

Pymont Peninsula Place and Economic Strategies

Submission from the Committee for Sydney

September 2020

Introduction

The Committee for Sydney welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the draft Pymont Peninsula Place and Economic Strategies, led by the NSW Department for Planning, Industry and Environment and NSW Treasury.

The Committee is a member of the Western Harbour Alliance, and supports their vision for Western Harbour Precinct, published in December 2019. That vision recognises that Pymont is already a great place to live, work and socialise, but that more could be done to enhance its economy and improve its public realm.

We wish to congratulate NSW Government on the publication of an ambitious and visionary strategy for the Pymont Peninsula. The draft reports are the result of extensive consultation and provide a masterplan for the precinct for the first time in a generation.

We are greatly encouraged by much of the content of both the Place and Economic strategies. In particular, both documents highlight the enormous potential of the peninsula and the wide range of benefits it could bring to the local community and Sydney as a whole.

Pymont is strategically one of the most important parts of the Harbour CBD. The precinct is well positioned geographically to have close links with the emerging tech precinct at Central-to-Eveleigh; the arts and hospitality hubs of Darling Harbour and Cockle Bay and the major financial and professional services centre at Barangaroo. It is also linked to major centres of education, such as University of Technology Sydney and TAFE.

It is both a major residential area, a hub for jobs and businesses and one of the city's most important precincts for tourism, entertainment and hospitality. As Sydney recovers from the COVID-pandemic and economic recession, Pymont should continue to play a substantial role in the social and economic renewal of Sydney.

1. Five Big Moves are a major step forward for Pyrmont

We support the Five Big Moves announced in the Place Strategy, which will help to make the peninsula a greener, open, better connected and vibrant precinct.

Mobility has to be central to the strategy

The Big Moves are underpinned by a commitment to build a metro stop at Pyrmont as part of the Sydney Metro West project. We are very supportive of this idea, particularly if the station has an entrance on both sides of the peninsula. Many of the aspirations set out in the strategy documents can only be realised by investing in fast rail that connects Pyrmont to both the CBD and Parramatta.

Although Pyrmont is currently served by light rail, bus and ferry services, its connectivity suffers from a lack of heavy rail infrastructure that links the area with the broader city. Connectivity challenges can arise from the Pyrmont being a peninsula. Existing infrastructure including Pyrmont Bridge, light rail and parts of the harbour pedestrian promenade are often above capacity. More recent decisions will exacerbate connectivity challenges, such as the doubling of retail floor space at the new Sydney Fish Market.

The Metro West project currently proposes a stop at Pyrmont and the Bays Precinct in Rozelle. We support building both. Given the high number of residents already living in Pyrmont, and the potential for further growth of employment and retail developments in the area, it makes social and economic sense to enhance mass transport options in the locality now.

There is also a vital opportunity to reimagine the use of the Glebe Island Bridge as an essential local connection between Pyrmont and Bays West. We would like to see the bridge prioritise cycling and pedestrian access, which would not only improve active transport access along the peninsula, but also create an attractive landmark in the city. It could also provide a local public transport connection across the bay.

Make the precinct a great nightlife destination

Pyrmont borders some of Sydney's most prominent centres for hospitality, nightlife, culture and tourism. As these areas rebuild following the COVID-19 lockdown, there is potential for Pyrmont to expand local amenities, particularly in the creative industries. The development of local nightlife should be balanced with the interests of local residents but remembering that many in the local community would benefit from having a vibrant and diverse mix of arts, hospitality and cultural venues on their doorstep.

The area is also perfectly suited to embed nightlife in its open and public spaces, including greater provision for outdoor dining and activities and open-air cultural activities. With NSW Government releasing its 24-hour economy strategy, Pyrmont is perfectly placed to build upon its existing infrastructure and lead Sydney's nightlife renaissance.



We must create great open, green and public spaces

We very much support the aspiration set out in the Place Strategy to create a tapestry of green canopy and open spaces. Pyrmont contains some of the densest parts of Sydney, which with neighbouring Ultimo has the third highest population density in Australia at 16,170 pp/sqkm (2018), and it is vital that people have access to high-quality public space to congregate, socialise and exercise.

The decision to return Wentworth Park to community use in 2027 is particularly welcome. Returning the open and green space for public use will be a valuable resource for the local area.

In addition, we support the idea of activating land under the Western Distributor and on Darling Drive to create temporary or permanent new public space. We are particularly keen to see more active transport facilities located in both spaces. The Place Strategy could go even further to reduce the impacts of the overhead freeway interchange with closure, modification or removal of some or all ramp and access to and from the Western Distributor.

New developments across the peninsula at Blackwattle Bay, Fish Market and Harbourside also creates the opportunity to create great public spaces. In particular, we would like to see a link created between parks and green spaces across the peninsula, as an important addition to the Greater Sydney Green Grid.

We also wish to ensure that a future approach to the peninsula fully utilises the potential of former industrial areas including White Bay and Rozelle Power Station. There is enormous potential for urban regeneration of both sites, creating great spaces for people to live, work and socialise and connecting precincts across the peninsula as well as providing for vital harbour services.

Get the planning and governance framework right

We recognise that a considerable amount of work has been undertaken by the Department for Planning, Industry and Environment and the Greater Sydney Commission to review and define a draft planning strategy for Pyrmont.

We particularly support the implementation of a planning framework that would allow the precinct to reach its economic potential. The Pyrmont Peninsula is already home to a lot of mixed-used development and a diversity of housing density. Some parts of the precinct have some of the highest levels of density in Sydney, whilst other areas have smaller block and terraces.

We believe that the precinct plan should permit new and upgraded developments in Pyrmont and Ultimo that are sympathetic with its unique character. In addition, given the area's proximity to the CBD, we support the medium and high-density development for both employment and retail options, where it is sympathetic to local character and supported by infrastructure, particularly active and public transport. Greater height and density can and



should be incorporated alongside significant investment in mass public transport in both precincts.

Governance of the peninsula and the broader Western Harbour is also vital to its future success. The Committee for Sydney is a member of the Western Harbour Alliance. The Alliance has worked collaboratively across the public, private and civic sectors to develop and articulate a vision for Pyrmont that has broad consensus. We believe that this way of working will draw significant benefit for diverse stakeholders across the precinct.

We also believe that there is strong merit in creating a pilot Business Improvement District across the Western Harbour, with the option of including the Pyrmont Peninsula, which would include a governance framework that utilised the voices of major business stakeholders, local and state government and community representatives.

Deliver good social and environmental outcomes through the strategy

The Place Strategy identifies the importance of building more social and affordable housing in Pyrmont. We support maintaining a strong residential element in Pyrmont, as well as offering a diversity of housing options and price points. As with many parts of Sydney, housing affordability is a big challenge in Pyrmont, and we encourage state government to invest in social and affordable housing for residents. The historical role that Pyrmont has played as a place where low-medium income people can live should be retained.

Discussions about Pyrmont often focus on the issue of density. We believe that density is not only a suitable option for Pyrmont but could also enhance its public realm. Density done well, in sympathy with local heritage and design, and accompanied with relevant social and physical infrastructure such as convenient public transport, is appropriate for an inner urban location like Pyrmont.

It is vital that future growth in the peninsula be based on a low or zero carbon approach. An important part of this will be to shift people from private vehicles to use public and active transport; promote the use of renewable energy as much as possible in the precinct and greater use of tree canopy and access to water to cool down local streets.

We also support the aspiration to create safer, greener streets in Pyrmont. In particular, reclaiming Pyrmont's high streets from congestion and clutter, including widening footpaths, planting trees and removing infrastructure that clutters high streets, and removing clearways.

In tandem with the economic regeneration of Pyrmont post-COVID, these changes would help to encourage commerce and retail along local high streets, as well as making the areas safer and more liveable for the local community.

Get parking provisions right

We support the aspiration in the Place Strategy to re-think parking solutions, and particularly to open up road capacity for public transport, walking and cycling. Restricting



on-site parking for residential and commercial developments would be a sensible and welcome move, as well as helping Pyrmont become a low-carbon precinct.

Aggregating and reducing parking into central garages or multi-utility hubs potentially means that street space can be used for things like wider footpaths or cycle lanes, both of which we support.

2. Suggestions on how to make a great strategy even better

Find a solution to the Western Distributor

The Western Distributor overpass is one of the most prominent structures in the Western Harbour, but we believe there is merit in exploring what its long-term future should be. Very few Western countries are building new highways and indeed many are actively removing elevated freeways from urban areas.

Removing the road in stages, in tandem with investment in the area's public transport, would transform Pyrmont and the broader Western Harbour. It would reconnect the Western Harbour with the rest of the CBD, and it would remove one of the great physical barriers between different parts of the Western Harbour. As a first step, it has been suggested that bringing the Anzac Bridge off-ramp down to ground, and possibly linking to the Cross City Tunnel, could bring the city to the waterfront and reconnected Fish Market and Wentworth Park.

For the first step, we recommend that DPIE and Transport for NSW jointly commission a study to look at the long-term future of the highway, with the goal of removing or relocating it over time. We are not naïve about the scale of this undertaking, but we believe it would make eminent sense for Government to understand what the options are.

Enhance more streets and public spaces

For the vision of the public realm improvements to be translated into reality, much depends on funding and implementation. We recommend that the team develop an implementation plan for public realm improvements, which would identify how each improvement is funded, who is in charge of implementation.

In addition, we suggest consideration of the following additional public realm improvements:

- Prepare a Complete Streets Strategy for Pirrama Road as a key desire line from Pirrama Park to Pyrmont Bay Park. Complete street to adopt a place-led and human-centric approach, which safely and effectively integrates all modes of transport while enhancing streets as places.
- Rationalise the intersection of Murray Street, Union Street and Pyrmont Bridge Road to improve pedestrian and cycling flow. Continue public domain improvements down Miller Street in-line with the Union Street treatment, including street trees and cycle lanes. Explore the opportunity to widen Union Street footpath to



accommodate high pedestrian flows, delivered through setback controls and/or 'road diets.'

- Explore pedestrian bridge options that utilise the Pyrmont Bridge Road gradient to create a continuous link across Bank Street and the Western Distributor, arriving at podium level in Blackwattle Bay.
- Explore closing Pyrmont Bridge Road adjacent to the Sydney Fish Market to unify Wentworth Park with the waterfront. Realignment can redirect traffic to Wattle Street.

Protect Pyrmont from the impact of climate change

Global sea levels are rising and increasing the risk to coastal communities from inundation and erosion. Therefore, we urge a long-term precinct plan for Pyrmont to examine the likely impact on the peninsula of rising water levels.

This is a rare opportunity for Sydney to set the stage for longer-term resilience from sea level rises and should not be missed. We recommend that DPIE Commission an implementation plan on how to elevate the defined grade level for building pads, infrastructure, and public spaces.