

Star Casino redevelopment (MP08_0098 MOD 13)

I write to urge the Independent Planning Commission to support the proposed development of the Ritz-Carlton Tower at The Star in Pyrmont.

The New South Wales Planning & Environment Department's recommendation against the Ritz-Carlton proposal is a significant disappointment to the Sydney tourism sector, local business leaders and many residents who live in Pyrmont and surrounding suburbs. These are stakeholders who recognise the importance of Sydney securing much-needed additional hotel accommodation, construction and permanent jobs, and long-term investor confidence.

The recommendation comes after four years of consultation by the proponents with the Department, local residents and other stakeholders such as the City of Sydney, undertaken at considerable cost in both financial and human resources.

The elected Councillors in the City of Sydney have been briefed by the proponents on details of the development, particularly the height and scale, as part of those consultations. As an outside observer, it seems reasonable that the Department, if it had objections to these most basic aspects of a \$500 million investment by a significant tourism proponent, should have made its views known much earlier in the planning process.

As Australia's global city, Sydney should have tall and iconic buildings in locations close to transport, visitor and commercial infrastructure. The proposed Ritz-Carlton Tower ticks these boxes, given its proximity to existing light rail and ferry, and future metro lines; Darling Harbour tourism and conference infrastructure; and redevelopment projects such as Barangaroo, the Fish Market and Bays Precinct.

As a mixed-use development, such as envisaged by the City of Sydney's own draft Central Sydney Planning Strategy, it would be a significant contributor to the city's stock of hotel accommodation. It is well documented that Sydney needs to address a chronic supply gap in our hotel sector, where occupancy rates are hovering at a consistently high 85-90%. That need is supported by figures from Destination NSW that show international and domestic visitor nights in Sydney are expected to increase from around 103 million in 2016-2017 to more than 170.7 million in 2026-2027.

The Ritz-Carlton development would also provide approximately 1,700 square metres of dedicated, mixed-use community space over five floors. As one of Sydney's most densely populated areas, Pyrmont and its residents have been crying out for significant new community infrastructure: a call which until now had fallen on deaf ears at the City of Sydney.

Nor is there strong evidence that there is widespread opposition to the proposal among the local residents. I draw the Commission's attention to the Department of Planning & Environment's Assessment Report published on the Commission's website, which shows there were 144 submissions on the Ritz-Carlton proposal in response to a 28-day public exhibition period that closed in September last year. This was despite nearly 5,000 people visiting the information display of the plans and model.

At the end of the period a total of 117 submissions were received from the public. Of those, 88 were objecting and 27 expressing support, with another two simply commenting. This can hardly be described as a groundswell of opposition. By way of comparison another recent State Significant project, the Art Gallery of NSW Expansion Project (Sydney Modern), attracted a far higher number of

responses (283) from the public, of which 202 were objections and 70 were in support. Despite this far more considerable opposition, that proposal has now been approved.

Nor can there be any denying the economic and other public benefits this proposal would bring, as acknowledged by the Department itself. It is estimated that the project would create 1,000 jobs in the construction phase, at a time when lack of confidence in the residential sector is hurting the construction industry, and hundreds of permanent jobs into the future.

As Premier Gladys Berejiklian acknowledged when announcing on 19 August 2019 a well-overdue review of the planning rules and infrastructure requirements for the precinct: “With a growing population, we know there will be more development in Pymont in the future.”

And as Planning Minister Rob Stokes said of the review, to be undertaken by the Greater Sydney Commission: “We must ensure that our planning system is clear and effective in supporting the type and scale of development needed in a top quality, vibrant, mixed-use precinct.”

The Ritz-Carlton proposal is that “type and scale of development,” and our planning authorities now need to send a strong signal that Sydney is a good place to invest: that we welcome bold design and that we want the jobs, visitors and amenity that proposals like this would bring.