine large-scale portside industrial activity be lost as land parcels get carved up opportunistically?

And, finally, isn’t it most peculiar that in the 21st century, with our renewed consciousness about the need to have green public parklands in the heart of our cities, that this most enormous of land parcels has no provision for public parkland at all?

Professor Philip O’Neill is director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

Big Harbour

Poverty and hunger challenge everyone

The goal is help eradicate them by 2015, writes Tracey Edstein.

CARTIS Australia, in partnership with the Australian Government’s aid agency, AusAID, is presenting a travelling display in 30 locations around Australia over 18 months. The exhibition will be launched in Newcastle by Bishop Michael Malone on March 9.

Blue参etter New World highlights the Millennium Development Goals and the promise of governments throughout the world to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.

The multimedia exhibition, with a focus on development programs in Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Africa, gives a practical face to the eight goals.

Video and photographs, posters, baskets and school books from Caritas partner communities make up the installation. Each of the eight goals is presented as a blueprint for positive social change in our world, highlighting how Caritas Australia and the Australian Government, through AusAID, are engaged in the challenge of tackling the poverty of the world’s poorest.

Be challenged.

The exhibition also presents a challenge for all and a call for action at all levels. If the goals are to be achieved, it is not just government initiative that is required the public has to commit too.

In a number of creative ways within and adjacent to the exhibition space, Caritas Australia invites individuals and groups to take action: learning more about breaking the burden of poverty, joining national and global networks (signing up to Caritas Australia campaigns run with Make Poverty History and Close the Gap alliances); pressing governments to keep their promises; and when the goals were promulgated in 2000.

One interactive aspect of the exhibition are the pledge towers, which provide an opportunity for those who view the exhibition to write down the contribution they intend to make to ending global poverty. The pledges then become a component of the living exhibition, enhancing the reality of the positive difference one person — and indeed a community of people — can make in the world.

Local Caritas spokesperson, Patricia Banister, of Rutherford, said the exhibition was aimed at increasing the public’s awareness of the unique contribution Australian NGOs and the government were making in empowering communities to overcome poverty.

“The exhibition forms part of Caritas’s commitment to enabling public participation in local and international responses to the eradication of global poverty.

“It is important that we commit to achieving the millennium development goals at this time because economic slowdown has lessened the incomes of the poor, the food crisis is forcing millions more into poverty and climate change will have the greatest impact on the poorest,” she said.

Blueprint for a Better World is at Yammaloc Centre, 71 Prospect Road, Garden Suburb, until March 13, 9am to 4.30pm daily. Free admission, more at blueprintforabetterworld.org.

Tracey Edstein edits Aurora for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.