



Kelli Haynes  
Friends of Millers Point  
26 Pottinger St  
Dawes Point NSW 2000  
16th February 2018

Dear Madam/Sir,

### **Submission re Draft State Environmental Planning Policy for the Sirius Building**

Friends of Millers Point membership consists of local and other community and business leaders, private housing owners and residents, arts administrators and professionals, architects, federal, state and local politicians from all major parties, united in concern for and committed to saving the Millers Point community.

On behalf of our 4500 plus members we strongly urge that this policy be withdrawn or significantly amended. The principles and assumptions underpinning it are seriously flawed and it contains content written as facts which are misleading and even false.

Social housing, including public housing, when done well can be a powerful tool to ensure elderly, long term residents and those with disability and others disadvantaged remain in the place they belong, contribute to and are productive in. Inclusion of people with disability and others is supposed to be a major priority of the NSW State Government. For this and other reasons to allow the policy as currently drafted to remain will have a significant negative impact on an already greatly weakened community in The Rocks and Millers Point in terms of social diversity, social capital and inclusion, as well as it's highly valuable heritage and cultural nature.

#### **We highlight the following problems:**

1. The documents state that the 'NSW Government is seeking to divest the Sirius site to fund new social housing as part of its Future Directions in Social Housing Strategy'.

This is in contradiction to the government's own auditor general who in a report "Making the best use of public housing" said it was unsustainable and fiscally irresponsible to try to manage public housing in this way.

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/city-east/new-report-casts-doubt-on-viability-of-millers-point-public-housing-sell-off/news-story/7a1185ee4a3a1cc322fede8ea464d4e1?sv=5e65619e2552617ff8b82886cd77c2b9>

Funds from the sale of housing in Millers Point are not going to towards providing social housing in the inner city areas where it is seriously short supply. If any new social housing is being produced as a result of the sales it is clear that it is being largely directed toward poor, outlying suburbs already with high percentages of public and social housing. Compared to other inner city areas Millers Point is already very low in terms of percentage of

public housing as a percentage of population. The attached table was completed based on 2016 data and public housing tenancies in the area is now below 1%. We desperately need Sirius to remain as a source of public housing for the inner city. Even if funds were to be allocated to the inner city the immediate to medium term loss will be significant and there will be no benefit to the social fabric of the local community if it does not.

## 2. Possible change from residential

The draft Sirius State Environmental Planning Policy proposes to apply a B4-Mixed Use zone over the site, allowing for a mixture of compatible land uses: business, office, residential, retail and other development. This includes hotel or motel accommodation and registered clubs. This allows for the demolition of the existing Sirius building, but it also allows for the building to be kept in its current form, if that's what the new owners choose to do.

Along with a desperate need for housing to address homelessness and key workers, as part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NSW is embarking on a significant change in the way that people with disability are supported. For the success of the NDIS, it is vital for the existence now of suitable housing such as that which Sirius provides.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2015/s4301141.htm>

We strongly caution against changing the original intention and very successful function and form of Sirius .

3. Negative impact to culture, historical value and social fabric in the surrounding area and community. The Sirius Apartment Building was designed and built as a consequence of the historic Green Bans of the early 1970s and community opposition to plans by the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority to demolish heritage buildings along the western side of Circular Quay. Through the efforts of community activism the Authority agreed that residents displaced by newly built high-rises would be rehoused in quality accommodation at low, affordable rates. This set an important precedent, communicating to the government and powerful development lobby that long-term residents should not be cast from their homes in the name of cheap profit but supported to continue as contributing community members.

The Sirius Apartment Building was the outcome of this historic struggle. It continues to be arguably the finest examples of public housing in NSW, and was one of the first social housing developments built to support the needs and welfare of tenants. Due to this history, Sirius has become a symbol of community resistance and triumph. In the cultural history of NSW, the construction of Sirius represents one of the few battles the powerless won against the powerful.

Since completion, the Sirius Apartment Building has caused controversy and community debate. Nonetheless, it has come to be an accepted and much loved fixture on Sydney's famous skyline. For over forty years it has greeted commuters on a southbound approach to the City, marking the entrance to the CBD with its iconic 'One Way Jesus' and 'SOS' signs. More recently, Sirius has courted controversy as the site from which the Housing NSW Relocation Team has coordinated the movement of tenants out of The Rocks into other social housing accommodation.

<http://saveoursirius.org/video-the-history-of-sirius/>

The Sirius Apartment Building and its residents have therefore played an important role in the course of NSW's cultural history and the government has an obligation to ensure this important icon and the part it plays in history endures.

Although not recognised yet by the State Government minister, her own Heritage Department declared that the Sirius Apartment Building satisfies every listing criteria and recommended it receive Heritage Listing ie

- a) an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history;
- b) an item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history;
- c) an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW;
- d) an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons
- e) an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history
- f) an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history;
- g) an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's-cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments

The Sirius building has indeed been recognised as such by every reputable body:

In our submission supporting the heritage listing of Sirius we stated that "We note with approval the relevant section of the draft Sirius Apartment Building nomination on the Office of Environment & Heritage's website and submit the same. In particular, we concur that:

*'The Sirius Apartment Building at 36-50 Cumberland Street, The Rocks, designed by Tao (Theodore) Gofers may be of State Heritage Significance as a fine example of the Brutalist architectural style, especially in its use of off-the-form concrete and the stacking of cubic components to create a harmonious whole. It is also significant as an early example of rooftop landscape gardening in NSW and Australia. As such it featured in a number of architectural websites and in architectural literature internationally.*

*The building may have further State landmark aesthetic significance as an unusual and aesthetically distinctive treatment of high rise accommodation, bookmarking the view of Circular Quay from Sydney Harbour together with the Opera House. Described in the magazine "Concrete" (Issue 11) as a 'bold and exceptional experi-*

## Who Support Sirius Heritage Listing?

### YES!

NSW Heritage Council  
National Trust  
World Monuments Fund  
ICOMOS  
DOCOMOMO  
Australian Institute of Architects  
City of Sydney  
Historic Houses Association  
The Twentieth Century Heritage  
Society of NSW & ACT

### NO!

NSW Heritage Minister, Gabrielle Upton



*ment in low income public housing'. It was a conscious attempt to reduce the monolithic nature of most high-rise residential developments.*

*The four wooden sculptures in the foyer area may have State aesthetic and technical significance as rare surviving works by architect Tao Gofers.*

*The Sirius Apartments may meet this criterion of state significance because it is a rare example in Australia of Tao Gofer's modular housing design in concrete originally pioneered by Canadian/Israeli architect Moshe Safdie. His three-dimensional, prefabricated units for living were a central feature of Expo 67 and an important development in architectural history.'*

We further submitted

“that the Sirius Apartment Building exhibits a number of other unique aesthetic qualities. The building was the first to combine aged and family units in the one social-housing development, which became the model for subsequent local and international public housing development. Furthermore, the entrance foyer is adorned with the unique laminated timber animals designed by architect Penny Rosier. Finally, Sirius was one of the first social housing buildings to incorporate a number of innovations, such as distress buttons for its residents, a library, heritage room and other amenities, designed specifically to meet the needs and improve the welfare of residents. To many, Sirius is an expression of hope and resilience, as well as a building that embodies the ideals and principles of a more compassionate society that recognises that the importance of preserving a place for both the rich and the poor in metropolitan Sydney.

The Sirius Apartment Building has a strong association with residents of Millers Point and The Rocks, with the structure itself embodying their multigenerational struggle to stay in their own community. Many of these residents were descendants of maritime workers who lived and worked in the area. Their community is unique in its intergenerational continuity, which has resulted in a distinctive identity and the aggregation of local and historical knowledge. Despite successive waves of state sponsored and market based gentrification, this community has endured, with hundreds of its members, both past and present, residing in Sirius until very recently...

As stated, the Sirius Apartment Building is inextricably linked to the historic Green Bans ... (which were) instrumental in securing the preservation of the built environment in the Rocks, Surry Hills and many other suburbs that was under threat from developers at the time, and are the reason why so many residents and visitors are able to enjoy the history and aesthetic qualities of these areas today.

The story of the Green Bans reveals that cultural, natural and historical value isn't always immediately apparent; it is only in hindsight that the real significance of a building or site crystallises.

The same is true of the Sirius Apartment Building. Future generations will find value in the stories and people associated with Sirius and ascribe meaning to the building as Sydney's character changes. The continuing struggle to preserve Millers Point's unique community will add another layer to this narrative, and effectively ensures that Sirius will be regarded as a heritage site in the years to come. As a living monument, Sirius therefore has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural history.

We also submit that the Sirius Apartment Building is an increasingly rare example of social housing in inner-city Sydney. The recent sale of public housing properties in Glebe, Millers Point and The Rocks has resulted in the depletion of public housing stock in and around the Sydney CBD. Sirius remains one of the few viable social housing options in the inner-city, and for that reason is appropriate for state heritage listing.”

Continuing with the draft policy as is means that the Sirius Apartment Building faces a risk of redevelopment that would irreparably compromise all of these elements.

**In conclusion:**

We believe that if the sale of the Sirius building proceeds any draft Sirius Site SSP State Environmental Planning Policy:

- i) be in a form that supports the Sirius building being retained as residential only;
- ii) specifies that its use incorporate significant elements of social housing and affordable housing, in addition to any private ownership of residential units within the building; and,
- iii) specifies that the proceeds from the sale be reinvested in new social housing units within the Millers Point or Sydney Central Business District.

It is clear that the Sirius Apartment Building and its former residents tell a unique story about Sydney's past that demands protection. Again in making this submission we remind that there is no community like Millers Point and The Rocks in NSW, and there is no building more important to them or as uniquely significant to the wider community as the Sirius Apartment Building.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at [kellihaynes@gmail.com](mailto:kellihaynes@gmail.com) or 0400 924130 should you wish to discuss this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Kelli Haynes  
Convenor  
Friends of Millers Point

0.3%

### Friends of Millers Point

The Friends of Millers Point is a growing coalition of public figures, artists, art organisations, business and community leaders, private residents, local, State and Federal politicians and others that support the community of Millers Point. We have over 4500 members.

Our working group includes the Mayor of Leichhardt and councillors of inner Sydney Local Government areas, and our campaign is supported by members of all major political parties including the Liberal party, State Greens and Christian Democrats.

Our patrons include the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP, Eva Cox, Jack Mundey, Reg Mombassa, and Dr Michael Kendrick.

Our goals are to

- support the community of Millers Point, Dawes Point and The Rocks
- call for the maintenance of public housing in the area
- oppose the forced relocation of public housing tenants and the destruction of the community
- make others aware of the negative impact this has on an individual's identity, belonging and ability to contribute and how it seriously damages 'civil society', diminishing social capital and increasing reliance on welfare, health and other services

Contact: Kelli Haynes, ph 0400924130

[www.millerspointcommunity.com.au](http://www.millerspointcommunity.com.au)

fb savemillerspoint