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# ‘It will be returned to its heyday’: Taller buildings and rooftop bars to transform Oxford Street

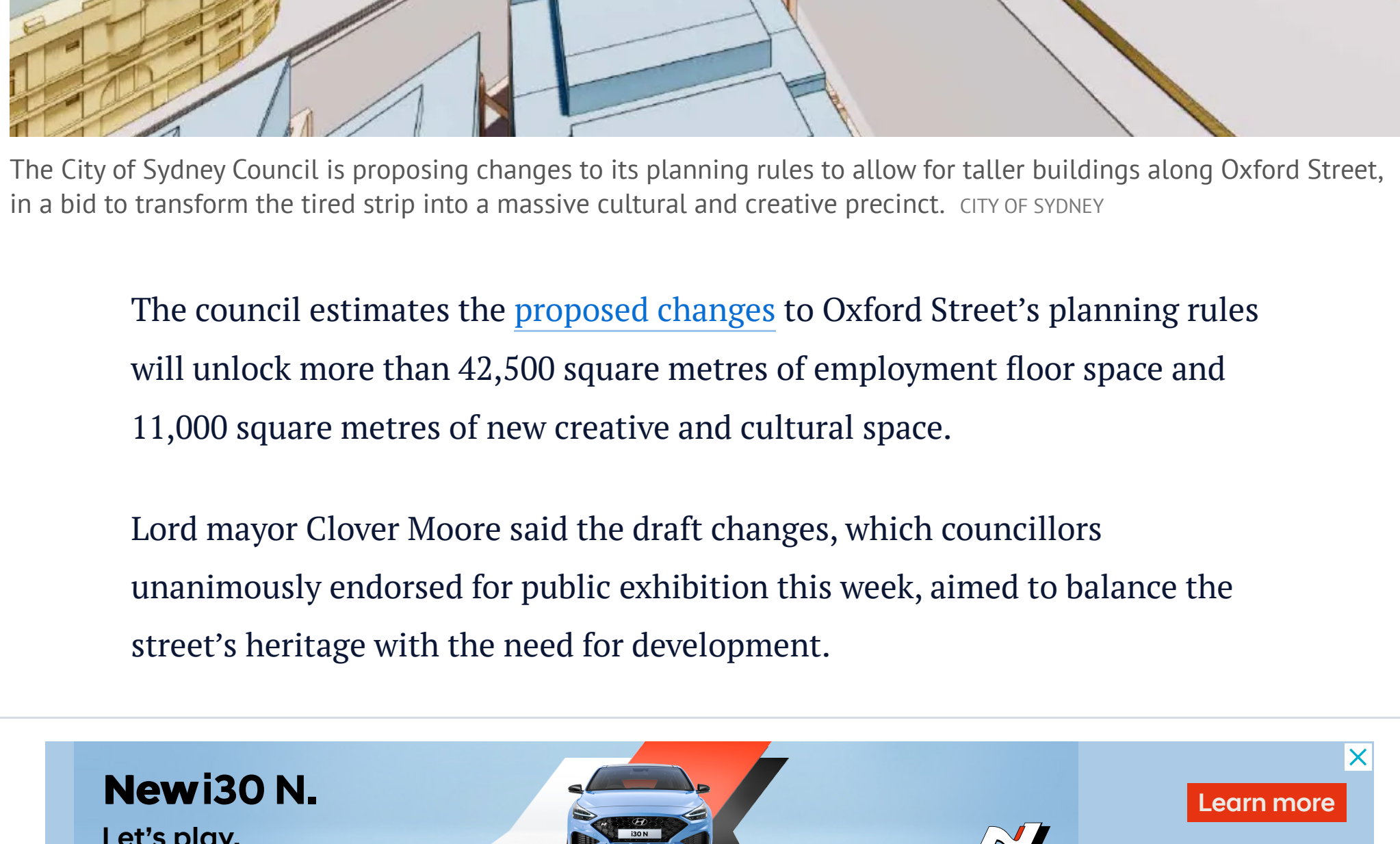


By **Megan Gorrey**  
May 20, 2021 – 6.09pm

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Oxford Street will be dramatically transformed under a City of Sydney plan to turn the faded strip into a massive cultural and creative precinct, raising building heights and opening it to hundreds of millions of dollars of development.

Buildings already lining the 1.3 kilometre corridor from Surry Hills to Paddington will be allowed to add two storeys as part of a package aimed at boosting the 24-hour economy, cementing the strip’s role as a “local centre” and increasing the number of cultural and entertainment venues.



The City of Sydney Council is proposing changes to its planning rules to allow for taller buildings along Oxford Street, in a bid to transform the tired strip into a massive cultural and creative precinct. CITY OF SYDNEY

The council estimates the [proposed changes](#) to Oxford Street’s planning rules will unlock more than 42,500 square metres of employment floor space and 11,000 square metres of new creative and cultural space.

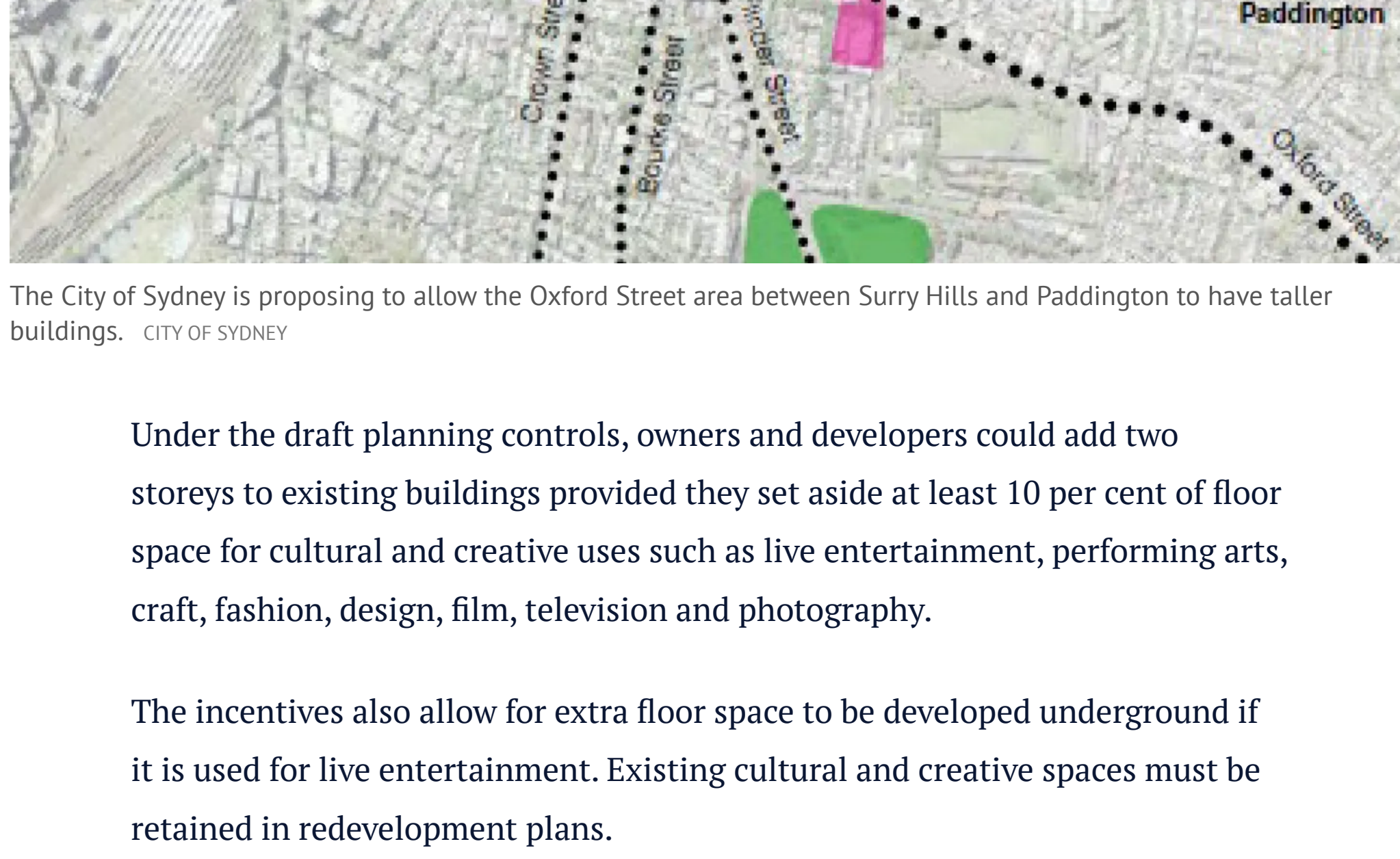
Lord mayor Clover Moore said the draft changes, which councillors unanimously endorsed for public exhibition this week, aimed to balance the street’s heritage with the need for development.

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“We’re breathing new life into the fabulous strip with innovative controls to support growth and diversity, protect heritage and character and promote both day and night-time economies – all while ensuring the development of cultural space, such as new basement bars and space for creatives,” Cr Moore said.

The proposal to rezone the site will be decided by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.



The City of Sydney is proposing to allow the Oxford Street area between Surry Hills and Paddington to have taller buildings. CITY OF SYDNEY

Under the draft planning controls, owners and developers could add two storeys to existing buildings provided they set aside at least 10 per cent of floor space for cultural and creative uses such as live entertainment, performing arts, craft, fashion, design, film, television and photography.

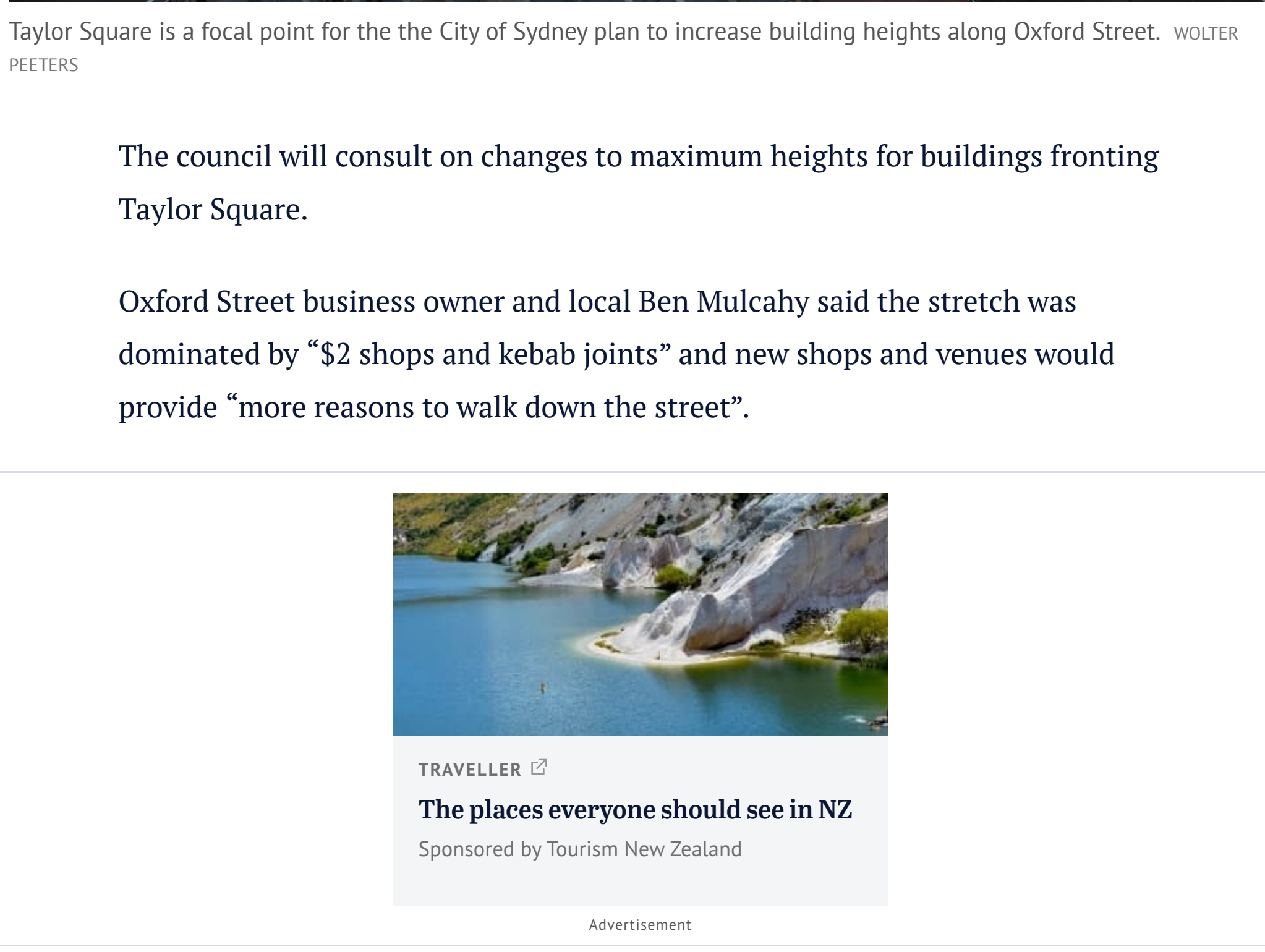
The incentives also allow for extra floor space to be developed underground if it is used for live entertainment. Existing cultural and creative spaces must be retained in redevelopment plans.



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Building height limits along Oxford Street vary but are predominantly two to three storeys, with some reaching five, 12 and 15 storeys on the western side of the precinct.

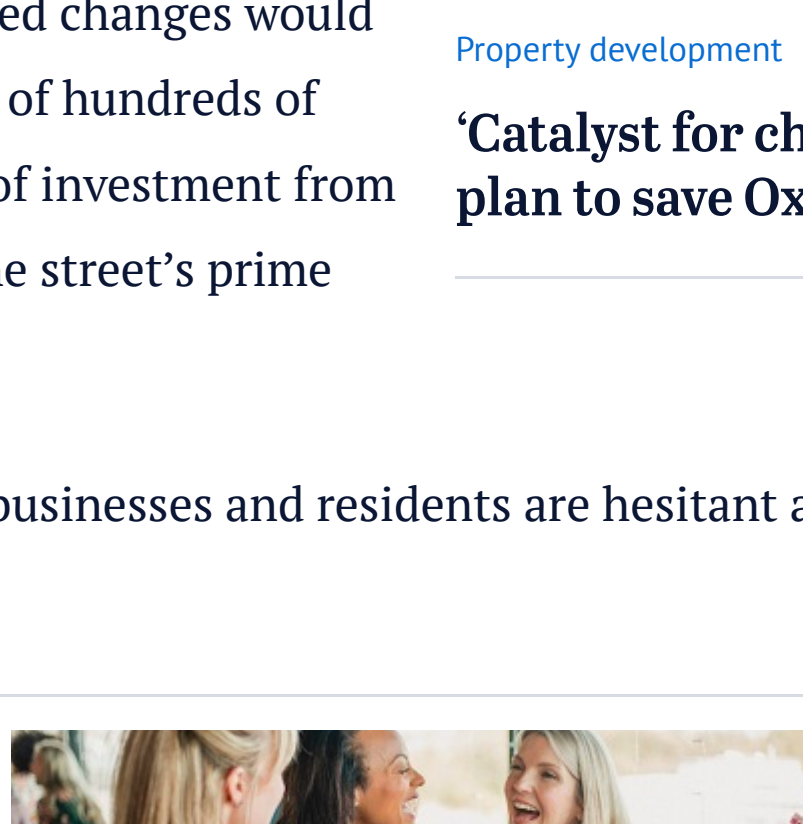
Developers will be eligible for the extra building height if they include uses compatible with the street’s function as a “local centre”. This includes entertainment venues, health services, education facilities, hotel accommodation, light industry and community centres.



Taylor Square is a focal point for the the City of Sydney plan to increase building heights along Oxford Street. WOLTER PEETERS

The council will consult on changes to maximum heights for buildings fronting Taylor Square.

Oxford Street business owner and local Ben Mulcahy said the stretch was dominated by “\$2 shops and kebab joints” and new shops and venues would provide “more reasons to walk down the street”.



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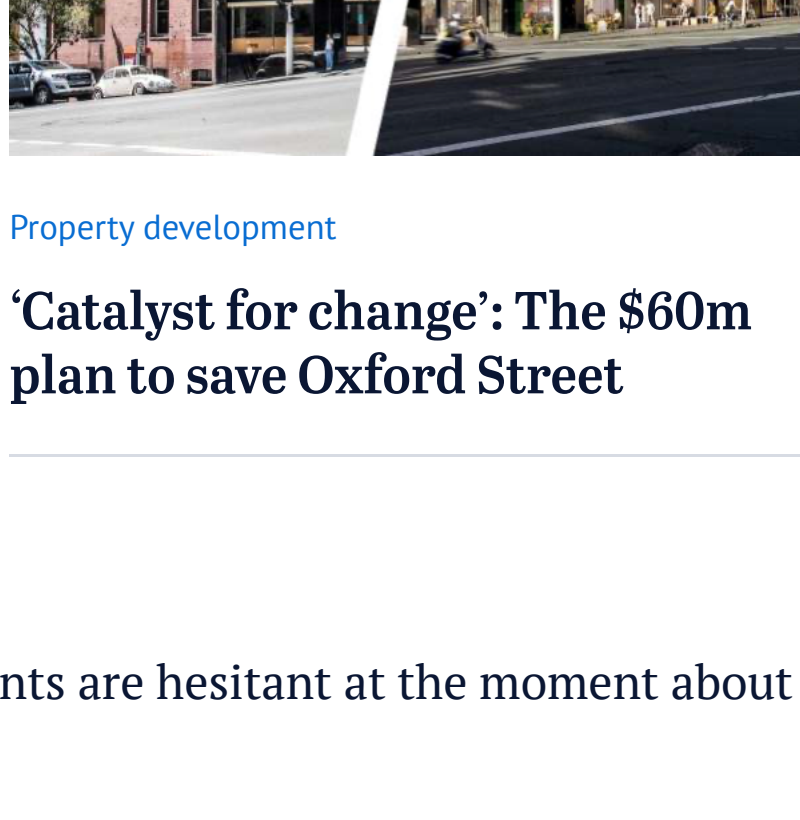
Mr Mulcahy said height restrictions had deterred developers in the past. He predicted the changes would prompt “amalgamations”, where multiple owners merged neighbouring properties to make the investment worthwhile and to create larger rooftop bars and underground music venues.

“The council doesn’t want apartments - the restaurants, the bars, the clubs will be the priority. This will bring the investment Oxford Street needs. It will be returned to its heyday.”

Liberal councillor Craig Chung expected the proposed changes would unlock “in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars” of investment from developers eyeing the street’s prime real estate.

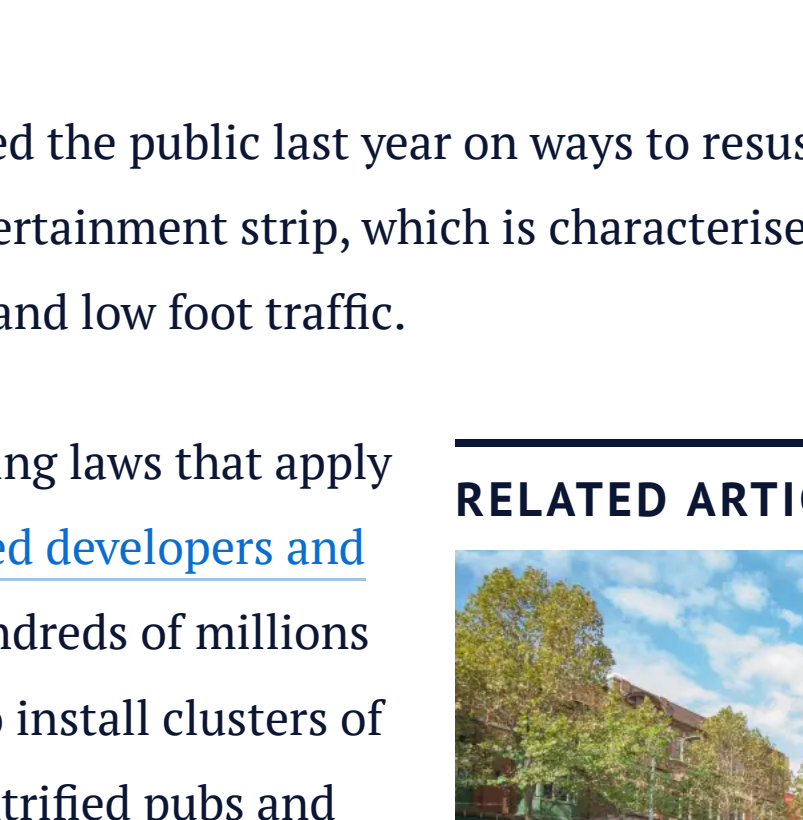
“I think a lot of the businesses and residents are hesitant at the moment about what it will mean.

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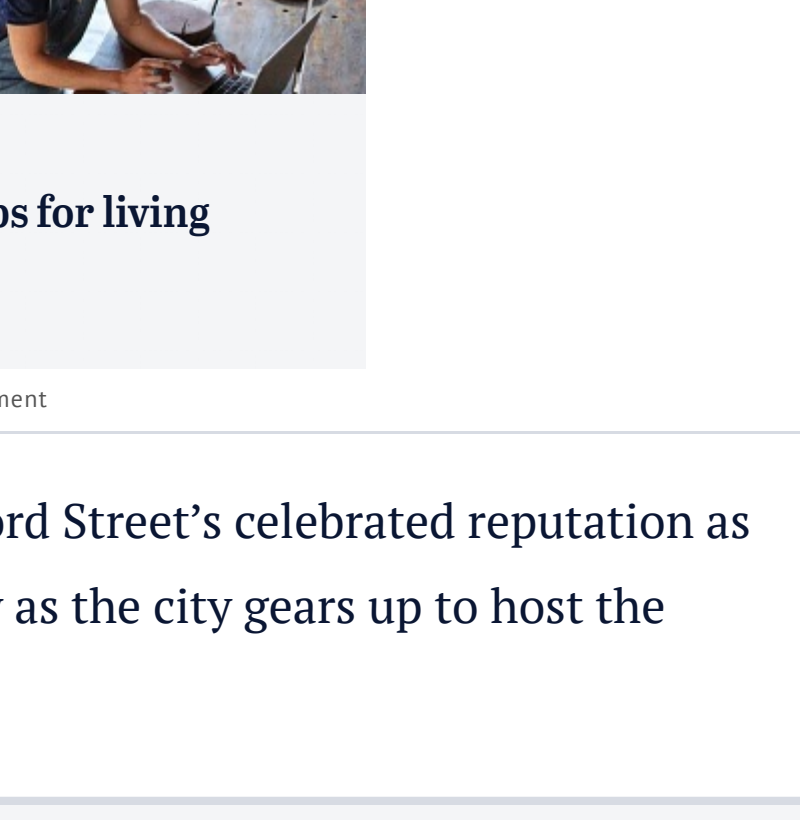
“But I think everyone’s looking forward to a revitalised Oxford Street, it’s been a long time coming.”

The council consulted the public last year on ways to resuscitate the retail, commercial and entertainment strip, which is characterised by empty shops, dilapidated facades and low foot traffic.

The review of planning laws that apply to the street [triggered developers and owners](#) to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in plans to install clusters of boutique hotels, gentrified pubs and creative spaces, in anticipation of the proposed cultural and entertainment precinct.

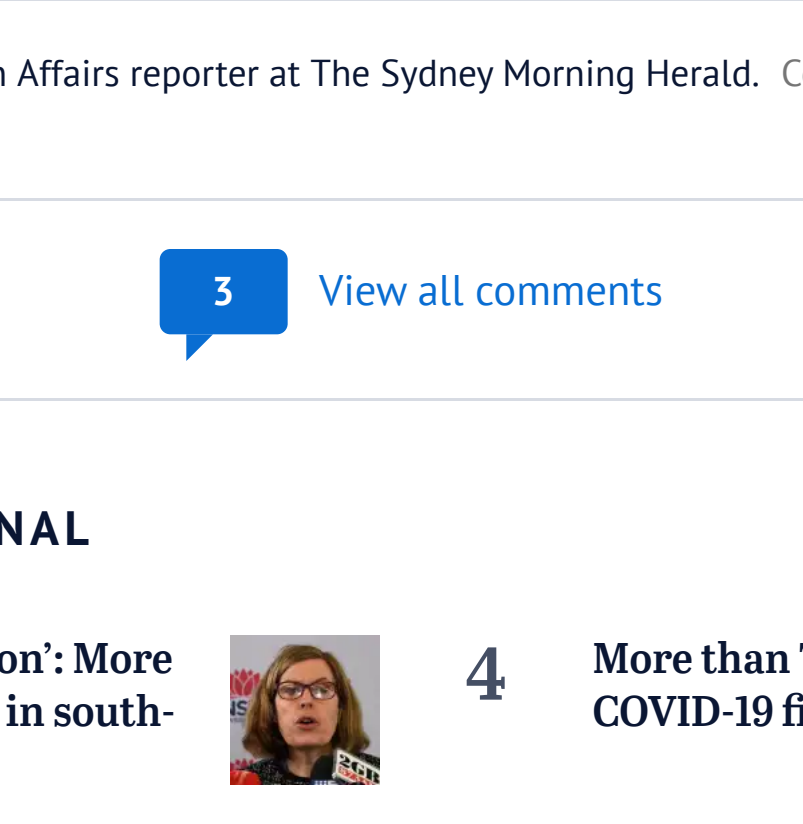
Cr Moore said it was “one of our greatest and best-known streets” but acknowledged it faced “significant troubles in the recent past”, including the lockdown laws, the state government’s clearway, and the Westfield shopping centres in Bondi Junction and the central business district.

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She said the changes would build on Oxford Street’s celebrated reputation as the heart of Sydney’s LGBTQI community as the city gears up to host the WorldPride LGBTQI festival in 2023.

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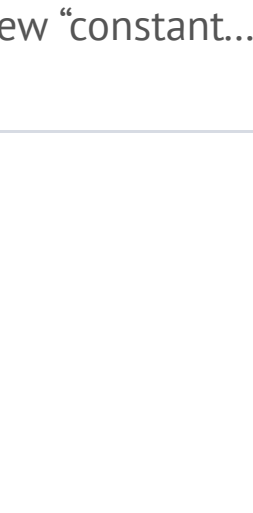
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