



## The Block plans approved for 24-storey tower in Redfern

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4 Mar 2019



**PHOTO:** An artist's impression of the Pumulwuy Project at Redfern's The Block.

**The approval of a controversial student accommodation tower on Redfern's The Block has divided the Aboriginal community, with some concerned it will "erase" their footprint.**

Key points:

- The approved plans include accommodation for 62 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Opponents were angry about the inclusion of a 24-storey student accommodation tower
- Some community leaders believe they must now "make it work"

The vacant land, which is owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), is being redeveloped into a mixed-use site including affordable housing for 62 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Initial plans approved in 2012 also featured a six-storey building that would house about 150 students.

However the updated application, approved by the NSW Independent Planning Commission on Monday, was for a 24-storey student accommodation tower.

The revised plans have long sparked anger around the need for more affordable housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, along with the building's height and its cultural and social impacts.

Public meetings about the site have previously become heated, with protesters forcing one meeting to an abrupt end in 2017. Opponent Jenny Munro said she wasn't surprised the application got the green light.

"It disappoints me greatly, but it doesn't surprise me," she said.

***"They've effectively erased our community footprint here on The Block."***

Ms Munro said the development wasn't in the interests of the community and believed opponents' voices hadn't been properly heard.

"They have become the agents of the enemy by practicing social engineering here, by deciding who amongst our people will live in those houses," she said.



**PHOTO:** Jenny Munro fears the student accommodation tower will "erase" the Aboriginal community's footprint.

Residents must 'make it work'

Community leader Shane Phillips called the approval "bittersweet" and believed it would help retain a footprint.

"Obviously we all wanted a bigger footprint, but we are happy that we've got to this point," he said.

"Unfortunately the student accommodation is going to be big, but we're going to make it work."

Mr Phillips said he could appreciate how the AHC was simply trying to sustain itself, welcoming news that at least 62 families would have a home.

"Displacement is happening really fast, so we need every option to be able to strengthen our identity," he said.

***"I really do believe that it will strengthen what we've got."***

"Right now, there's no-one on that patch of dirt."



**PHOTO:** Community Leader Shane Phillips is optimistic residents and students will "make it work".

Long-term Redfern resident Richard Coady said the site was historically significant and should not be commercialised.

"It's not for Aboriginal people, it's to make money," he said.

"It's not something the Aboriginal people want. There was a big riot when they first proposed it."

He said Redfern already had plenty of high rises and many public housing complexes and the community needed a space for cultural activities.

***"We're going to lose Redfern, that's what's going to happen."***

The commission said the proposal would not "substantially" alter the impact of the development on the neighbourhood.

In its statement of reasons, the commission said the student accommodation would have a positive social and cultural impact, with 110 of the nearly-600 student beds subsidised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

"The commission acknowledges the cultural significance of the development site to the local ATSI community," it said.

The proposal includes a public art strategy to reinforce Aboriginal culture and an Aboriginal art gallery.

It will also feature a gym, commercial and retail space and a childcare centre.