



Photograph courtesy of the Olin Partnership, Philadelphia

**Figure 8.16** A model of the SOM proposal for Canary Wharf.

also suspended. Much was left up in the air. There were, for instance, no specific regulations about building developers' contributions to the cost of the infrastructure or landscape architecture. Decisions were made on an *ad hoc* basis.

In 1985 an American entrepreneur, G. Ware Travelstead, proposed a 35-hectare commercial development designed by Hanna-Olin for the Canary Wharf site but in the same year Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) was commissioned to produce a master plan and design guidelines for the area (see Figure 8.16). The present layout retains the essential feature of that plan. The

design has a City Beautiful/Beaux-Arts axis terminated by a landmark building (see Figure 8.17). The area was divided into 26 building sites and formal landscaped gardens. The design guidelines – prepared by SOM and the LDDC – specified height limits for the buildings in order for the central towers to be landmarks, and also the requirements for the materials to be used in order to establish a sense of unity. Development proposals that conformed to the guidelines did not require LDDC approval. Anything that deviated from them did. The guidelines turned out to be quite prescriptive giving architects little design leeway.

In 1987, the developers Olympia and York, earlier a key investor in Battery Park City (see later in this chapter), inherited the master plan. The company was part of the Reichmann family real estate empire in Canada. Otto Blau, a key member of the company advised against investing in Canary Wharf because of its location. Paul Reichmann, who had developed a close relationship with Margaret Thatcher, was persuaded to go ahead by her personal promises that an underground rail connection to the site would be built in order to make the site commercially viable. By the time she left office in 1990 no progress had been made on the line.

The development of Canary Wharf, like that of La Défense, has not been smooth sailing. £1.3 billion was quickly invested between 1981 and 1986. After those years of speculation and development, bankruptcies in the 1990s saw the financial collapse of the development. The commercial rental market was severely depressed. No leading tenants had signed leases. This lack of demand for commercial office space had