

25th April 2025

The Hon Paul Scully MP
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Concept Proposal: CHIMES BUILDING 45-53 Macleay Street, Potts Point
'The Chimes'
State Significant Development

Dear Minister

This objection is presented on behalf of the Potts Point Preservation Group, representing the local community and dedicated to the preserving the vibrant and accessible neighbourhoods of Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay and Rushcutters Bay that together uniquely embrace the architectural and social history of Sydney.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The potential loss of this building and the affordable housing it contains will, if approved, be a permanent blemish on the reputation of the statutory authorities at all levels of Government who are supposed to protect people and heritage in NSW. If the aim of the NSW State Government is to provide more housing and particularly affordable housing, why is it complicit in allowing developers to demolish existing apartment buildings like the Chimes (which currently has 80 studios and one-bedroom apartments) in order to create 3- and 4-bedroom apartments for the wealthy. The inclusion in the new plans for 9 affordable apartments is a paltry substitute for the loss of 80 and offset by increasing the height of the building beyond the planning limit. Not only will the affordable apartments revert to the private sector after 15 years it is more than likely the developers will pay a fine to the city rather than build the affordable apartments.

The loss of 80 small affordable apartments to be replaced with 34 apartments is a reduction of 57% which blatantly violates the City of Sydney's new planning rule that all new developments do not result in a greater than 15% net loss of dwellings. The possible creation of 9 new affordable apartments by destroying 80 existing studios is completely at odds with NSW Government and City of Sydney policies to increase affordable housing.

HERITAGE

In the original DA the developers utilised the City of Sydney's designation that the Chimes building was 'detracting' from the heritage and aesthetic character of the neighbourhood as justification for demolition. Recently and mainly due to the efforts of the PPPG, and reinforced by an independent heritage assessment report in 2024, the City now regards the Chimes as 'contributory' to the Potts Point Heritage Conservation Area and worthy of retention. This should invalidate the new DA from the outset. (*see background detail below*). From a heritage point of view it will not only be a loss of an important Modernist building from the 1960s but dilute the special Modernist group of 30 apartment buildings from the 1960s which are unique to the Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay area.

HEIGHT

The average height of buildings in the area is 20-30 metres, yet the proposed development is over 50 metres. This 60% increase in height is excessive, inappropriate for the residential community and significantly out of proportion to surrounding buildings. It will cause overshadowing, loss of views, a wind tunnel effect and compromise the low-rise nature of the neighbourhood. These height offsets expose a shameful and cynical manipulation of the current planning rules with no real benefit to the community or Sydney's housing shortage..

REMEDICATION NOT DEMOLITION

Functioning buildings such as the Chimes which have heritage significance as well as social value should be remediated and not demolished. Remediating buildings offers a more sustainable and environmentally responsible approach, prioritizing reuse and reducing the environmental impact of construction. In this case remediation would retain the affordable housing that the State is desperate to provide and retain the diversity of residents that is characteristic of the neighbourhood. The site is large enough to accommodate a second building adjacent to the existing one and claims by the developer that remediation is not possible need to be properly scrutinised and considered suspect as self-serving justification for the preferred option of demolition. A similar example in the area is the Minerva/Metro Theatre where the State Heritage Council unquestioningly accepted the developer's claim that the theatre could not be restored (ignoring multiple views that this was false) and approved a hotel on the site. Fortuitously, the Minerva was purchased by a local philanthropist and will be restored to a live theatre, validating the claims of the community and other experts.

Summary

The Potts Point Preservation Group regards this concept proposal as lacking merit and justification. The application to build an oversize building has the prime objective of creating large apartments for the very wealthy. The ultimate result will be the loss of a heritage building full of affordable housing, a major reduction of housing stock in the area while evicting long-term residents and destroying the diversity of the neighbourhood. The proposal should be refused.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Peter Sheridan AM
On behalf of the Potts Point Preservation Group

BACKGROUND DETAIL

The unique architectural profile of Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay is its 20th century architecture, namely Art Deco (1930-1940) and Modernist (1960-1970) apartment buildings. In this compact 1sq km community of 16000 people, 98% of people live in apartments and its contemporary vitality and harmony should be a template for low-rise high density living in Sydney. It is a liveable and walkable oasis where contemporary living exists and flourishes within a heritage framework. This is in major part made possible by the 75 Art Deco and 30 Modernist apartment buildings in the area which provide the density without any modern super high-rise buildings. The compact nature of the precinct and the fact that this contemporary community is both harmonious and diverse should be held up as an iconic example of 21st century living within a 20th century architectural profile.

The Chimes building is a Modernist building designed by émigré architect Hugo Stossell in 1964 and one of seven of his buildings in the area. His work in the area is cynically undervalued in the DA in order to justify the demolition of the Chimes building. There is reference to the Chimes being anomalous in the area which is completely false with some 10 Modernist buildings within 100 metres of it including Habitat (1 McDonald St); 17 Wylde St; Kuttabul (18 Wylde Street); Gweedore (12 Wylde Street); Denison (15 Wylde Street), Macleay Gardens (8 Macleay Street); Gemini (40 Victoria Street); 40 Macleay Street; Fairhaven (8 Wylde Street); The Gateway (3 Wylde Street); The Macleay (28 Macleay Street).

The Modernist post-war period ushered in strata title, and the 30 Modernist buildings in the area (including five by Harry Seidler) with their small one bedroom and studio apartments are the best hub of these buildings in Sydney and speak to the democratisation of ownership of property and appeal of apartment living as an alternative to the single dwelling.