



An artist's impression shows the location of the highest towers under the new Sydney CBD planning controls.

Industry warms to CBD strategy

Robert Harley

Sydney's development and property industry have, at first glance, largely supported the dramatic changes to height and usage proposed by the City of the Sydney in its new, draft Central Sydney Planning Strategy.

But some are cautious about the detail, the costs, and about the implementation.

The new strategy, released late Wednesday, aims to encourage more office and hotel projects and curb the current enthusiasm for apartment towers.

The strategy would require all new towers over 55 metres to be at least half commercial. New towers could rise above current height limits, as high as 300 metres, if they were exclusively for office, hotel or other commercial use.

Lord mayor Clover Moore said the proposal would unlock 2.9 million sq m of new commercial space and protect the new economy's floor space needs from high-priced residential on larger scale sites.

Greg Crone, the chief executive of architects Crone Partners, has been designing towers in the Sydney CBD for near 30 years.

"I think it is a great start," he said. "There is a genuine consensus that there needs to be far greater balance in the cities, and that is not just in Sydney but in many global cities."

Michael Cook, group executive at Investa Office, said the strategy answered many of the questions facing the growing city as it tried to meet the demands of city residents without jeopardising commercial requirements.

"The new LEP (Local Environment Plan) appears to give a little to everyone; greater heights, protection of sun access, smarter design rules and encouragement of better long-term outcomes," he said.

"The Council has responded in an intelligent way to take advantage of the new transport infrastructure currently being constructed like the light rail and the Metro. This infrastructure lends itself to allowing denser and more comprehensive development in the CBD."

The chief executive of the DEXUS Property Group, Darren Steinberg, supported the City of Sydney focus on ensuring sufficient commercial office space in the CBD into the future.

Sydney needs a sensible and sustainable supply of commercial office space.

Jane Fitzgerald, Property Council

"Due to the geography of the area, the core CBD precinct is very tight and the only logical way to do this is to increase heights of its towers," he said. "As the largest owner/manager of Sydney CBD office buildings we look forward to working with the City to ensure the appropriate precincts are given additional height limits."

One leading CBD valuer, the managing director of valuation and advisory services at Colliers International,

Dwight Hillier, said that at first glance the draft proposals had "a lot of positives."

He noted that valuation uplift was likely to be focused on those sites, or clusters of sites, on which the full 300 m height can be achieved.

He also noted that the proposal would be good news for those who already have approvals for "significant residential buildings."

Chris Johnson, the chief executive of the Urban Taskforce, a developers lobby group, welcomed proposals to increase the height of the city's towers but warned about potential increased costs to developers.

The draft recommends that any uplift in value, due to planning, be "equally shared between the land owner/developer and the public...to ensure the adequate provision of infrastructure in the city."

"This will have an impact on the physical shape of the city with fatter commercial towers rather than slim residential towers," he said. "Residential mixed uses in the city create active bustling centres with cafes, restaurants and walkable areas 24/7."

NSW executive director of the Property Council, Jane Fitzgerald, said the strategy included some excellent proposals such as removing long-term height controls which have constrained the CBD's growth.

"Sydney needs a sensible and sustainable supply of commercial office space, and the proposed incentives for commercial development reflect the future demand that our geographically constrained CBD faces."