

Protection of Brutalist Buildings being used to stop new development

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The recent interest in Brutalist buildings by the City of Sydney Council and the National Trust has become a new way to stop new housing projects, says the Urban Taskforce.

“The supporters of Brutalist buildings have moved on from their failure to get the Sirius Building listed to another Brutalist building sitting amongst the Victorian streetscapes of Glebe,” says Urban Taskforce CEO, Chris Johnson. “The Glebe building is the Bidura Metropolitan Remand Centre (BMRC) that was built in the 1980s to house children going through the Children’s Court system.”

“The recent Central Sydney Planning Committee meeting supported a council proposal to have the Bidura complex becoming a heritage item even though the City Council’s own Local Environmental Plan allows an 8 story apartment building on the site and no heritage controls have existed on the Remand Centre before. The brutalist BMRC building presents tall blank concrete walls to the street that have very little of the active uses the council normally requires. Proponents of the heritage listing amazingly compared it with the sandstone Queen Victoria Building on George Street in the city with its extensive display windows and many entrances.”

“But more importantly the moves to keep the building would stop a state government asset sale objective of providing new housing on a site close to a village centre and public transport. It will be almost impossible to find compatible uses for the concrete monolith unless they relate to prison like uses that want to exist in a concrete fortress. At the time of the sale of the site by the NSW Government to the private sector there was no heritage controls on the site apart from the 1860 original Bidura House and the City of Sydney’s planning rules allowed an 8 storey apartment building, similar to neighbouring sites, to be constructed. Now that the site has been sold to the private sector the Sydney City Council wants to change all the rules. The state government must ensure that there are consistent rules when their sites are sold or the private sector will not have confidence in the sale process.”

“The extensive support documents to the councils proposed heritage listing lauded British Brutalist buildings including the Barbican Centre in London as good examples of Brutalism. The Barbican Centre takes up a full city block but the street edge on all four sides is either a blank concrete wall, a

concrete car park or on one side service entries off a covered road that looks like a tunnel. Brutalism seemed to be very unfriendly when it presented to the public realm of the street as demonstrated by London's Barbican Centre and Glebe's Bidura Children's Court and Metropolitan Remand Centre."

"The Urban Taskforce is concerned about the sovereign risk that the change of planning rules creates after government disposes of an asset. We are also concerned about the growing trend to try and list as heritage items Brutalist buildings that have poor relationships to the street and are seen by many people as being ugly."



Glebe's Bidura Children's Court and Metropolitan Remand Centre

The **Urban Taskforce** is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.

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