

Submission on Sirius Development Application (SSD10384) from Save Our Sirius Inc (SOS)

Introduction

The Save Our Sirius Foundation was formed in 2015 and registered as an incorporated association in 2018.

Its primary aim was to celebrate the building and its people. A Green Ban and a Land and Environment Court judgement that the government failed in its consideration of a Heritage Council recommendation for listing Sirius on the State Heritage Register had not been enough to achieve our aim.

As the architect of the building, Tao Gofers, says in response to this proposal: “My preference would be that no amendments are made to the existing building.” That would be our preference also, and in particular that the reuse of the building for social and affordable housing should be considered.

The Government claims that funds from the sale of Sirius will be used to build more social housing. This is a superficial argument as the total State housing budget determines funds available for housing. We also note it will now be almost impossible to find suitable sites for social housing in the city centre, thus defeating the objective of socially mixed communities.

All that being said, SOS wishes to add whatever value it can to the remnants of the architectural and social ideals remaining. Our following comments have been grouped under convenient headings and we would be most happy to continue discussions on any matters.

We agree with the applicant’s social consultant Cred Consulting, that the substantial retention of the Sirius building as proposed, including the Phillip Room, responds to our previously expressed concerns regarding the loss of social history. Cred do not however address our main concerns with the loss of social and affordable housing in the CBD and the negative impact on the creation of truly mixed communities.

The Rocks was the birthplace of public housing in Australia and even now the deliver of key worker housing is a priority for the State’s Eastern City Strategy and the City of Sydney’s Sustainable 2030 strategy. This proposal removes 79 affordable-social housing units from the City and increases the City’s bias away from a mixed community.

On the positive side, we support Cred’s request for new lighting to increase passive surveillance and their request that a future public art strategy be required to convey the social and cultural history of Sirius.

The Cred study points out that the area, in comparison to the rest of the City of Sydney and NSW generally, has a current low cultural and linguistic diversity, a higher percentage of high density dwellings, smaller household sizes, more people living alone, fewer couples with children, and more households renting privately. The area has less social housing (3.3%) compared to the City of Sydney local government area of 8%. This is a decline from 18.2% in 2011 due to the sale of 206 social housing dwellings in Millers Point. This is

contrary to the express direction of the Greater Sydney Planning Commission that all new developments should include up to 10% of social or affordable housing.

As another example of this skew towards monoculturalism, home ownership has the highest percentage in the local government area – 23.1% compared to an average of 12.5% and more than half of the households in the area are high income households – the highest proportion in the City of Sydney local government area.

In light of the above, some response would have been expected to the SEAR's requirement of "proposed measures to avoid, minimise or mitigate any negative social impacts and measures to enhance positive social impacts". As no response has been achieved from the applicant, we propose a condition of approval similar to the following:

That one of the proposed SOHO apartments or other 1 bedroom apartments (equal to 1.3% of the proposed dwellings) be designated as an affordable housing unit with an appropriate reduction in rental and managed in accordance with the State's policy on affordable housing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- The through block link from Cumberland Street to Gloucester Walk should be conditioned to be available for public access at all times.
- The comments of the Design Integrity Panel requesting retention and public use of the Phillip Room should be enshrined in an appropriate condition and be included in the proposed Operational Plan of Management.
- The new height limit for Sirius should not be taken as an excuse to extend height limits in the vicinity. This is a unique and historical situation.

Signed on behalf of Save Our Sirius Inc



John McInerney
Chair, SOS