

## **Friends of Pymont Community Centre**

### **Submission to the Pymont Peninsula Place Strategy Implementation Plan**

This community group focuses its efforts on bringing our community closer together, welcoming and including residents from all cultures and walks of life, and encouraging community members to provide feedback on the many development proposals that appear in a constant stream.

The range and detail of the Pymont Peninsula Place Strategy are overwhelming. We have chosen to focus on four areas of particular concern:

- Maybanke Recreation Centre
- Union Square
- Threats to public and affordable housing
- Blackwattle Bay.

All proposals for development on the Pymont peninsula must allow for genuine community consultation and feedback. This cannot simply be a “tick the box” exercise, but must take into account the real concerns and often innovative ideas of community members who live and work here, and whose lives will be positively or adversely affected.

#### **1. The proposed destruction of Maybanke Recreation Centre by turning it into “Maybanke Park”**

##### **The origin of the Maybanke Centre:**

In 1965 the General Manager of Colonial Sugar Refinery, the owner of this land, wrote to City of Sydney Council noting that Council had enjoyed use of the land between Harris Street and Mount Street for 24 years. CSR now needed the (upper) area bordering Mount Street for a car park. However, CSR would dedicate the rest of the site – “Harris Street Playground” – in perpetuity for recreational purposes.

On 25 June 1970 Council accepted CSR’s gift of the lower section for recreational purposes (letter from Town Clerk to CSR General Manager). Residents believe that this commitment stands. Working bees of residents have repaired and maintained the facility as needed.

##### **The present uses of Maybanke:**

Since the transfer from CSR, the City of Sydney has appended Maybanke to the Pymont Community Centre, but has not staffed this facility.

There are only two outdoor sports facilities in Pymont, both in Maybanke:

- A three-quarter tennis court (at the top level), and
- A three-quarter basketball court at street level, used by office workers during work breaks to throw hoops.

Neither facility can support formal team games.

The PPS responds to popular demand for sports facilities by proposing to abolish both, in order to create a terraced garden with art installations and pathways.

*The Urban Design Report* suggests:

- Interspersing terraced sports courts and activity spaces with interpretive public art. This would create even smaller courts wedged between art installations and flower beds.

- Creating links between Harris, Mount and Pyrmont Streets. This is unnecessary duplication of the existing access from Harris to Mount Street, and a link from Harris Street to Pyrmont Street has no value.
- “At-grade landscaping with active frontages” sacrifices scarce active recreation space.
- Providing infrastructure for local level events and local public facilities – What does this mean? The infrastructure the community needs is for active recreation and team sports.
- Shelters, performance space facilities, trees, planter boxes and garden beds would make active recreation more difficult, and sports completely impossible.
- Improving the interface of Harris Street with Mount Street would require demolition of public housing on both streets.
- The present building, which is not heritage-listed, is too small for community activities, is on two levels, and is completely inaccessible for people with mobility issues.
- Enhancing the connection with Jacksons Landing tennis courts is inappropriate as they are on private property with limited public access.

Landscape gardening jargon masks a proposal to eliminate Pyrmont’s only outdoor exercise site to create a terraced garden for passive recreation and a path to nowhere.

This is the work of planners who have no detailed map of the site, have not asked how Maybanke is used, and have not consulted PCC staff or users of the site or neighbours.

### **What does the community need?**

As the introduction to the strategy states, Pyrmont is one of the most densely populated suburbs in Australia, including many families with children and young adults. 94% of housing is in high-rise apartments. There are no public full-size courts for any sport; the only full-size tennis courts are privately owned with limited public access.

Pyrmont residents have developed a mixed community from public housing tenants to upmarket apartment dwellers. To propose replacing public housing with terraced gardens and paths insults the community, and undermines the social cohesion of which we are proud.

Maybanke provides the only opportunity in Pyrmont to build a full indoor/outdoor sports and recreation facility like King George V Recreation Centre at The Rocks. "The King George V (KGV) Recreation Centre provides high quality sports and fitness facilities and a range of community services to city residents, workers, students and visitors."

We must not lose this opportunity to provide a comprehensive recreation facility in this last publicly-owned area large enough to accommodate it. Incorporating the small Maybanke Reserve would enable provision of a full-size indoor/outdoor facility that our community urgently needs.

### **Recommendation:**

*That the Department of Planning work with the City of Sydney to use some of the proposed developer contributions to build a full indoor/outdoor sports and recreation facility on the site to meet the existing and growing needs of residents and employees on the Pyrmont peninsula.*

## 2. Making Union Square a safer and more usable space for our community

Union Square is the community's natural outdoor venue. It comes into its own on ANZAC Day and for Christmas Carols when seats, awnings and a sound system are provided by local bodies. Due to its present configuration, however,

- it does not lend itself to other community or commercial occasions;
- there are many steps from top to bottom, not well marked, and many people have tripped or fallen on them;
- level spaces are few and narrow;
- the largest level space is occupied by the war memorial.

These concerns can be addressed, so that Union Square can be used by the community for concerts and other events, and by businesses for regular markets and pop-up events.

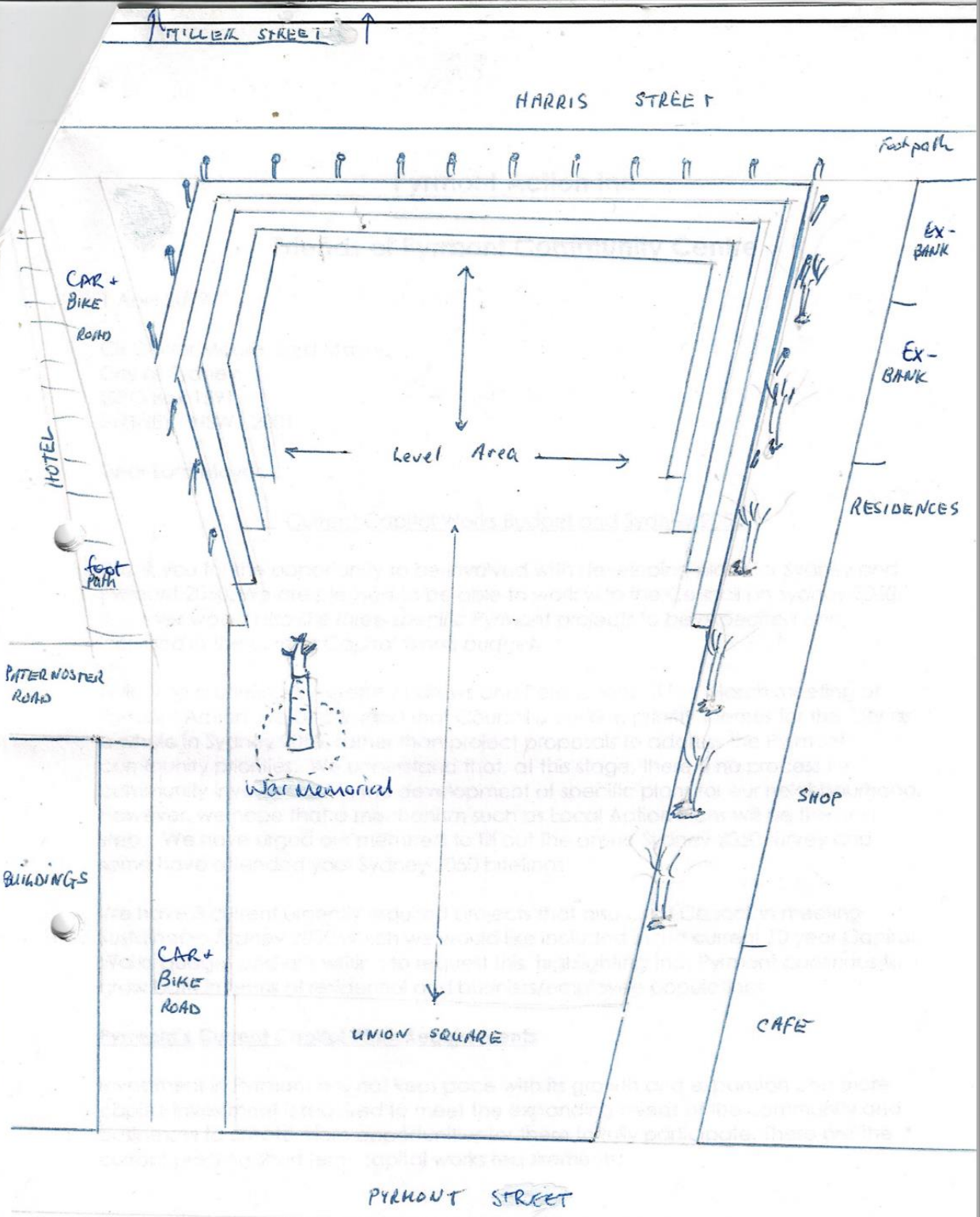
The main obstacle is the central position of the War Memorial. It was moved here from its original site in 1998, when this part of Union Street and Pyrmont Bridge were closed to vehicles. It would not be difficult to move it again, to the narrow end of Union Square. The Memorial would command the view from Harris Street to Pyrmont Street, allowing the wider part of the square to become a venue for concerts, plays, pop-up markets etc. The social and commercial benefits would greatly outweigh the cost of the work.

### **Recommendation:**

*That Union Square be reconfigured to enable greater use for community and local business events by*

- *Removing the steps from the centre of the square and creating a large level area;*
- *Building rows of steps for seating around the edges of the square;*
- *Relocating the war memorial closer to Pyrmont Street and removing any trees obscuring its visibility;*
- *Combining the footpaths on the hotel side of the road/bike path.*

*See a rough drawing on the next page.*



Notes  
 Remove steps from centre  
 Trees obscuring statue  
 Absorb path next to Bike  
 lane  
 Move column from trees

### 3. Concern about sites “capable of change”

It is surprising that the state government intends to accommodate several thousand more people in Pyrmont and Ultimo, already one of the most densely populated areas in Australia. This can only be achieved by promoting the construction of highrise, high-density apartments, and demolishing some existing buildings.

So which buildings are “capable of change”?

Discussions with Department representatives reveal that:

- Heritage buildings have some legal protection, and
- It is difficult to acquire strata-titled highrise buildings with multiple owners.

The Department will therefore seek to acquire buildings owned by the Government or by individuals, i.e. public housing, affordable housing and individually owned houses.

Department representatives agree that public and affordable housing are most at risk. They have stated, when asked, that it is not their intention to concentrate on these buildings, but that is the most likely outcome of their approach.

This approach again undermines the social cohesion of our mixed community of which we are proud. We have worked hard to bring different groups together, and we will resist giving in to the greed of developers at the cost of destroying our community.

#### **Recommendation:**

*That the sites “capable of change” be reviewed so that any increase in accommodation does not focus on demolishing public and affordable housing. The significant social mix in Pyrmont and Ultimo must be protected, and proposals from developers must be evaluated with this in mind.*

#### 4. Infrastructure NSW vs PPPS approaches to Blackwattle Bay

It is hard to see the point of commenting on the plan for Blackwattle Bay, when the Urban Design Report contains this caveat:

**NOTE: The INSW proposal for Blackwattle Bay is subject to a separate planning assessment process as a State Significant Precinct.**

The INSW proposal flies in the face of all the assurances of the PPPS Height Strategy, viz

##### 3.1 HEIGHT STRATEGY

##### BAY INTERFACE ZONE

Located at the bay edges of former dockland sites (Darling Harbour and Blackwattle Bay) that are undergoing renewal for commercial, cultural and entertainment uses. These zones allow for a more intensified **urban experience of the harbour edge that engages with the existing character and reinterprets the historic working harbour**, while providing where feasible a **continuous foreshore walk** of 20 metres, with an additional 10 metres for retailing and outdoor seating where appropriate.

Within the Bay Interface Zone:

17. New buildings are to ensure protection of the **harbourside experience for public gatherings, pedestrian and cycle movement and enjoyment of the water** as set out under the peninsula wide objectives.

18. New buildings will provide **an appropriate response to the character of Pyrmont's foreshore in a reinterpretation of the working harbour.**

There is no way that 45 storey residential towers on the waterfront can meet any of these objectives. The foreshore of Blackwattle Bay must provide a “world-class continuous harbour-edge walk -a strategic objective of NSW Government ... to connect key public spaces, cultural and entertainment destinations, ... allowing people to engage with and appreciate the natural setting of the harbour from Wollomooloo to the Bays Precinct. The water interfaces, **particularly in Blackwattle Bay**, Darling Harbour and Cockle Bay are key areas of recreation, gathering and celebration **which centre on the water** which is actively used for civic and sporting events as well as other water based activities.”

Significant features and possibilities are ruled out by this plan:

- Continued water access for dragon boaters and other passive boaters;
- Children’s access to play in shallow water;
- Small public boat mooring for visitors to the Fish Market;
- Harbour views from Pyrmont and Ultimo towards Glebe;
- Harbour views from Glebe towards Pyrmont and Ultimo;
- A world-class harbourside promenade of 30m (not the narrow walkway proposed);
- Bank Street, instead of a promenade as PPPS suggests, would become a wind tunnel;
- The foreshore park designed and proposed for many years would be sacrificed to the greed of property developers.

Meanwhile there will be:

- increased demand for school places (the Department of Education has a poor history of anticipating this);
- increased demand for residential car parking;

- massively increased traffic (especially when Bowman Street carries more traffic and the Glebe Island bridge reopens (according to the PPPS plan));
- Fumes and noise from ANZAC bridge which would prevent residents and workers in the high-rise buildings from opening their windows.

It is vital that the INSW proposal for highrise residential towers be scrapped, so that genuine community engagement can be undertaken on Blackwattle Bay foreshore. It is a special part of the Pyrmont peninsula, and provides the opportunity for a world-class foreshore walk, access to the water for recreational activities, playing space for children and young people, recognition of our indigenous and industrial histories, honouring our Aboriginal heritage, an entertainment precinct, a high quality pedestrian and cycling network, public boating facilities.

All these objectives outlined in the Blackwattle Bay Sub-Precinct Plan are possible, provided the INSW is not pursued, and is acknowledged by government to be inimical to the aims of the Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy.

**Recommendation:**

*That the state government abandon the INSW proposal for a wall of highrise towers on the harbour foreshore at Blackwattle Bay, and endorse the opportunities outlined in the PPPS to*

- *Build a world-class harbour foreshore walk 30m wide to provide space for walkers, joggers, cyclists, families with prams and strollers, and older people with mobility issues;*
- *Honour Aboriginal and working harbour heritage in statuary and activity/event spaces;*
- *Build a new district park with access to the water;*
- *Make provision for passive boaters with adequate change facilities;*
- *Orientate central public open space between Miller Street and Sydney Fish Market to maximise solar access throughout the day;*
- *Reinforce Sydney's peninsula street character of streets extending to the water's edge;*
- *Enhance Miller Street Intersection to link the walking and cycling loop, Bays West, Sydney CBD, Fish Markets and Light Rail;*
- *Enhance Bank Street as a pleasant walkable street that supports the local business and media cluster linking the employment zones of Blackwattle Bay to Bays West;*
- *Investigate opportunities for a Glebe Island Bridge Crossing; and*
- *Formalise the public boating facilities at Bank Street to provide access to the fish market.*