

ATTACHMENT “D”

**ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW ADVISORY
PANEL COMMENTS**

Architectural Review Advisory Panel

Proposal:

Concept Plan for Mixed Use Residential and Commercial Development (Kirrawee Brick Pit)

Property:

566-594 Princes Highway KIRRAWEE NSW 2232

Applicant:

NSW Department Of Planning

File Number:

DN10/0007

The following is the report of the Architectural Review Advisory Panel Meeting held on 22 December 2010 at the Administration Centre, Sutherland Shire Council, Eton Street, Sutherland. The report documents the Panel's consideration of the proposed development described above.

"1. DN10/0007 – Part 3A Concept Proposal for a Mixed Use Development (Kirrawee Brick Pit Site) at 566–594 Princes Highway, Kirrawee

Introduction

The proposal is located adjacent to the existing Kirrawee Shopping Centre on a 42,542 square metre site formerly used as a brick pit. Over the past decade there have been several concepts for the development of this site that the Panel has reviewed. The concept illustrated in this proposal was recently reviewed by the Panel. Unfortunately, there have been only incremental improvements where the Panel had suggested fundamental change. Consequently, the Panel feels compelled to repeat some of its earlier messages. It would rather move forward with the refinement of the project but as some of these are basic planning issues, they must be addressed at the concept stage.

The proposal will accommodate 14,350 m² of retail/commercial space and approximately 450 dwellings contained in eight (8) separate buildings. The proposal will be serviced by a basement car park and incorporates a 9000 square metre park proposed to be dedicated as a public park.

As a general observation, the Panel noted that the Urban Design Report was comprehensive and examined the relevant issues. However, the comments it contained were superficial or dismissive. A good example is the discussion of height in Section 3 where reference is made to chimneys which once stood on the site. The Panel considered it absurd to argue that "It is in many ways fitting that taller development be introduced back onto the site." The shallowness of the arguments greatly diminishes the quality of the report.

The following issues were considered to require further development and/or consideration:

Context

The Department of Planning outlined DGRs to be considered in the development of the design proposal. For example: 'Detailed envelope/height and contextual studies should be undertaken to ensure the proposal integrates with and is appropriate for the surrounding environment.'

Although the application incorporates extensive documentation there is little written analysis or demonstrated response to the neighbouring area, which consists of three (3) to four (4) storey residential unit developments to the west of the site and two (2) storey commercial and industrial developments to the north, east and south of the site. The site analysis is below the standard expected for any project. While the analysis of the context is poor, it is reflective of a wider problem.

So building height is a good example of how the proposal ignores its context. It argues that context is relevant to its interface with the site but is otherwise irrelevant.

It is recognised that this is a large unique site so solutions unique to the site can be considered on the condition that there is a high degree of permeability and connection between the development and the surrounding area. Unfortunately the proposal fails to create convincing connections. The retail component is buried in the middle of the site, not visible from or easily accessible to the surrounding retail and residential areas. Way finding needs to be intuitive not tortuous.

The Panel observed that underlying decisions taken in respect to vehicular and pedestrian access to the site and circulation within it are crucial in determining whether the project succeeds in satisfying the objectives outlined in the DGR. However, these fundamental issues appear not to have been adequately addressed in the early planning of the proposal, to the extent that in many instances these shortcomings in the design could not possibly be satisfactorily resolved by further design development.

Further, the traffic network ignores the broader network beyond the site. While others can comment on the technical aspects of traffic, the Panel is concerned about the physical impacts of the entrance and exit driveways and the difficulties for motorists to visit the site in a comfortable and safe manner, including the apparent conflicts between movements of heavy delivery vehicles, private cars and public buses.

Building Form/Scale

Four (4) alternative building layouts are briefly discussed in the documentation but there is insufficient explanation of the reasoning behind the selected scheme. The idea underlying the original concept was weak and became lost as the scheme developed. As finally presented, the internal arrangement of the buildings lacks justification.

Residential buildings require a clear address. If a residential building does not directly connect with a public street the circulation system must be legible for residents and visitors alike.

The location of the simple linear building forms on Flora Street and Princes Highway are considered a reasonable response to the site. However, extending buildings further along Flora Street to the west would create the opportunity for the proposed retail to form

a stronger link with the existing shopping centre. If some of the existing trees are to be removed, retailing is preferred to an observation deck. Breaking down the buildings into smaller forms along Flora Street is also recommended.

The orientation and massing of the three (3) residential towers (A, B and C) are considered inappropriate. The three (3) building forms will read as a large building mass when approached from a distance. Individually the buildings are bulky but the angular relationship between the buildings will exaggerate this bulk. View 8 in the visual analysis illustrates this point.

The podium spaces created between the towers are also poor. While later detailed design may be able to improve the quality of the spaces, the fundamental shortcomings will remain. These are not natural spaces at ground level. Residents of Buildings B and C can only relate to the elevated podium or the subterranean world of the enclosed basement or shopping mall. The circulation system is poorly resolved for residents and visitors.

From all entrances the separation between the central towers and the outside world is emphasised. At the vehicular entrance from the Highway, for example, the monolithic wall which greets the motorist proclaims that the outside world is excluded.

As a matter of principle, the introduction of a single 15 storey tower on the site could be considered acceptable. However, for this strategy to be successful the tower must read as a single slender form. To achieve this all other building forms must be significantly lower than the tower and the spaces between the buildings need to be carefully considered. It is suggested that the tower be located in one corner of the site. One option would be towards the north-eastern corner of the site, which is away from other residential properties and would not overshadow the public outdoor spaces. Another option is in the south-eastern corner, where any overshadowing would fall on the industrial premises to the south. Buildings around the perimeter of the site should form a meaningful edge to the development and buildings contained within the centre of the development should be of a smaller scale. In this way the internal spaces within the site would not be dominated by tall bulky buildings that overshadow the spaces. A more pleasant scale can and should be provided within the site.

Density

The present scheme (which at 1.52:1 is significantly higher than what is the permitted maximum under the planning controls) creates inappropriate, poorly proportioned building form and struggles to provide adequate amenity for the extent and range of uses envisaged on the site. It is not the opinion of the Panel that a 52% increase in floor space represents a "marginal increase over the required 1.0:1". The density in this case is considered greater than this concept can accommodate.

It is also noted that the 1.52:1 floor space ratio is calculated on the whole site area of 4.2 hectares. Discounting the 9000 m² proposed for the public open space, the effective floor space ratio is 1.93:1. Such density is inappropriate for a location such as this.

Resources, Energy & Water Efficiency

While it is noted that not all of these issues can be addressed at this stage, it is a concern that the scheme does not propose to be innovative or satisfy more than the basic minimum standards. It is apparent that inherent planning limitations within the proposal would significantly limit any future capacity to raise environmental performance standards at a future design development stage. A scheme of this scale provides the opportunity to incorporate features which cannot be considered for smaller sites. Despite the claims that this is a unique site with great potential, that opportunity is being overlooked. Other developments of this scale are proposing solutions such as tri-generation, but this scheme aims to satisfy BASIX.

The Panel is concerned that there will be poor solar access to many parts of the site, with both public and private amenity being affected. In order to achieve adequate solar access and ventilation as required by SEPP No. 65 it is proposed to incorporate numerous "crossover" units. Such units have their place but in this instance it is concluded that their inclusion highlights a fundamental problem caused by the large footprint of the residential buildings.

Amenity

Residential amenity is considered to be sub-optimal and not of a standard that reflects the quality of the site or the Director-General's requirements as set out in the Urban Design Report. The relationship between public and private open space is unclear, as is the relationship between the residential and retail/commercial zones.

The residential component of the current proposal provides no clear pedestrian entries to the residential towers (A, B and C).

Despite the proximity to Kirrawee Railway Station the scheme is not designed to create an easy connection from the residential buildings to the station. Priority is given to car use because the internal movement system focuses on the basement car park. Nothing in the proposal suggests that the basement car park will be a beautiful place which improves amenity for residents.

A good example of the consideration given to amenity is provided by Block F. Pedestrians enter from the south via the heavily trafficked vehicular entrance off the Highway. This access, which is used by all delivery vehicles, provides a bleak and sterile entrance. South facing units on the level above the showrooms have an outlook onto the rear wall of the retail complex. On the levels above the outlook is over the podium above the retail use towards Blocks B and C. Apart from having a poor outlook, the south facing units have little or no solar orientation and poor ventilation. For a development of this nature a higher standard of amenity can be provided and is essential.

The retail component relates poorly to the existing Kirrawee Shopping Centre and the vehicular access/servicing clashes with the pedestrian circulation. Of particular concern is the overlap of the Princes Highway retail entry and the vehicular/service entry. For residents walking to the retail centre from the west and north-west, access is not as convenient or as easy as it could otherwise be. The proposal offers little evidence of adequate attention to the development of the rational and clear access and circulation

network necessary to underpin the planning concept of such a complex, multi use development.

On the typical floor layouts long internal corridors are proposed for Blocks A-C at Levels 2 & 5, Block A Levels 7, 8 & 9 and Block B Level 7. These corridors should be naturally lit and ventilated. As they are currently shown, they would have difficulty meeting the escape provisions of the BCA.

To improve the amenity of the proposal, the site planning must be better informed by a clear circulation strategy. All residential buildings must have a clear pedestrian entry that has a street address. Visitors need to be able to easily find their way to any unit. The retail component of the proposal must form a clearer and easier connection with the existing shopping centre and the servicing functions of the development must be separated from pedestrian circulation.

Concern is also expressed about the location and amenity of the piazza. From the shadow diagrams it appears that the space will be overshadowed for lengthy periods throughout the year, with winter being particularly poor.

Safety & Security

The lack of good access and movement legibility planning does not assist the final resolution of planning for "safer by design". Way finding will not be intuitive due to the complexity of the design concept and the poor relationship between public and private spaces.

A close examination of this issue should be undertaken by relevant specialists, including NSW Police.

Social Dimensions

The proposal in its current configuration is seen as undermining the viability of the existing Kirrawee Shopping Centre. Visual, pedestrian and services connections are poor. The proposed retail area has poor street presence and activation.

Within the scheme a variety of housing options are provided. This includes different unit sizes and configurations. Creating more affordable units is a desirable outcome but it should not follow that more affordable units should have poor amenity.

Aesthetics

Few underlying principles are supplied that could form a basis or framework for future design development. However comments in regard to aspects of the proposed building form and scale are also pertinent to the ultimate level of aesthetic acceptability of the development. Since the detail of the buildings' appearance will be the subject of later applications it is imperative that the principles are firmly in place at the conceptual stage. Further comment cannot be made about the anticipated aesthetic merits except to highlight the deficiency in the application as submitted.

There is no evidence that the scheme will be able to satisfy the Director General's requirement for a high standard of urban design.

Landscape

The current scheme is felt by the Panel to be tokenistic with regard to the ecological assets of the site (vegetation, water body and flying fox) as well as its strong existing sense of place.

There is an opportunity to retain and reinforce the existing Turpentine/Ironbark forest as a feature throughout the site by creating more substantial on-ground pockets that would create a strong framework for the development.

Water is a major component of the existing landscape, bringing coolness, support for the flying fox/bat population and a strong sense of place. There is an opportunity to retain and reinforce these assets by treating the landscape as a "water park" (ie substantial areas of water ringed by forest, walkways and terraces) rather than as a filled and grassed "parkland" with small scattered water bodies.

The present location and treatment of the water body reduces the degree of connection with the Kirrawee Shopping Centre. Since a new water body will be created in this proposal, either a bridge connection from the south-western corner of the site to improve access or an alternative location for the water body on the site should be considered rather than accepting the present location as a "given".

The piazza is set down below Flora Street so there will be little connection with the surrounding area, either visually or functionally.

Shadowing of the piazza in winter is a real amenity issue.

Given the shortcomings of the proposed public open space, Council would be very poorly advised if it is recommended to accept ownership of the open space "park".

The proposed on-slab open space in and around the tower blocks A, B and C includes a swimming pool (see Site Plan) and an area for tennis (see Upper Ground Floor Plan) but much more needs to be done to optimise useability, privacy and social opportunity in these outdoor spaces. It is important that private/semi-private and public open space is clearly defined and that large shade trees, level changes and windbreaks are provided to reduce both heat loading and wind tunnelling between the buildings as well as relieve the perceived flatness of the podium.

Recommendation/Conclusion:

The urban design report does a good job of identifying key issues relating to the site. However, the proposal fails to adequately address these issues. The proposal also fails to address the issues outlined in the Department of Planning's DGRs.

The current proposal is too dense; forms no clear connection to the existing retail centre or nearby residential neighbourhoods; and lacks a clear access, circulation and servicing strategy. Rather than being designed so that it will integrate into the neighbourhood and enhance its overall quality, the development is designed to operate as an island principally accessed by motor vehicle. This fundamental concept is not supported. There should be a desire to embrace Kirrawee, whereas the current proposal seeks to create a residential enclave.

The three (3) residential towers are poorly proportioned and inappropriately located. It is recommended that if a taller building is acceptable, it should be a single tall slender tower located on the perimeter of the site and all other built forms should be significantly lower. To improve SEPP No. 65 performance, the footprint of each residential building should be smaller.

Unsupported by a clear design philosophy and rationale, the 'finger' planning concept for tall central buildings appears to create far more site planning issues (and ultimate construction and sustainability issues) than it resolves.

The development of an appropriate strategy that responds to the constraints and opportunities of the site, as clearly identified in a comprehensive site analysis, is strongly recommended.

As the proposed park falls short of what should be provided as public open space, Council should decline the offer for this land to be dedicated and acknowledge that the space will provide a valuable outdoor area to enhance the character of the proposed retail development."

Colleen Baker
ARAP Coordinator

13 January 2011