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12 Onslow Avenue, Elizabeth Bay, NSW, 2011

Response to Concept Proposal for Mixed Use with Affordable Housing – 45-53 Macleay Street, Potts Point

I am writing as a resident and ratepayer to express my significant concerns about the above proposed development. There is no justification for this being treated as a 'fast track' development application via the NSW Department of Planning rather than using the appropriate pathway through the local council (City of Sydney).

Loss of affordable housing

This development proposes to demolish 80 comparatively affordable studios apartments in The Chimes and replace them with 34 apartments. There will be a net loss of 46 dwellings, which equates to almost 60%. Of the proposed apartments, 25 will be 3-bedroom luxury dwellings; only 9 will be affordable housing, and then only for 15 years after which the residents will be displaced. This development – if approved – will further hasten the destruction of the affordable housing that has long characterised this area and which has provided low and lower cost accommodation for essential workers, those on lower incomes, pensioners, students, creatives etc. This scale of reduction in dwellings is almost triple what would be permitted by the City of Sydney under the proposed planning changes that would limit the loss of dwellings in redevelopment of existing residential flat building or mixed-use development to 15%. Potts Point needs more homes, not fewer more-expensive homes.

This loss of affordable housing is significantly underplayed in the current social impact assessment. If the proposed development goes ahead in its current form, the less well-off will effectively be displaced from the existing building and replaced by those who can afford multi-million-dollar apartments. Token affordable housing concessions with a 15-year sunset do nothing to offset this. This represents an unacceptable form of social cleansing, and the population replacement will forever alter the social mix of Potts Point. Along with other residents in this area, I value the social mix of our community. Australia's increasing wealth inequalities are rooted in housing, and we do not want our suburb to become an elite enclave populated exclusively by the super-rich.

This negative impact should also be assessed as part of the cumulative loss of such housing across this local area. Five current projects in Potts Point/Elizabeth Bay have caused a net loss of 101 apartments because 20th century apartment buildings are being pulled down and replaced with large 3- & 4- bedroom apartment blocks designed only for the very wealthy. This includes approval of demolitions at 1 Onslow Place, 10 Onslow Avenue/21c Billyard Avenue, 11A and 13A Wylde Street to name just some the sites where luxury housing proposals have been greenlit in the last two years. Even the adaptive re-use of the apartment building at the corner of Ithaca Road and Billyard Avenue represents a reduction of 32 apartments to nine.

All of this runs counter to the City of Sydney's ideal future as outlined in the Sustainable Sydney 2030–2050 Continuing the Vision document, in which an 'equitable and inclusive city' with 'housing for all' are two of the ten future directions proposed by CoS.

Loss of Heritage

City of Sydney has independent expert advice that The Chimes is worthy of consideration as contributing to the HCA and, for that reason, being retained. This building was designed by the architect Hugo Stossel in 1964 and represents an example of the “international style” in 20th architecture. The proposal specifically disregards the heritage value of modern developments in the minimalist “international style” of the postwar era. As the State Heritage Inventory for the adjacent Elizabeth Bay and Rushcutters Bay HCA makes clear, buildings of the 1960s and 1970s period represent an integral part of the fabric of this part of the city and, as such, they form part of the diversity of architectural periods that should be protected. Indeed, the co-existence of 1960s and 1970s buildings alongside those of earlier periods is recognised as a key defining feature of this area. There has been public criticism of the City of Sydney’s failure to register the heritage value of buildings from the 1960s and 1970s and to offer due protection for them. This proposal is one further instance of ignoring or discounting the heritage contribution of these buildings and, if successful, would undermine an important, if under-acknowledged, element of diversity in the City of Sydney that should be preserved and protected.

Allowing this DA would result in a loss of history and a permanent defacement of this extraordinary historic Sydney community in general and the Macleay Street streetscape in particular. Both State Government and City of Sydney Council take a one-building-at-a-time mentality which works well for remaining 19th structures but is anomalous in a 20th or 21st century context. In the case of Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay, there is a significant assemblage of some 75 Art Deco and 30 Modernist apartment buildings. While many of these may not be suitable for singular State Heritage listing, the collective impact of these buildings is truly significant. This is how Napier in New Zealand and Miami South Beach in Florida are represented and similar protections should be in place for Potts Point and Elizabeth Bay in their totality.

Adaptive Re-use

The greenest building is the one that already exists. It is environmentally unsound to demolish a building given the carbon impact it creates when it can be renovated or left in its perfectly adequate current state. The current adaptive reuse study by URBIS and SJB is inadequate. It is remarkable how Urbis can be relied upon to produce reports that minimise all manner of negative impacts of proposed developments. A more fully developed independent study should be undertaken, one that looks seriously at the options for retaining and uplifting the current building.

Bulk and Height

The plans present a structure that is unsympathetic to the heritage environment and has a scale and bulk that mean it will dominate the streetscape and have a detrimental impact on the Potts Point HCA. The proposed building presents an excessive and overbearing presence to Macleay Street, McDonald Street and McDonald Lane encroaching all neighbours’ rights to privacy, natural light, sunlight and outlook. In particular, the proposed building will block natural light and sunlight to Macleay Regis residents facing Macleay Street. Significant buildings such as the Macleay Regis should not be visually dominated by an unsympathetic development with little redeeming value in architectural design terms.

The proposed height is not in keeping with this area of Macleay Street where surrounding buildings have an average height of only about 20-30 metres. While this excess height and bulk will be permanent, the trade-off of providing a mere 9 affordable apartments will only be in place for 15 years. The proposed building has a height, scale, bulk, and form that mean it will seriously detract from the historical environment. The spaceship style of AI generated architectural design does not

connect in any way to the surrounding built environment. In this respect, the proposed development would be a detracting building defined in the Heritage DCP 2006 as “buildings that are intrusive to a heritage conservation area or heritage streetscape because of inappropriate scale, bulk, setbacks, setting or materials”. Adjacent developments such as Villard at 18 Macleay Street, The Dorchester at 38 Macleay Street, and Pomeroy at 14 Macleay Street (adjacent to the Macleay Regis) are clear examples of recent residential developments that maximise the affordances of their respective sites and yet are sympathetic to the existing heritage streetscape and enhance the neighbourhood.

In conclusion, I am opposed to the substance of this proposal and to the process under which development approval is being sought. Should development at this site go forward, I submit that a more sympathetic and responsive architectural design should be considered based on a genuine assessment of the needs of the local area and requiring a reduced development envelope.

Sincerely,

Dr Maryanne Dever