



Barangaroo Design Review – Government Response

Introduction

In May 2011 the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure commissioned “The Barangaroo Review”, an independent review in relation to Barangaroo of compliance with the planning approval processes.

The Barangaroo Review completed by Ms Meredith Sussex and Ms Shelley Penn in August included in its recommendations that a “snapshot design review” be undertaken to assess and advise on the quality of forthcoming commercial tower proposals. Their Review indicated the basis of the recommendation was community concern about the “visual bulk” of the towers and the perception of a previous lack of independent, expert design advice to Government.

The Barangaroo Review acknowledged the major issue for the proponent, Lend Lease, and the Government is the urgent need to proceed with the planning and development of the three commercial towers in order to confirm investor confidence in the project, provide assurance to future tenants and assure the world community that Sydney (and NSW) is “open for business”. It also acknowledged that Sydney will receive a significant economic fillip from the largest investment in the CBD for years.

The Barangaroo Review concluded that, subject to the Recommendations of the Review and proper planning process, there is no reason why the planning and development of the commercial towers should not proceed, consistent with market expectations.

The “snapshot review” was undertaken by the DRP 48 Design Review Panel (DRP 48) comprising Ms Penn (chair), Mr Peter Mould (NSW Government Architect) and Mr Ray Brown (independent architect). The review was conducted over the 12th and 13th September (ie 48 hours).

Snapshot Design Review - Terms of Reference

The Barangaroo Review suggested the focus of the “Snapshot Review” should:

“Address, *within the parameters of the Approved Concept Plan, and the Project Approvals*:

- Articulation and modulation of the commercial buildings C3 and C5
- The integration of the towers with the podia
- The public domain at Barangaroo South, including microclimate impacts
- Any other aspects of the design that may seek guidance on”

The Terms of Reference are provided at Attachment A.

Snapshot Design Review

The DRP 48 has made a number of findings and observations which accord with the views of Lend Lease and the Lend Lease design teams and which are consistent with the views of the Design Excellence Review Panel and the BDA Design Advisors. These relate primarily to the need for “authentic” podia and streetscapes, improved connections to the city, and transport links. The DRP 48 comments positively that the design of the public domain is being considered to deliver a high quality result.

The DRP 48 also commends the engagement of the tower architect (Rogers Stirk Harbour Partners) and the overall design of Tower C4 stating it is of very high quality and expected to deliver an excellent outcome whilst noting there will be further refinement of elements such as the base of the core and sun shading during design finalisation.

Although the DRP 48 commends the excellence of Tower C4 and acknowledges “the three towers have been consciously designed as a family of buildings” it does not favour the “repetition” of its design to C3 and C5, which is the basis of the accepted design philosophy of the proponent’s architect, Lord Richard Rogers of RSHP, which was integral to the successful Lend Lease bid of 2009.

That philosophy was to develop a family or set of closely related buildings designed by one architect and distinguished from each other through height, orientation, façade treatments, colour etc. Lend Lease has proceeded to develop the designs of the three towers with the continuing endorsement of the Design Excellence Review Panel (DERP) (constituted to ensure design excellence in accordance with the Concept Plan Approval and appointed by the then Minister for Planning) and the BDA Design Advisors since winning the bid. In June 2011, the DERP review of the proponent’s Design Excellence Strategy, confirmed the three towers are to be an ensemble, Lord Rogers should be the architect for all three towers and that a design competition was not required to achieve excellence.

The DRP 48 notes the proposals for C3 and C5 vary in relation to C4 in terms of their heights and connections to podia, shading blades and colour schemes. It is of the opinion, however, that the proposed approach is too subtle advocating instead

three differently conceived towers of more diverse form, expression and visual identity. The DRP 48 argues this is necessary to achieve design excellence and address the perception of visual bulk. It is of the view that the variations between the current design proposals of Lend Lease are inadequate to achieve sufficient diversity and address the visual bulk issue. The DRP 48 recommends a further review of the C3 and C5 designs either by RSHP or by engaging other architects.

On the basis of the above there is, in essence, a simple but fundamental difference of opinion between the DRP 48 the proponent, the Design Excellence Review Panel and the Barangaroo Development Authority's design advisors with regard to the overarching design philosophy of the towers and how to achieve diversity. Both opinions are valid and recognised as such by both Lend Lease and the DRP 48.

The DRP 48 has also made strongly supportive design comments in respect of the C4 Tower, the external core (lifts component) and the podium. C4 has already received Project Approval (planning approval) and the design is being finalised for commencement of construction prior to Christmas. That development should proceed.

The designs of C3 and C5 are still being finalised and Lend Lease and its architects should be encouraged to explore greater variation in the individual designs (both towers and podia) than is currently provided without impacting the fundamental design philosophy and brief and without impacting floor plates and heights which have planning approval. The floor plates have been designed specifically to meet the current and future needs of the financial services industry.

The Barangaroo Review (August 2011) acknowledged the urgency to "proceed with the planning and development of the three commercial towers in order to confirm investor confidence in the project and provide assurance to future tenants." The DRP 48 recommendation to review the designs of the towers, if adopted, would significantly impact the delivery program for the towers with consequential impacts on project financing arrangements and negotiations with future tenants.

The DRP 48 has suggested that changes to the development controls for floor plates and heights within the current GFA be considered to enable the design of taller, slimmer towers to address the visual bulk and diversity. Such changes would necessitate modification to the approved Concept Plan introducing uncertainty about existing approvals and posing unacceptable risk and delay to the project as a whole.

Regarding the podia, the DRP 48 reinforces the importance the podia design, building access points and active street front s will have in setting the street character and identity for each area and encourages the engagement of architects and designers of high calibre to ensure high quality outcomes. This is supported. It is also noted the podia are yet to be designed and these issues will need to be carefully addressed.

The DRP 48 has commented that the public domain is being carefully considered to deliver a high quality result whilst noting it is still in the early design phases with further resolution required in some areas.

Similarly, the DRP 48 acknowledges the design of “transport place” and adjacent areas is in progress

Public Release of the DRP 48 Report

A significant issue raised in the Barangaroo Review was transparency and consultation with the community. There is considerable interest in the outcome of the review and strong expectation both from those making submissions to the Barangaroo Review and the media that the report will be publicly released. The DRP 48 Report has been released.

Conclusion

There is considerable alignment of the DRP48, Lend Lease and its designers, the Design Excellence Review Panel and the BDA’s design advisers on the importance of the podia design, in particular in setting the street character and identity for each area. There is also alignment on the development of the public domain and the need to have better design integration between Barangaroo and major transport connections.

The DRP 48 Review Panel has formed a valid but philosophically different view to Lend Lease, the Design Excellence Review Panel, and the BDA Design Advisors and made design recommendations or suggestions for significant changes which, if adopted, would be inconsistent with existing planning approvals and development controls and seriously compromise the deliverability and thus feasibility of the project.

The Government thanks the members of the DRP 48 for their work and the presentation of their report.

30 September 2011

DRP 48 Terms of Reference

The review will:

- Be focused on the commercial towers C3 and C5 and their relationship to C4 at Barangaroo South, as proposed by the proponent;
- Include review of the podia and integration with the towers;
- Assess public domain impacts associated with the towers and podia such as bulk and microclimate, private/public domain , relationship to street pattern, relationship to public transport etc
- Be limited to consideration of the proponent's design propositions within the existing Concept Plan and Project Approvals;
- Identify areas (if any) where the Design Review Panel believes there is scope for improvement in the design;
- Report directly to the Premier as Minister for Barangaroo;
- Be completed over two consecutive days, with the report to the Premier to be finalised within a week of the meeting;
- Be informed by presentations and reports from the proponent, the Barangaroo Delivery Authority (BDA) and their designers, and may consider recent reports on relevant design matters that have been prepared by the DERP and by the BDA's Design Advisors.