



COMMISSION APPROVES HIGH-RISE STUDENT ACCOMMODATION FOR “THE BLOCK”

4 March 2019

The state’s Independent Planning Commission has approved with conditions plans for high-rise student accommodation on land known as “The Block”, in inner-city Redfern.

The Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC) applied to the Department of Planning & Environment to modify the existing concept approval for its Pemulwuy Project to include a 24-storey student accommodation tower within Precinct Three of the development.

The Department referred the matter to the Commission for final determination amid community opposition.

Chair of the Commission, Professor Mary O’Kane AC, appointed a three-member Panel, comprising Mr Soo-Tee Cheong (Panel Chair), Ms Ilona Millar and Dr Peter Williams, to scrutinise the proposed changes to the project.

AHC’s application sought:

- State Significant Development consent for the construction of a 24-storey student accommodation building – providing 596 student beds, students amenities, open space, public domain works and landscaping, bicycle parking, loading dock and services
- modifications to the concept approval to increase building height, floor space ration (FSR) student accommodation beds, delete the land-bridge, dedicate open space to City of Sydney Council and reconfigure uses, and
- modifications to the project approval to delete Precinct Three buildings / works, the land-bridge and delete/amend related conditions, replace the Precinct 1 retail with gallery use and amend the public domain works and landscaping.

The Commissioners met with the applicant, Department and City of Sydney Council representatives and conducted an inspection of the site and surrounding areas.

They also listened to the community’s views on the Pemulwuy Project during a public meeting at Surry Hills in December last year. Concerns raised by residents related to building heights and overshadowing; pedestrian, traffic and car parking issues; the need for more affordable housing for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; and cultural, noise and social impacts.

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Following careful consideration of all the evidence before it, the Commission has today (Monday 4 March 2019) determined to approve, subject to conditions, AHC's revised plans for its Pemulwuy Project.

In its Statement of Reasons for Decision, the Commission concluded the changes to the project are in the public interest, as they will:

- present no significant adverse social or cultural impacts and be consistent with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development
- deliver 62 affordable housing dwellings
- provide other public benefits, such as subsidised student accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as public domain improvements
- not mimic or distort the significance of surrounding heritage items
- retain culturally significant Aboriginal art walls
- achieve design excellence, and
- provide appropriate management of the student accommodation.

"The Commission acknowledges the cultural significance of the development site to the local [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community," the Commission stated in its Report.

"The Commission also acknowledges the community's concerns raised at the public meeting regarding the need to ensure continued housing for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] people within the development site and the potential social impacts of the student accommodation."

However, the Commission found "the proposed development will not substantially alter the impact of the Pemulwuy development on the neighbourhood, from that of the approved development."

"The Pemulwuy Precinct site currently consists of vacant parcels of land and (the Commission) accepts the Department's finding ... that it does not make efficient use of the land to provide housing for the community. The Commission considers that the proposed development provides an opportunity for urban renewal to respond to the area's emerging urban context," it added.

The Commission's full Statement of Reasons for Decision is available here:

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/projects/2018/10/pemulwuy-project>

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