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Submission Type

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Submission file

[pyrmont-peninsula-place-and-economic-strategy---wha-submission.pdf](#)

Submission

Please find attached a submission from the Western Harbour Alliance.

I agree to the above statement

Yes

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Pymont Peninsula Place and Economic Strategies: Western Harbour Alliance submission

Introduction

The Western Harbour Alliance welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Pymont Peninsula Place Strategy and Economic Strategy.

The Alliance is a coalition of major stakeholders across the Western Harbour. Participating organisations include Accor/Sofitel Darling Harbour, Australian National Maritime Museum, Celestino, Lendlease, Groaton Development, ICC Sydney, Mirvac, Sydney Fish Market, The Star and TransDev. The Alliance is supported by the Accommodation Association of Australia, Committee for Sydney and Sydney Business Chamber. It was originally convened in 2015, in response to opportunities and challenges emerging from more than \$10bn in imminent prospective development and investment across the Western Harbour, and the desire to optimise the precinct as it developed, as a multi-dimensional but holistic strategic asset for Sydney and New South Wales.

Since it was more formally reconstituted in 2018, the Alliance has commissioned two pieces of substantive planning: a foundation vision and strategy prepared by Roberts Day in 2018-19; and a draft Business Plan for the program of work to be undertaken under a proposed Business Improvement District governance trial, in 2019.

The Alliance's vision for the Precinct as articulated and pursued in those documents is:

For the Western Harbour to realise its potential as a key strategic and economic asset for Sydney and NSW, by becoming a truly world class waterfront. The Western Harbour will provide the best of contemporary Sydney experiences in one place, as a fully-integrated, officially-designated "Sydney-signature" Entertainment and Tourism Precinct, loved by locals and visitors alike.

After years of effort and substantial investment, the Alliance is reassured that the draft Pymont Peninsula Place Strategy and Economic Strategy so strongly align with this vision, and the strategic priorities set out in our key pieces of planning.

We therefore very much welcome the draft strategies. Both documents are the result of significant and robust consultation with stakeholders across the precinct. For the first time in a generation, the Pymont Peninsula has the prospect of an officially endorsed, exciting and vibrant vision for the future. NSW Government should be congratulated both for the process, and for producing an extremely high-quality long-term plan.

The process represents a welcome continuation of a strategic approach to the precinct, which could be traced back to conferences held in 2015 and 2016, with presenters including Lucy Turnbull, Nick Greiner, Patricia Forsythe and Monica Barone. The Greater Sydney Commission's review, requested by the Premier in 2019, escalated the discussion, and the Committee for Sydney's Western Harbour Summit in December 2019 saw the Treasurer and the Planning Minister each endorse the Alliance's vision for the Precinct and a proposed trial of a form of Business Improvement District to manage it. They also foreshadowed the most recent piece of economic development strategy-informed place planning for Pymont, in the company of the Lord Mayor of Sydney. Now the resultant draft Pymont Peninsula Place Strategy and Economic Strategy consolidate and develop this work significantly, to provide a plan, which if implemented, will bring huge benefits to people who live, work and visit Pymont, as well as to the area and Sydney as a whole.

Strategic Overview

The Western Harbour Alliance recognises that Pyrmont is one of Sydney's most iconic, important and valuable precincts. Importantly, however, the Alliance's very *raison d'être* recognises that Pyrmont is even more valuable if optimised in the context of the surrounding and adjacent parts of the Western Harbour, which extends broadly from the Barangaroo Headland around the harbour front to Blackwattle Bay, and south to the Powerhouse Museum. Analysis by PwC in 2015 estimated that the incremental value to NSW of aligning and co-ordinating the planning, development, activation and promotion of this "super-precinct" would exceed \$2bn per year by 2025. This "value of alignment" could be considered in addition to the \$4.2bn to \$4.9bn of additional economic output estimated by PwC in the Pyrmont Economic Development Strategy. The Alliance therefore recommends that plans for Pyrmont must address and support both the internal characteristics and opportunities of the peninsula itself, while also ensuring that the strategic purpose and user experience of the precinct is seamlessly integrated with the adjacent parts of the Western Harbour.

The Alliance also believes that the Western Harbour's extraordinary potential contribution to the State's future economy and prosperity should warrant its official designation as a signature precinct for the State. Given its uniquely compelling and valuable combination of harbour front location, characteristics, assets and experiences, the Western Harbour has the potential to play a similar role for Sydney as Marina Bay has played for Singapore since the early 2000s. Just as Marina Bay has become the globally-recognised "picture postcard" for Singapore, the Western Harbour can provide a new, contemporary, experience-rich shopfront for Sydney, to offer a much-needed addition to the traditional "Opera House and Bridge" imagery¹.

As the state finalises its definition of the competitive positioning platform it will use to promote Sydney, the Western Harbour can provide a tangible living case study of what 21st century Sydney has to offer – to locals, tourists, business and business event visitors, investors, international talent and global businesses. Such formal designation would be a powerful enabler and accelerator of the vision and ambitious plans proposed in the draft Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy.

Response to relevant aspects of draft Place Strategy and Economic Development Strategy

The generally strong alignment and synergies between the Western Harbour Alliance's vision and the Pyrmont Peninsula Place and Economic Strategies suggest exciting opportunities for the Alliance to work collaboratively with NSW Government to deliver the strategy and the related potential benefits to the precinct and beyond. The following territories have been identified as most important in the view of the Alliance, and are addressed to highlight particular opportunities or divergences warranting further consideration and dialogue:

1. Precinct Vision and strategic purpose
2. Transport connectivity
3. Appropriate sustainable growth and development
4. A cultural hub for Sydney's 24-hour renaissance
5. Public and green space
6. Governance and implementation
7. Pyrmont in the context of the Western Harbour and surrounds

¹ Note that playing this role for Sydney is not incompatible with the draft Place Strategy's aspiration to optimise Pyrmont for residents as a place to live. On the contrary, the need to recognise, protect and promote the heritage character of Pyrmont Village will be an important element of the Western Harbour's authentic, quintessentially Sydney proposition.

1. Precinct Vision and strategic purpose

While it is addressed to varying degrees elsewhere, the vision drafted into the strategy, however, appears to ignore the fundamental role of Pyrmont and the Western Harbour as a major tourism demand driver for the State. The draft vision is headlined with aspirations for the peninsula to be an “innovative, creative and cultural precinct” that will “connect” and “complement”. It makes a single reference to opportunities for jobs growth associated with the visitor economy, but neither the draft Place Strategy nor the Economic Development strategy appear to capture the very significant (likely multi-billion-dollar annual) increased economic contribution available to NSW through the optimisation of Pyrmont and the Western Harbour as a signature destination in Sydney’s tourism offering. Many of the proposed strategies and initiatives would support this opportunity, but the absence of specific reference to this key strategic role for the Precinct seems conspicuous.

This is particularly important in the current global circumstance. If Sydney and NSW is to emerge strongly from COVID19, it will need to put its major tourism assets to work compellingly and effectively. The Western Harbour has been under-valued and underleveraged in this capacity in the past. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on tourism, culture and hospitality, Pyrmont’s existing assets and its proximity to the CBD make it well positioned to lead the renaissance of Sydney’s cultural and hospitality sectors and play a key part in the revival of Australia’s domestic and international tourism markets. It should become one of the centrepieces in Sydney’s revived 24-hour economy, offering some of the highest quality and most diverse night-time experiences in Australia.

A related opportunity/challenge is highlighted by the draft Place Strategy and the proposed sub-precinct approach. A guiding principle of the Alliance’s work over many years has been the desire to establish a more user/visitor-centric, and experience-based lens for planning and activation. While the drawing of sub-precinct “boundary lines” is a useful mechanism which the Alliance supports, it will be important to cross reference the resulting plans against typical and desired future user behaviours, to ensure that impediments to the user experience are not unwittingly introduced or retained.

This approach requires some mapping of visitor behaviours, current and desired, across the greater precinct, to properly understand the relationship between various complementary assets, attractions and the experiences that they offer. This exercise should inform considerations on new assets to be introduced to the precinct, to ensure that they complement the existing assets and enhance visitor experience in ways consistent with the Precinct vision. It should also inform more co-ordinated/integrated Precinct activation planning and management, as well as planning for improved connectivity.

This way of thinking should be applied both within the Pyrmont Peninsula (across the sub-precincts) and also with respect to the user interfaces between Pyrmont and the Western Harbour, and indeed the wider adjacencies including the Bays Precinct (see 6. Pyrmont in the context of the Western Harbour below).

2. Transport connectivity

The Alliance fully supports the government's aspiration for a Metro stop at Pyrmont as part of the Sydney Metro West project. A Metro stop would bring enormous benefits to a part of Sydney that has historically lacked heavy rail infrastructure and continues to face real pressure on existing road and public transport links.

The Alliance agrees that the establishment of a Metro stop in Pyrmont on the proposed new Sydney Metro West Line is the single most important enabler of the optimisation of the Western Harbour Precinct. Importantly, it would not only allow seamless travel between Pyrmont and the CBD, but also connect the peninsula to Western Sydney, via a fast train to Parramatta, and eventually to Western Sydney Airport. Even the firm commitment to the provision of a Pyrmont station will send a strong signal of intent and provide confidence for both the local community, businesses and investors.

By including Pyrmont on Sydney Metro West, several of Sydney's key tourism destinations will be connected and activated for the first time. The CBD, the Western Harbour, Sydney Olympic Park and Parramatta offer the spine of a visitor itinerary, and their mass transit connection will support and amplify their promotion and appeal immeasurably. This will translate into additional overnight stays generating billions of new visitor economy dollars.

Connectivity challenges can arise from the precinct being a peninsula. Prior to COVID-19, existing infrastructure including Pyrmont Bridge, light rail and parts of the harbour pedestrian promenade often operated above capacity, providing below-par user experience. Since the extension to Dulwich Hill was opened a few years ago, patronage has grown on the Light Rail by around 50%, and it struggles to meet passenger demand during many hours. Recent decisions will exacerbate connectivity challenges, such as the doubling of retail floor space at the new Sydney Fish Market without increase in car parking or a mass public transport solution.

The Alliance also fully supports the draft Place Strategy and Economic Development Strategy recommendations in respect of improved other public and active transport capacity for the Precinct. The need to provide easier, more legible and seamless east-west and north-south connectivity within the Western Harbour was highlighted in the Alliances foundation planning documents. We believe there is also a need for more ferry services (and wharfs) to the precinct, including potential stops at Pirrama Park and the Fish Markets (Blackwattle Bay). This is particularly important given the likely timeframe for the completion of the Metro West, understood to be eight to ten years away. The Alliance believes that prioritising and accelerating the enhancement of other transport modes is essential if the Precinct's amenity for residents and economic contribution is to be maximised in the interim.

3. Appropriate sustainable growth and development

The Alliance welcomes the draft Place Strategy's appropriately considered "sub-precinct" approach to the future growth and development of Pyrmont. This recognises the wider context and adjacencies of the Peninsula, in the entertainment and tourism precinct of the Western Harbour, while respecting and protecting the significant value in terms of the Precinct's offering, of authentic heritage places like Pyrmont Village. The sub-precinct approach recognises the compatibility of these propositions and can enable them to be progressed harmoniously.

Development in the area should be sympathetic to both these factors. In the view of the Alliance, the Pyrmont Peninsula should allow for a certain degree of dense and tall buildings, the type of which would be found in the inner urban locations of other global cities, and in the adjacent parts of Darling Harbour. The sub-precinct approach provides for this, and the draft Place Strategy characterises the four identified key sites for growth appropriately in the Alliance's view. It will be important, in terms of providing legibility for users and certainty for investors, that there is a consistent approach to the principles by which required height and density are enabled, across the four identified key renewal sites.

The Alliance also welcomes the Place Strategy's considerations on Planning Controls, and the commitment to implement a unified Planning System. The principle that "Redevelopment of opportunity sites, including key sites ... will align with the Place Strategy" is fundamental. The Alliance believes that Planning Sydney Consideration 1 (*Set a state significant planning framework for key sites identified in the Place Strategy*) and its supporting recommendations will be an essential provision if that principle is to be upheld, and its benefits realised in a timely fashion.

4. A cultural hub for Sydney's 24-hour renaissance

Pyrmont and the broader Western Harbour already boasts some of Sydney and Australia's premier assets for tourism, culture, entertainment and hospitality. As these sectors recover from the severe impact of COVID-19, there is an enormous opportunity for the peninsula to lead this renaissance.

The precinct is home to major cultural and entertainment infrastructure including the Australian National Maritime Museum; ICC Theatre; Lyric Theatre; Powerhouse Museum; The Star Events Centre and a modern entertainment and emerging new cultural offering at Barangaroo.

The Place Strategy would be strengthened by overt acknowledgement that Western Harbour could be an even stronger tourism driver, presenting a compelling experience-led (rather than passive sightseeing backdrop) postcard for Sydney's re-emerging vibrant 24-hour offering. Enhancing the Precinct's cultural offerings from its already strong base can differentiate Sydney's night time offering, and underscore the quality and sophistication of the city's experiences – both after dark and in inclement weather.

The Place Strategy identifies Ultimo as being the sub-precinct with the scope for the greatest amount of growth, change and opportunity for the creation of new cultural experiences and facilities. In our view there is a stronger case for investment in the high-profile Western Harbour and Museum surrounds as this area provides the optimal location for a cultural hub that reflects the vibrancy of the local community and is enriched by visitors. Leveraging this highly visible, pedestrianised location would provide a far higher return on investment than investing in a less accessible area of the Peninsula.

Leading cities around the world are investing in iconic museum buildings to deliver cultural, social and economic benefits. As the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain has shown, an imaginatively designed museum can turn a city around – "The Bilbao Effect". The Western Harbour would benefit from a new iconic cultural building, with the Australian National Maritime Museum an obvious site.

5. Public and green space

The Alliance welcomes recommendations to identify, create, prioritise and showcase open, green and innovative public spaces. This aligns well with the opportunity for the precinct to embody Sydney's brand, by manifesting the clean outdoor lifestyle for which our city is recognised. Maximising, protecting and enhancing the amenity and accessibility of the precinct's green and public spaces will add to the appeal of the precinct to residents, and local and tourist visitors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of access to public and green spaces as areas for people to congregate, socialise and exercise safely. Given the sometimes dense nature of Pyrmont, and the possibility of further development, it is appropriate that a plan for the precinct must include provision for more available, attractive and accessible public space.

We strongly support the proposal to return Wentworth Park to the community as public space and parkland in 2027.

The proposal to examine the use of vacant space at Darling Drive is worth exploring, although noting that the area is often used for deliveries to the many venues in the vicinity. Therefore, any proposal changes should be conducted with full consultation involving relevant stakeholders.

6. Governance and implementation

The Alliance's 2018-19 foundational planning work highlighted the need for appropriate co-ordinated oversight to enable the strategic optimisation of the Western Harbour. Realising the potential of the Precinct has been hindered historically by the fragmentation of oversight responsibility. This has arisen from multiple responsible authorities without a resourced and empowered vehicle to align their strategic direction.

This situation has improved more recently, with the absorption of the responsibilities of the BDA and Urban Growth for Barangaroo and the Sydney Fish Market respectively by Infrastructure NSW, and the government agency co-ordination efforts of Place Management NSW. Despite this, the Precinct lacks holistic strategic and operational oversight, and programs of work and priority initiatives have remained piecemeal and have not been collectively supported nor their implementation responsibilities shared or sustained by all stakeholders.

In response to this, in December 2019, NSW Government endorsed the Western Harbour Alliance and the Committee for Sydney's recommendation to conduct a formal pilot of a Business Improvement District (BID) for the Western Harbour precinct, including Pyrmont. The pilot was due to launch in July 2020, but due to the severe impact of COVID-19, has been paused for now.

The Alliance is encouraged by the recommendations of both the draft Economic Strategy and draft Place Strategy, to proceed with the establishment of a Business Improvement District to provide "a collaborative voice" and to improve amenities and public domain. It should be noted that significant planning work was progressed by the Alliance in late 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, in preparation for the BID trial. This work, which is able to be reactivated as soon as conditions are right, includes the development of robust, systematic trial evaluation methodology by Alliance member UTS², with the input of Treasury and other state and local government, and private sector

² UTS has and will continue to provide substantial specialist support and expertise in this area, with the resources required constituting UTS's material contribution to the Western Harbour Alliance. UTS can and will also provide expert advice and support to the next stage of detailed Governance planning work recommended below.

stakeholder contributions. This assessment framework is in a NSW Treasury-recognised format and is currently being updated to ensure complete alignment with the relevant parameters of the Economic Development Strategy.

The detail and nature of the draft Place Strategy and Economic Development Strategy suggest the need for careful consideration of the approach to governance for implementation. While the Alliance remains strongly committed to the implementation of a trial of a BID for the Western Harbour, it will be crucial that the scope of work to be managed by that vehicle to be completely clear, endorsed, resourced and appropriate.

The mandate of a BID organisation can comfortably address the co-ordination of whole-of-Precinct activation and promotion, and co-ordination of members' programs of work (capital and operational) to ensure alignment with the Precinct vision and optimised visitor experience. However, the extent to which its mandate should extend, for example, into oversight of implementation of the proposed enhancements of the amenity of the public domain (e.g. signage/wayfinding; works to improve the attractiveness and legibility of key connecting thoroughfares) requires appropriate further consideration.

It may be, for example, that the BID plays a role in respect of such public works limited to prioritisation, and co-ordination of work programs with the operation schedule for the Precinct. This would imply the need for some form of Co-ordinator General-type overseeing figure, to enable the respective governance responsibilities (day-to-day, medium and long term) to be effectively aligned.

The BID trial evaluation framework will then be configured to address and assess only those aspects of the Precinct optimisation strategy that are determined to fall within its scope.

7. Pyrmont in the context of the Western Harbour and surrounds

As outlined in the Strategic Overview above, the Alliance is fundamentally concerned with the opportunity available to Sydney and NSW through the optimisation and integration of the whole of the Western Harbour, including but not limited to Pyrmont. Pyrmont, particularly when viewed through the helpful "sub-precinct" lens proposed in the Place Strategy, shares many characteristics and offers complementary experiences to those of the adjoining districts. It is those complementary adjacencies that are unable to be properly experienced today, because they are disrupted by sub-optimal connectivity that is not intuitive, legible, easy or user-friendly. It is also the ability to unlock those complementarities that contributes significantly to the estimated multi-billion dollar potential economic uplift available from an optimised Western Harbour and surrounds.

The Alliance is therefore highly supportive of any tangible initiatives that will break down the current barriers to seamless visitor experience of the Precinct as a whole. We have long supported the aspiration to create a world-class harbourside walk along the peninsula, including securing the final links of the foreshore link at Blackwattle Bay and Darling Island.

As recommended in the "Precinct Vision and Strategic Purpose" section earlier, effectively addressing this opportunity requires a specific initiative to map current and desired visitor behaviours. This exercise will inform and enable whole-of-Precinct, and inter-precinct planning, activation and management, as well as planning for improved connectivity. This mapping should consider the Pyrmont Peninsula (across the sub-precincts), the interfaces between Pyrmont and the Western Harbour, and the wider adjacencies including the Bays Precinct/Rozelle Bay.