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Article rank | 28 Nov 2018 | The Cairns Post | MARK MURRAY

NEW HOTEL'S SIX APPEAL

FNQ reaches for stars as projects deliver new era of growth

THE first six-star hotel in the Far North is earmarked for Port Douglas.

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ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Prime Construction's crane operator Chris Burkin has the best office in the CBD, 60 metres above the Flynn construction site on The Esplanade. Picture: BRENDAN RADKE

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NEW HOTEL'S SIX APPEAL

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Picture: BRENDAN RADKE

ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Prime Construction's crane operator Chris Burkin has the best office in the CBD, 60 metres above the Flynn construction site on The Esplanade.

Crystalbrook Collection is poised to unveil plans to build luxurious six and five-star hotels at the Port Douglas marina in a private meeting with Douglas Shire Council.

Crystalbrook chief executive Mark Davie said the company's billionaire owner, Ghassan Aboud, was reviewing three architectural concepts in preparation for a formal offer to council in January.

All three proposals involve building a 30-room six-star hotel and a 100-room five-star hotel along the Dicksons Inlet waterfront.

Mr Davie said Mayor Julia Leu and council CEO Mark Stoermer would be privy to the initial concept of the \$200 million investment in the coming weeks, with a view to promptly moving to the development application process.

"From my discussions, there is sense of strong support from council and a motivation to process the application as quickly as possible," he said.

"Right now there is an opportunity for everybody to get behind this project, which will be an absolute game-changer for Port Douglas.

"It's on our desk to move ahead. It's budgeted for and construction is set to begin in 2020."

Crucially, none of the plans will affect the retail trade and tourism sector already established at the marina – a major sticking point in the original DA which stalled in April.

Mr Davie said that, if given the green light, they would demolish the Dicksons Inlet facing elbow in the first half of 2019.

"At this stage there are no hold-ups. We are at the point where we will make a decision on what we are willing to build and invest in," he said.

"We are talking about a \$200 million project at least, so obviously this is a very important financial decision for our company."

Crystalbrook has just opened the first of three hotel developments in Cairns worth in excess of \$350 million.

Its Port Douglas development would target high-end travellers who are bypassing Australia for Asia, Mr Davie said. "If Port Douglas really wants to be a tourist destination in the future, then it needs to invest heavily in the hotel infrastructure in that town," he said.

"We are mindful there has been minimal investment in Port Douglas since the days of the Sheraton.

"We are finding visitors to Port Douglas are seeking alternative locations, so I think we need to fight hard to offer them a product to attract them to our region."

Mayor Julia Leu said she was encouraged to hear Crystalbrook was keen to work with the council through the process.



"Douglas Shire Council continues to work closely with the applicants and looks forward to maintaining a strong relationship when a new development application is lodged," she said in a statement.

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Fair winds as tradies set a cracking pace

ALICIA NALLY
alicia.nally@news.com.au

BUILDERS have taken full advantage of clear skies to move forward in the hope of opening Crystalbrook Collection's two other hotel projects ahead of schedule.

The company's first offering, Riley, at the site of the old Rydges Tradewinds, opened November 6, two months early.

Prime Constructions director Andy Taylor said the crew had put in an "extraordinary effort".

"We were absolutely elated to open the doors of Riley, the first hotel in the Crystalbrook Collection in the CBD, just in



time for Melbourne Cup," Mr Taylor said.

"It was an extraordinary effort by all involved to deliver stage I well over two months ahead of schedule.

"Bailey will be the next hotel to open in mid-late 2019, followed by Flynn in early

2020. Both hotels are also tracking well ahead of schedule at this stage.

"Every single supplier, subcontractor and tradesperson that has worked on these three hotels has worked very hard to achieve a fast-tracked program schedule."

Mr Taylor said tower 2 at Riley, which will be home to rooftop bar Rocco, Greenfields whole foods cafe and more rooms, was the most interesting part of the project.

The tower will open on December 20.

"This has been exciting, not just for us from a development perspective to design and build, but to be able to deliver an iconic piece of infrastructure for the people of Cairns," Mr Taylor said.

Despite pressure to achieve building deadlines, some jobs on the Crystalbrook Collection sites, such as Chris Burkin's role as tower crane operator, do come with some perks.

"Our crane operators start very early in the morning and they are on site moving building materials into key locations all day long. The early morning starts obviously make for some very nice views as the sun rises over the waterfront of the Cairns Esplanade," Mr Taylor said.

"The crane operators are lucky to work in an air-conditioned cab, unlike many of the other trades.

"But having said that, they have a critical role to play on the hotel sites and therefore we need them comfortable and in the right state of mind to perform such high-risk tasks working at such heights."