

Owners face paying true cost of upkeep

Sean Nicholls

Many of Sydney's old, ugly and deteriorating apartment and office buildings would disappear from the landscape under a plan by the Property Council of Australia to make them easier to redevelop.

Almost two-thirds of strata-titled buildings in NSW are in "dire need of refurbishment", according to a discussion paper released yesterday by the property council, which represents big developers.

It wants the NSW Government to introduce five-year compulsory maintenance schedules for strata-titled buildings under which owners would pay levies towards upkeep of a building, keeping the cost of future redevelopment lower.

The plan, released to coincide with the NSW Government's review of strata title laws, also calls for a reduction in the number of owners required to agree on a redevelopment proposal from the present 100 per cent to 75 per cent.

"With a trend to more multi-unit housing we need to ensure the right mechanisms are in place to maintain these buildings properly and to allow our cities to continue to evolve and grow," the council's executive director of NSW policy, Ken Morrison, said.

The paper says up to 40,000 of the 60,000 strata schemes in NSW are associated with buildings more than 20 years old.

The apartment boom means about 50 new strata schemes are registered in NSW each day. More than a million people are in strata schemes in NSW.

Mr Morrison said there was pressure in many schemes to keep levies low and defer building maintenance because owners did not believe they would be around for the full life of the building. He nominated the eastern suburbs, particularly around Bondi and Coogee, as having many buildings stricken with concrete cancer as a result.

"The Government's got to think about what happens when more and more people in strata units have a



A waterfront transformed . . . an artist's impression of the development at the old water police site in Pyrmont.

Farewell to Water Rats, hello to rich set

A fading reminder of the area's working past, the old Water Rats headquarters on Elizabeth Macarthur Bay is the final jigsaw piece of Pyrmont's transformation into a swish inner-city residential address.

Now, after a year of intense community consultation over its future, the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority has unveiled the shape it wants redevelopment of the 1.3-hectare plot of prime foreshore land to take once the NSW Water Police move to new headquarters at Camerons Cove, Balmain, early next year.

The plans, revealed to Pyrmont residents this week, include 100 residential apartments across four buildings, a large public square and foreshore walkway.

More contentiously, the design by Sydney architects Engelen Moore also features a 13-storey residential tower that dominates the southern end of the site. There will be 1200 square metres of commercial space.

Although the authority said the plans had been well received by the

community, the announcement has again prompted an outcry against any form of development and renewed calls for its dedication to the public as open space.

The design was chosen from three finalists in a competition launched last year in response to local anger over the initial master plan, which proposed more than 200 apartments.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION



A spokesman for the authority said it offered "the best balance of building and public domain design"

requirements for new and existing buildings 12 months after a change to the legislation.

The Government is expected to begin implementing changes to the Strata Schemes Management Act this year.

and had twice the amount of open space as the original master plan, including a 900-square-metre public plaza and 20-metre-wide foreshore promenade.

The elected community representative on the judging panel, Geoff Twibill, endorsed that view, describing the process as responsible and the outcome of "mutual benefit".

But Marcelle Hoff, president of the Friends of Pyrmont Point group, said she was disillusioned by the outcome. She said the authority was out of touch with the community and the winning design was the one least preferred by residents.

"There are enough flats here already," she said. "We need greenery, somewhere for the kids to play. We don't want a little footpath that leads around to the Fish Market."

The spokesman for the authority denied the winning design was the least popular with residents and said the panel considered a range of factors in making its decision, including the community input.

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The NSW president of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Caroline Pidcock, said the changes would allow owners to update poorly constructed buildings or buildings that were no longer suited to an area that had changed.