

Making density work in Central Melbourne – a review of built form controls

Larry Parsons, Director Development Approvals and Urban Design, ¹, Tania Crisafi, Principal Urban Designer, ²

¹ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria

² Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria

Melbourne, and particularly its Central City, is renowned for its liveability, based on high amenity public realm and good manners architecture. However, this popularity is now threatening over development and Melbourne's old, discretionary built form controls are permitting extreme site densities, with Floor Area Ratios over 50:1 and limited setbacks to neighbours, despite heights commonly exceeding 200 metres.

In 2016, the State Government, partnering with Melbourne City Council, undertook the first successful Central City Built Form Review in thirty years. This involved original research, full consultation and vetting through an independent panel process, prior to the introduction of a game-changing planning scheme amendment. The new controls seek a balance between necessary public realm amenity and achieving a reasonable yield to allow for strategically positive central city growth. They assure proper street definition and building separation, without fixating on height, so long as comfortable sunlight and wind conditions are achieved.

Floor Area Ratios are also introduced as a means of signalling up front the reasonable yield for a given site. They also allow for Floor Area Uplifts, with the provision of commensurate public benefits, in cases where this yield can appropriately be exceeded.

The controls are designed to allow design flexibility, while indicating realistic limits on density ... from day one! This will discourage speculative density and protect Melbourne's liveability.