

ATTACHMENT H

URBAN DESIGN REPORT

by

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responding to

DEPT LETTER OF ISSUES

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**MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT AT COLUMBIA PRECINCT MP 10-0143
2-20 PARRAMATTA ROAD & 11-13 COLUMBIA LANE, HOMEBUSH
RESPONSE TO COMMENTS OF STRATHFIELD COUNCIL AND KEY ISSUES
RAISED BY NSW DEPT OF PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE.**

Introduction

Prior to the original submission of this proposal I was requested by the applicant to undertake an independent review of the design in relation to urban design and SEPP 65 issues. I considered it to be a potentially excellent development and provided a supportive report in May 2011. I have been provided with copies of the responses from Strathfield Council and the Department which have raised a number of issues: most of those relating to urban design and amenity are addressed in this report. The critical matters are those affecting building height, form and amenity, and the comparison of the design as proposed with the layout and form envisaged in the draft Council controls, particularly as illustrated in Figure 3 of the draft.

Assessment

AMENITY

The Figure 3 diagram envisages buildings six storeys high enclosing courtyards, and with ten small-footprint higher elements rising to eight storeys, assuming a scheme complying with the draft LEP height controls. Whilst overall the building forms would be unobtrusive, and the courtyards could be attractively landscaped, the configuration as indicated would result in layouts of residential units that would be highly problematic. It appears impossible for any development to conform to the envelopes proposed, and at the same time both satisfy the requirements of the Residential Flat Design Code and achieve even close to the permissible density. The small floor-plate of the plan for the areas at levels 7 & 8 would accommodate few units and appears commercially unrealistic. The architects have investigated a range of possible layouts and have prepared diagrams illustrating the problems arising for any design contained within the Fig.3 envelopes. In summary the concerns are as follows:-

- . Solar access. The small courtyards, the orientation of the blocks, and the narrow north-south and east-west streets would result in many of the residential units being overshadowed in winter, so that it appears impossible for the RFDC recommendation that in more dense urban settings at least 70% should receive 2 hours or more of winter sunlight to living rooms to be achieved. By comparison it has been calculated that approximately 84% would satisfy this standard in the submitted proposal.
- . Cross-ventilation It is difficult to fully interpret the intentions of Figure 3 in relation to detailed layout of units, particularly for example in the curved buildings along the eastern boundary. Whether central corridor access was envisaged or single-aspect units in these blocks and several of the others, it appears very unlikely that many units would achieve natural cross-ventilation without providing excessive number of lift cores and/or multi-level units: whether the recommended 60% could be achieved seems doubtful. Again by

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comparison, as demonstrated in the submitted scheme 66% of units would be cross-ventilated.

. Spatial separation distances between buildings As indicated in the architects' diagrams the separation distances across some of the Fig 3 courtyards would not comply, and in the narrow north-south street they are far below the 18 metres RFDC recommendation for six-storey buildings. In the submitted scheme however with buildings of varying heights and plan forms off-set from one another the separation distances would be satisfactory, and residents in the large majority of units would have excellent outlook.

. Privacy separation between habitable rooms The minimum separation distances in the RFDC are recommended for a combination of privacy and spatial reasons. For privacy alone it is generally considered that 12 metres should be the minimal separation, and this could be satisfied in the Figure 3 plan in most cases, but would not be achievable for units facing the two narrow streets. It is also very difficult to achieve in the internal corners of courtyards, particularly so in the very constrained acute internal corner of block E. This concern goes to both visual and acoustic privacy.

. External noise impacts The two main noise sources are Parramatta Road and the freight rail line. As to the first, Figure 3 indicates that residential units would directly face the road to a height of six storeys, with no ameliorating setbacks. By comparison the submitted design has setbacks, space to include acoustic screens and with walls of the residential levels above the commercial lower levels splayed away from the road. In addition approximately 1/3 of the frontage will comprise only commercial activities where road noise is not an issue. As to the rail noise it is understood that the curved eastern wall in Figure 3 was intended in part as an acoustic screening device, but it is apparent that any residential units in this block facing to the south would be very close to the noise source and very difficult to insulate and at the same time naturally cross-ventilate. If it were intended that this was to be only an 'acoustic wall', then west-facing units in the block could not achieve cross-ventilation. By comparison in the submitted scheme approximately 1/3 of the frontage to the rail remains as commercial, and along the remainder of this perimeter the first three levels are carparking with a sound-barrier wall above to screen the nearby units and the site generally from rail noise. Units at higher levels are distanced from the noise source where it is comparatively simple to deal with the issues arising.

. Communal space It is assumed that the intention of the Figure 3 layout is to provide for communal space in the courtyards and although these could be visually attractive they would be largely overshadowed at ground level for much of the year. The submitted scheme by contrast proposes communal spaces at the podium levels which would be easily accessible, but have the important advantage of good sunlight all the year. In addition there is considerably more *public* open space because of substantially greater setbacks on the western side of the site, and extending along the full length of the canal, and providing attractive pedestrian links through the precinct. Importantly from the security viewpoint public spaces are clearly defined and separated from private and communal open spaces, a distinction which does not appear to be made in the western part of the Fig.3 layout.

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VISUAL IMPACT AND TOWNSCAPE ISSUES

There is a fundamental difference in the plan configuration between the Figure 3 diagram and the submitted proposal. In the diagram, the new main entry road into the precinct intersects at right angles with Parramatta Road. In the applicant's proposal it continues the alignment of George Street in the Bakehouse Quarter on the north side of Parramatta Road. I consider that the first would be less satisfactory in that the prospect on entry from Parramatta Road would focus on the wall of 'Building E', whereas in the plan as proposed on entering from Parramatta Road there would be an immediate glimpse directly into the new town square, with the its landscape and activity.

The three-storey podium buildings along the entry road with taller forms well set back, would create a more comfortable 'human scale' than the six-to-eight storey street frontage indicated in the Fig.3 diagram

The future pedestrian entry from the west on the proposed new bridge across the waterway should also be far more inviting. Residents and others would walk through a more generous landscaped area and into the wider east-west street towards the new square.

A significant difference between the Council plan and the applicant's design is the three southern buildings, one at sixteen storeys and two at twenty-one storeys in height. These will terminate the view looking south from the Bakehouse Quarter along George Street. They will have a symbolic role, defining the location of the new landscaped public square, with its communal and commercial activities, and public life. They are very well distanced from the taller buildings in Strathfield town centre, would not be seen to compete with that centre, approximately a kilometre away, and would have no adverse environmental impacts.

Conclusion

As to amenity for future residents, the draft Council controls, -specifically the building forms proposed in the Figure 3 diagram, -would result in unacceptable outcomes particularly those relating to solar access for units and communal spaces, natural ventilation, building separation and privacy. By comparison the design proposed in the application has the potential to achieve excellent standards in these respects as well as better outlook, and better options for external noise management.

As to visual and townscape issues I consider that the proposal offers better opportunities for more attractive streetscapes and public spaces than the Council option, and the taller buildings are appropriate in terms of their visual impact as well as providing considerably superior amenity.

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