

EXPERT REVIEW  
33 CROSS STREET,  
DOUBLE BAY

PREPARED FOR NSW DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING  
17 September 2009



**Public Works**  
Government Architect's Office

## Document Control

Issue/ Revision	Author	Reviewed		Approved for Issue		
		Name	Signed	Name	Signed	Date
<b>Final</b>	<b>Peter Mould</b>	<b>Helen Lochhead</b>	<i>Helen Lochhead</i>	<b>Peter Mould</b>	<i>Peter Mould</i>	<b>17.9.09</b>

### **Peter Mould, NSW Government Architect**

Government Architect's Office, Department of Services, Technology & Administration

McKell Building, Level 19, 2-24 Rawson Place SYDNEY 2000

T: 61 2 9372 8463 F: 61 2 9372 8499

E: peter.mould@commerce.nsw.gov.au

W: www.govarch.commerce.nsw.gov.au

# CONTENTS

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2.	PROJECT APPRECIATION	5
3.	ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL	6
4.	CONCLUSIONS	13

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a major application that raises complex design issues. The development site is strategic because of its size and location and although it can meet amenity standards and contribute positively in many ways to the public realm, its bulk, form and most significantly the height of the development are problematic.

The basic premise of trading central open space for height creates an inherent conflict between the proposal and its immediate context.

The uses are supported in terms of appropriateness, sustainability and mix, and the resultant circulation and open space positively contribute to the precinct. The building bulk and tower forms however significantly compromise the overall amenity of the town centre and the contextual relationship of the development to its surroundings.

Some reconfiguration in the overall planning and massing of the development may provide better design options for the site, but there will need to be some trade off in terms of open space and height which is not currently available in the Development Control Plan (DCP) controls.

The proposal demonstrates good design in aspects of the architecture, open space design, finishes and materials, the scale of the podium to the street and an active street frontage.

The PPR proposal demonstrates the value of the courtyard in opening up the site and providing an active open space and in extending the pedestrian network of the precinct.

This report concludes that the towers are intrusive elements and as such the development is unacceptable in its current form, and so with that finding the only options available are those that distribute floor space to the podium or keep and modify the existing building.

Due to the significant detrimental impact of the towers on the village character of the Double Bay Town Centre the development is not recommended for approval.

## 2. PROJECT APPRECIATION

### 2.1 PROJECT SCOPE

The Government Architect has been engaged by the NSW Department of Planning to undertake an expert review of the Preferred Project Report (PPR) submitted 21 August 2009 for the redevelopment of the Stamford Plaza Hotel site, Double Bay and provide a written report to the NSW Department of Planning in accordance with the following requirements.

### 2.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Review the proponent's preferred development option with regard to:
  - The suitability of the proposal having regard to the immediate, local (Double Bay Commercial Centre) and wider contexts;
  - The amenity impacts arising from the proposed building form, in particular the effect on views, solar access and privacy;
  - Whether the proposal achieves the optimum redistribution of the existing gross floor area of the site;
  - The design quality of the proposal.
2. Advise what changes (if any) should be made to the proponent's preferred development option in order to manage any impacts on its surroundings and the amenity of adjacent developments and the public domain.

**Note:** The proposal has been reviewed only with respect to the above Terms of Reference. It has not been assessed in terms of its compatibility with the existing planning controls or its compliance with State Environmental Planning Policies such as SEPP 65 and the Residential Flat Design Code.

## 3. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL

### 3.1 PRECINCT ANALYSIS

#### Character

Double Bay Town Centre is close to the harbour and located in a large natural valley between the ridges of Darling Point/Edgecliff and Bellevue Hill.

The building stock is varied in style and condition with no particular style or period dominant. The architectural and streetscape quality is generally undistinguished with the exception of the heritage precinct of Transvaal Avenue.

The precinct north of New South Head Road has a fine grain subdivision pattern.

The amalgamation and redevelopment of some sites along the north side of Cross Street have created buildings of different height and bulk to the predominant building stock.

#### Street Pattern

The street pattern north of New South Head Road has a complex mix of roads, laneways and small open spaces that provide a variety of pedestrian choices and experiences which add to the amenity and character of the place.

The centre provides a pleasant pedestrian experience due to the almost continuous shop fronts along streets and through block arcades. The improvement program of paving, footpath widening and pedestrian crossings carried out in the 1980s and 1990s enhances this experience.

#### Scale

The Double Bay Town Centre sits in the valley floor. The topography rises at the edge of the centre quite quickly to the surrounding ridges to the east and west and more distantly to the south. The predominant height of buildings in the Centre is two storeys with a few up to six storeys.

The DCP controls allow buildings with street frontages of four and five storeys (up to 16.5m high). These controls relate the allowable building height to the topographic form and by restricting the height in the Centre. This allows the built form to reflect the valley floor and remain substantially within the line of the predominant tree canopy.

### 3.2 RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

*3.2.1(a) The suitability of the proposal having regard to the immediate, local (Double Bay Commercial Centre) and wider contexts.*

#### COMMENTS

The proposal contributes positively to the immediate context at the ground level. The proposed public square and connections reinforce the intricate pedestrian

network of the Double Bay Town Centre and create a public place that will offer a potentially vibrant mix of commercial and retail opportunities. The proposal shows quality materials and landscape elements.

The square, open to the sky, adds to the existing urban pattern of the Double Bay Town Centre, reinforcing its village-like atmosphere and continues the fine grain already well established north of New South Head Road.

The scale of the podium is appropriate for the streetscape and uses are brought to the street front greatly improving the existing condition and activating the street.

The podium has minimum impact to the west and east and is reasonably scaled to the north. It is lower and closer to the northern boundary than the existing building.

The towers however have a negative impact on the immediate and wider context.

### **Immediate**

In Cross Street the towers will be the most visual elements, dominating the immediate environs and by so doing dramatically changing the village-like character it currently enjoys.

The impact on the heritage precinct of Transvaal Avenue is two fold. Firstly there is the increased visual impact and secondly there is a change of use. The building that currently occupies the site is out of scale, unsightly and has a negative impact on Transvaal Avenue. However although unsightly it is an inactive almost blank façade and so does not attract attention and at night its presence is mute. The proposed towers are however considerably taller and are activated by residential uses, with large areas of glass and balconies, and so will have a greater impact in terms of noise, activity and light at night on this area.

### **Local**

The impact of the proposal on the local context again comes down to the height and bulk of the towers. Their dominance as seen from the surrounding local context is over powering. This is especially true when viewed from Steyne Park, Bellevue Road and Greenoaks Avenue (views 8, 10, 11 and 12 in the Visual Assessment of the PPR). The view from the corner of William Street and New South Head Road shows how the towers effectively rise above the tree canopy which currently reinforces the plane of the valley floor. As such they are seen as intrusive elements of substantial bulk.

### **Wider Context**

Viewed from the wider context the impact of the towers lessens. From across the harbour the towers are seen as part of the variable cluster of towers in the suburbs surrounding Double Bay. From the surrounding ridges the towers alternately blend into the surrounding backdrop of buildings or vegetation, or sit across long vistas to the harbour. From a distance as individual towers their impact varies from negligible to intrusive, depending on distance and view point.

## **CONCLUSION**

The tower elements due to their bulk and form and particularly their height are intrusive and overpowering to the context of the Double Bay Town Centre and so the proposal is unsuitable in this context. Towers generally are inappropriate in the Double Bay Town Centre.

*3.2.1(b) The amenity impacts arising from the proposed building form, in particular the impact on views, solar access and privacy.*

## **COMMENTS**

The amenity impacts of the proposed built form can be considered both internally and externally, ie the impacts on the amenity within the proposed development and the amenity impacts created by the development on its surroundings. Both are considered in this report.

One impact of the proposed form is on the mix of uses on the site. By clustering retail, hotel (with its associated bars and restaurants) and residential uses around a central square at a reasonably high density there are the potential conflicts of privacy and noise.

### **Privacy**

The design in the PPR goes to considerable detail to provide privacy through the provision of fixed and operable screens to the facades of the podium buildings and the lower northeast tower. Although effective from the outside the views from the inside would be compromised and, as it is expected that these apartments are designed for the high end of the residential market, it is possible that applications to modify these in the future may compromise the privacy offered in the current proposal.

The issue of noise and its amelioration is covered in the PPR Environmental Noise Assessment. The impact (internal to the scheme) from ground level activity, or hotel rooms or pool, on the surrounding apartments (eg hotel balconies directly opposite or adjacent to residential bedrooms) is likely to have amenity impacts. Some apartments, opposite each other but in different buildings, have bedrooms facing each other with less than 3 metres separation.

The impact on the privacy of immediate neighbours is difficult to ascertain. It is axiomatic that high residential towers will overlook neighbouring properties. The effect of this impact is conditional on proximity and view lines and will vary from property to property. In this regard the northern boundary presents the most likely impact. Here the podium building is well screened (see discussion above), as is the northeast tower, and noise screens are placed around the pool. There will be overlooking of the properties to the north by the proposed new residences in the north wings and lower northeast tower.



## **Views**

The view impacts on the immediate and distant neighbourhood have been discussed previously (see point 3.2.1a).

## **Solar Access**

The biggest impact on overshadowing by the proposal is on the south side of Cross Street. There is a wide pavement on this side of the street and it is in part occupied by seating for cafés. There are several pavement cafés in the Double Bay Town Centre and with the increasing 'café culture' in Sydney this is likely to increase. Sun access is therefore desirable in the morning and at lunch time in all but the summer months.

The shadow diagrams provided in the PPR show that in mid winter there will be a substantial increase to the existing condition in shadows to the south pavement of Cross Street after 1pm. Currently the shadows of the existing building leave the pavement in part by 1pm and totally by 2pm. Substantial shadows cast by the two residential towers in the proposal remain on the southern pavement until well after 3pm. In September the impact is lesser and occurring between 12 noon and 1pm. In summer there will be no impact.

The loss of amenity to the pavement is offset by the provision of a new public square open to the sky within the proposed site. In winter this square is nearly totally in shadow with only small areas of sun in the south and east between 12 noon and 2pm. This increases through the equinox until it is fully sunlit by mid summer when it is less desirable.

## **CONCLUSION**

The amenity impacts on privacy from the podium can be managed by noise management policies and screens, but these will have an impact on the internal amenity of the apartments. Adjacency of uses will also have an impact on amenity within the proposed development.

Solar access beyond the site is negatively impacted by the shadows cast by the towers on Cross Street. Within the site the square is mostly shaded in the winter.

*3.2.1(c) Whether the proposal achieves the optimum redistribution of the existing gross floor area of the site*

## **COMMENTS**

The strategy of redistribution of floor space is based on the "hollowing out" of the current building mass and the redistribution of floor space on this site is logically to upper levels. The PPR proposes this redistributed floor space as towers. This provides accommodation at a higher level with uninterrupted views, and therefore greater value. Clearly this is desirable in terms of return on investment, but not so in terms of impact on the immediate and local environment.

It creates an inherent conflict between the premise of the proposal – open courtyard and higher towers - and its immediate context.

Any redistribution of floor space would be contingent upon mix of uses, understanding of market conditions, available floor space and functional design decisions to answer the brief defined by them.

The premise of the proposal is that the existing GFA on the site is available for distribution. There is some debate about this calculation, but that is outside the brief for this report. A different calculation would obviously make different options available for investigation. This report does not endorse that calculation or otherwise, but simply accepts that the options developed have used it as measure for comparison of like with like.

The proponent in developing this proposal has examined three of options in the PPR for floor space distribution on the site. All of these options are developed with towers of various configurations which have been assessed by the proponent with the resulting preferred option (Option 1) progressed as the Preferred Project.

The proposal breaks the DCP controls in terms of floor space and height.

This report concludes that the towers are intrusive elements and so with that premise the only options available are those that distribute floor space to the podium, or keep and modify the existing building. The PPR proposal demonstrates the value of the courtyard in opening up the site and providing an active open space and in extending the pedestrian network of the precinct. A better more flexible approach is available if the existing building is demolished, but this would need to be weighed against the costs of demolition and redevelopment.

Extra height could be acceptable along Cross Street as long as it was set back from the street so as not to increase the visual impact or the winter shadows beyond the current DCP controls (ie top 2 levels set back with a total of 7 levels). Extra height could be tolerated to the west and east with set backs similar to the DCP controls.

The best design outcome would be to design to a lesser floor space gaining both the advantages of open space and minimum increase in height.

## **CONCLUSION**

The towers are intrusive elements out of scale with the town centre therefore any development which includes the towers is not optimal in terms of impact on the surrounding context.

### *3.2.1(d) The design quality of the proposal*

#### **COMMENTS**

The proposal establishes design quality in the aspects of architecture, open space design, finishes and materials. There is sufficient detail to gauge design intent and detail resolution.

Minor areas of concern are the terracotta and timber batten screens which will affect internal amenity and views and may therefore be modified as the design develops, and the curved glass window walls shown in both the retail and residential components. These are labelled 'frameless glazing' but not noted as curved. Yet they are shown as curved on the plans and illustrated as curved in the renderings. The design quality would be lessened if these were faceted and not curved.

Design quality however also needs to be evaluated on functional as well as aesthetic concerns and in this regard earlier comments (3.2.1b Privacy) on residential and hotel amenity should be noted.

Further, the very transparent and glassy towers shown in the renderings could, when occupied, be expected to change as blinds and curtains furnishing the apartments are added for light control and privacy, lessening the clean and uncluttered look.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The proposal achieves good design quality in terms of architectural expression and contribution to the public realm.

However because the bulk and form are unacceptable, and there are some issues relating to amenity in the apartments, the proposal cannot be seen as meeting design excellence.

*3.2.2 Advise on what changes (if any) should be made to the proponent's preferred development option in order to manage any impacts on its surroundings and the amenity of the adjacent developments and the public domain.*

#### **COMMENTS**

This report concludes that the towers are intrusive elements and so the fundamental change is the removal of the towers. We understand that the towers are a major contributor the financial viability to the proposed scheme and so subsequent changes would be far reaching.

The DCP for the site allows a 5 level building at Cross Street and so the proposed podium fits within those controls. I believe it is possible to add another 2 levels above the podium along Cross Street as long as it was set back from the street so as to maintain the street height scheduled in the DCP and not increase winter

shadows beyond those of the podium (ie top 2 levels set back giving a total of 7 levels. It should be noted that this is outside the current controls).

It is however unlikely that the current floor space could be achieved (other than accepting the existing building envelope) without impacts on the amenity of surrounding properties. Extra height of up to 7 levels could be tolerated to the west and east (as well as the south) with set backs similar to the DCP controls, but this would need careful modelling and development to achieve an acceptable outcome. The north should remain low to minimize the impact of overshadowing on the central square as well as impact on properties to the north.

The extra height, if accepted, should be used to allow the creation of the open space network and pedestrian connections similar to that proposed in the PPR. These public benefits could allow some tolerance in regard to height as long as overshadowing impacts and privacy are managed.

### **CONCLUSION**

The towers should be removed and the floor space redistributed to the podium. The principles of the square and pedestrian network should be retained.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development makes a positive contribution the Double Bay Town Centre in terms of the new public square, the improved pedestrian network, the architectural quality, the mix of uses and the scale and form of the podium buildings.

The basic premise of providing a central open space in return for additional height creates an inherent conflict between the proposal and its immediate context.

The towers are considered to have a significant and negative impact on the Double Bay Town Centre which sits in the valley floor and is characterized by an intricate street pattern and pedestrian network, and low buildings. The proposed towers are counter to this scale and are seen as inappropriate in this context, destroying the village character.

The towers will also impact on the immediate context by overshadowing the southern pavement of Cross Street in winter. The new square provided within the development, whilst positive in most respects, is also overshadowed in winter.

In conclusion, the negative impact of the towers in this proposal makes it unacceptable in the context of the town centre despite other positive aspects of the proposed development.