

## St Leonards Crows Nest 2036 Draft Plan

### Planning Concept

The St Leonards Crows Nest Draft Plan is a welcome initiative by the Department of Planning. For many years the area has struggled with the piecemeal approach to planning taken by the three local government areas, North Sydney, Willoughby and Lane Cove. At last the Precinct is being addressed as a single entity with a consistent approach throughout. It also seems that as St Leonards Crows Nest is located on the periphery of each of the LGAs it received less attention than the areas closer to the centre of gravity of each LGA. The end result is that the area is already over developed with too many units in the pipeline and buildings underway and proposed that have been allowed to grow to excessive heights. Overcrowding and overshadowing are going to be huge issues for the area in the near future.

The Draft Plan can be described as setting/confirming the redevelopment parameters of the sites along the Pacific Highway and some adjacent streets which have been in commercial use since the 1970s. It was at that time that the Precinct started to become a viable employment zone attracting many businesses which valued the proximity to the Sydney CBD and North Sydney without the same level of crowding and higher rentals in those areas. As well as the Pacific Highway the commercial zone extended along Christie, Chandos, Atchison and Albany Streets. It also extended a little later to Lithgow Street, Christie Street South and Nicholson Street. The accommodation was in small to medium sized office buildings.

The slump in the commercial property market in the late 80s to early 90s stalled any further development for a period. At that time a commercial development was proposed in the airspace over St Leonards Station, but it proceeded no further than bulk excavation before it was abandoned. The project languished for some years but was eventually developed as the Forum, a mixed-use site but with a very large residential component. This set the land use and building height precedents for the Precinct. It was the first step in the large-scale residential developments which followed and are still under way today. In every case it is the sites which have been in commercial use for at least 30-40 years which have been redeveloped as large scale residential. Former industrial land to the north along Herbert Street and the railway has also been developed as high-density residential. The buildings have become higher and higher with no community benefit and questionable urban design and planning outcomes.

The Draft Plan reinforces this in that the current and future development sites are located within the zone that was previously exclusively commercial. It is a positive sign that the Draft Plan supports the inclusion of commercial space in the new developments. This approach should be strengthened to not only mandate the commercial space planned in the new developments but to increase it. The Department should actively facilitate landmark commercial development sites so that a critical mass is maintained for the future of the commercial centre of St Leonards Crows Nest.

The bulk of the Draft Plan does not contemplate the removal of existing low rise residential and replacing it with high-rise high-density development. That is good planning as it recognises the value of the existing residential precincts of Waverton, Crows Nest and

Naremburn. The same principles should be applied to St Leonards South which is identical in scale, proximity to facilities and housing stock.

The proposals for St Leonards South are in stark contrast to the approach taken in the rest of the St Leonards Crows Nest Precinct. The St Leonards South Draft Master Plan places no value on the existing housing stock and neighbourhood. It simply obliterates and replaces it with blanket high density. It is located in the least desirable topography, a south facing slope, so that the taller buildings closest to St Leonards Station cast long shadows over the buildings further down the slope. It is an unchangeable characteristic of the site. It is the wrong type of development in the wrong place.

Lane Cove Council developed the St Leonards South Draft Master Plan in isolation which has now been absorbed into the St Leonards Crows Nest 2036 Draft Plan. It is acknowledged that the scheme will be referred to the Independent Planning Commission for review. The Department of Planning in assessing the Draft Plan cannot turn a blind eye to the inconsistencies in St Leonards South in comparison with similar areas in the Precinct. What is good for Waverton, Crows Nest and Naremburn should be applied to St Leonards South.

The Department of Planning and ultimately the Independent Planning Commission should recognise the inappropriateness of the current St Leonards South Draft Master Plan. They should require that the whole area be medium density with some limited higher density close to St Leonards Station. Building heights in the Draft Master Plan should be substantially reduced with the maximum say 12 and the majority two to three.

The Department of Planning and the LGAs cannot be seen to be beholden to the Development Lobby in the finalisation of the St Leonards Crows Nest 2036 Draft Plan. They must put the needs of the community and the principles of good planning first. Only then will it be possible to achieve the aim of a vibrant community, a place that protects its past, a greener place, a well-designed place, an employment hub, a home for people of all ages and an accessible place.

My background is I am an architect. After an initial period in private practice, I spent 36 years of my career with the Leighton construction group. I have experience in and knowledge of all forms of design and construction in building and civil projects. Leighton Properties jointly developed with Mirvac their project currently underway on the Pacific Highway. I had no involvement in or knowledge of that project up to the time I retired in 2013. However, I do fully understand the principles and issues of both residential and commercial property development. I have a strong commitment to good design, good urban planning and good transport planning. These principles underpinned my working life.

*Summary:*

*The Plan is replacing the former piecemeal approach of each of the three LGAs. The Precinct is now being considered as a whole.*

*The Plan is setting the development parameters of those parts of St Leonards Crows Nest that have been commercial premises since the 70s.*

*The Plan does not replace existing low-density housing with high rise in Waverton, Crows Nest or Naremburn but it does in St Leonards South. This is a glaring inconsistency in the Plan.*

*The Department of Planning and the LGAs must deliver consistent high-quality outcomes throughout the Precinct to achieve their ambitious stated aims. They must make clear and unambiguous decisions to bring St Leonards South into line with the rest of the Precinct.*

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