

MERCURY

Develop for a better city

PLANS to create a cultural hub around Hobart's Odeon Theatre are an example of the sort of development that can work well for the city.

Rather than the current proposals for high-rise skyscrapers, this idea is one that is likely to unite people in support, rather than in opposition

Mona subsidiary DarkLab's plan for the site sees it being transformed into the centre of a cultural and entertainment district, retaining the Odeon Theatre and adding more live music venues, art house cinemas, gallery spaces, bars and restaurants, a "premium boutique retail lane", office space, residential apartments and a DarkLab branded hotel.

It builds on the city's strengths, retaining historic fabric and enhancing it with a funky modern cultural overlay.

Mona has already shown how successful arts ventures can become critical components of the local economy.

It is an idea that has been increasingly recognised around the world.

In his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida sets out the thesis that cities that are best able to attract creators: scientists, engineers, architects, educators, writers, artists, and entertainers are those most likely to thrive in the challenging 21st century economy.

It was an idea tested on a small scale, for example, by the NSW city of Newcastle with its successful Renew project, which reactivated the city's heart by matching creative businesses with under-utilised commercial space.

The residents of Hobart have an abiding love for their stylish and sometimes quirky city. It's essential that those who seek to change its fabric do so with broad community support.

Other smart cities are adapting the same idea in different forms, for their own benefit.

The Odeon Theatre and surrounds are ripe for such a revamp, particularly as the central city changes with the new student accommodation opening in Elizabeth St, the \$96 million Theatre Royal plans and the invigorated dining scene and music venues that we can expect to benefit in their wake.

It's why the Odeon proposal is better than just another hotel or apartment block, it is for a development on a human scale, one that ties in with the developing themes of a living city.

It is not to say that there is anything wrong with hotels or apartment blocks — when they are done well and with passion and soul and respect for their surrounding communities.

The residents of Hobart have an abiding love for their stylish and sometimes quirky city.

It's essential that those who seek to change its fabric do so with broad community support and engage those very people who have helped make this city what it is today.

The DarkLab proposal appears to be one that fits nicely with the city, and seems more likely to be welcomed than panned.

We look forward to a livelier, more livable city heart.

And proposals like this are examples of how good development can reflect a vision for a better city.

The current permit for the site expires in October, but Riverlee has asked the council for a two-year extension so it can work with DarkLab on its new proposal.

Given the potential outcome, it is difficult to see why the council would refuse such a request.

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