



NSW PLANNING ASSESSMENT COMMISSION

6 February 2009

Review of Recommendation in the DG's report Modifications to Concept Plan for Barangaroo

On 23 January 2009, the Director General of the Department of Planning wrote to the Chairman of the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) advising that the Minister for Planning has requested the PAC to undertake a review of the recommendation of the Department of Planning's Assessment Report (DG's report) for the modification to the Concept Plan approval for the development of the Barangaroo site.

The terms of review are:

- 1. The Planning Assessment Commission is to review the reasonableness of the recommendation of the Director-General's report.*
- 2. The Review is to be undertaken and reported to the Department at the earliest opportunity.*
- 3. The Planning Assessment Commission is not required to hold a public hearing in relation to this Review.*
- 4. The Planning Assessment Commission is not required to consult with persons who made submissions in relation to the application to modify the Concept Plan approval.*
- 5. Appropriate staff of the Department of Planning will brief members of the Planning Assessment Commission appointed to the review, if required.*
- 6. The Planning Assessment Commission shall be constituted by at least 2 members.*

The Commission consisted of Ms Gabrielle Kibble (Chairman of the PAC) and Mr Lindsay Kelly (Member of the PAC). The Commission was briefed by senior staff of the Department. The Commission also viewed the model of the development which sets the site in the context of the Sydney CBD.

The approved Concept Plan for the Barangaroo site provides for a mixed use development involving a maximum of 388,300m² of gross floor area for commercial, residential (min 58,245m² to max 97,075m²), tourist (max 50,000m²), retail (max 39,000m²) and community (min 2,000m²) uses. The application to modify the approved Concept Plan seeks approval to increase the allowable commercial floor space for Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 by 50,000m² to 120,000m² GFA. No changes are being sought to the approved floorspace for other land uses, ie, residential, retail, tourist and community. The modification, if approved, will result in an increase to the approved total GFA on the site from 388,300m² to 508,300m².

According to the Environmental Assessment (June 2008), justifications for the modification include:

- Office space development in the Sydney CBD is constrained, particularly for offices offering large floorplates as potential development sites consist of small contiguous properties that will require consolidation.

- The approved concept provides for buildings with relatively small and disconnected floorplates. These configurations do not meet commercial tenant demand for large contiguous spaces;
- The strategic context of Barangaroo has changed since the announcement of the North West Metro (now referred to as the CBD metro) which includes a station close to the site. Other possible transport initiatives include light rail system along Hickson Road, a ferry hub or wharf;
- The proposed additional commercial floorspace will not affect the site's suitability to accommodate the land uses approved in the concept plan; and
- Positive social and economic impacts including increase employment opportunities, meeting demand for premium office space and strengthening Sydney's role as a global city.

The Department's assessment focused on the key issues raised in submissions and identified during the assessment process. These include:

- Economic and public benefits
- Relationship to the CBD Metro
- Urban design and built form
- Increase in Gross Floor Area (GFA)/density
- Traffic and public transport
- Expansion/increase in commercial uses on the site
- Social impacts
- Consistency with the design principles of the approved concept plan
- Other issues include overshadowing, wind impacts, views and view corridors, heritage and demand on utilities, services and infrastructure.

Commission Assessment

The Planning Assessment Commission has been asked to review the reasonableness of the recommendation of the DG's Report. The Commission believes that the assessment and recommendation of the DG's Report is reasonable, but makes the following observations.

1. The DG's report concludes that the additional commercial GFA is generally acceptable and the impacts of the proposed development will be addressed via a range of additional built form controls, changes to the compliance documentation and through the design competition process required by the SEPP. The Commission notes that this approval essentially deals with floorspace increase and concept for development of the site. Future project applications for individual buildings will need to address the built form design principles and controls and it is imperative that these applications be assessed in detail.

Whilst the proposed increase in GFA is very significant, the Commission considers the increase is an appropriate response to the strategic importance of the Barangaroo development to the future of Sydney.

2. The proposed increase in the GFA to 211,907 m² for Block 2 will create a high development density (higher than that currently allowable for the Sydney CBD). Whilst this may cause some public concern, Block 2, with its access to Wynyard Station is the logical location for a substantial part of the additional GFA and it can be achieved within the currently approved development envelope.

Whilst the DG's Report permits a redistribution of the GFA between Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5, the GFA of 211,907 m² on Block 2 should be capped due to its already very high level of development. The total approved GFA for Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 can be redistributed between the blocks, but should not exceed the total approved GFA and no increase to be allowed on Block 2.

3. To ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place to support the increase in the commercial activity, the Commission supports the Department's recommendation that the Wynyard link should be completed prior to occupation of Block 2. The Commission is also of the view that the link should be built prior to the completion of any commercial developments on Blocks 3, 4 and 5.
4. The implementation of the key components of the proposed Transport Management and Access Plan need to be given a high priority.

The Commission notes that the Barangaroo development is predicated on a high modal split to public transport and the construction of the CBD metro is very important to secure the modal split targets.

5. To achieve the objectives of making Hickson Road and Globe Street the major public thoroughfares, the proposed street walls/podiums should be set as an absolute requirement and alternative pedestrian movements between Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 as permitted by the approval should not occur at the expense of achieving the objectives for Hickson Road and Globe Street, and other areas of the public domain.
6. The Minister's approval will incorporate the original approval, aspects of a number of documents submitted by the proponent (the Environmental Assessment and Appendices for the Modification June 2008 and the preferred project report and its addendum October 2008) and the Department's response to those documents. As the built form controls in these documents form a significant part of the Director General's Report and his recommendations, the Commission's interpretation of these controls has informed its advice to the Minister.

The prevailing document on built form controls (in the event of inconsistencies) will be the Minister's Instrument of Approval, and specifically within that Instrument, the Statement of Commitments in Schedule 3 and Parts B & C in Schedule 2.

The Statement of Commitments in Schedule 3 requires that the future development of Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 have to be consistent with the urban design controls in Table 1 to Section 2.1.1 of the PPR (proponent's response to issues raised in submissions to the EA) dated October 2008 (pages 7-9). Table 1 uses Block 3 for illustrative purposes only, and therefore it requires some level of interpretation for Blocks 2, 4 and 5. It is noted that the urban design controls in Table 1 may be viewed as guidelines, allowing for innovation and flexibility to assist in achieving an improved outcome, but are also viewed as minimum requirements to ensure that the primary urban design objectives and design excellence are achieved. In addition, the final designs for each development block will be subject to an approved "Design Excellence Strategy".

Parts B & C in Schedule 2 of the recommended Minister's Instrument of Approval partially modifies Table 1, and where it is not modified, Table 1 establishes the urban design and built form controls.


Conclusion

The Commission has reviewed the Director General's Assessment Report for the proposed modification and associated recommended conditions of approval, the Environmental Assessment Report, the PPR (proponent's response to submissions to EA) and the Addendum to the PPR.

The Commission considers the DG's report provides a comprehensive assessment of key issues and the recommendation is reasonable given the importance of providing for the expansion of Sydney CBD with a site which will allow large commercial floorplates to be developed. The Commission also notes that a considerable amount of work will be required and must be continued on the design of individual buildings at the project application stage that meets the design principles.



Gabrielle Kibble
Chairman



Lindsay Kelly
PAC member