

ANNEXURE 4

URBAN DESIGN REPORT

prepared by

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COLUMBIA PRECINCT
2-20 Parramatta Road and 11-13 Columbia Lane

PART 3A MAJOR PROJECT APPLICATION FOR MIXED DEVELOPMENT
URBAN DESIGN REPORT

Introduction

I have been consulted during the development of this project and requested to provide independent peer review in relation to urban design issues. The applicant has responded constructively to consequential suggestions and recommendations and has developed an excellent scheme which responds to the many challenges of the site, and one which I am pleased to support.

This report refers to the following documentation:-

- . Architectural and Urban Design Drawings by Mayoh Architects Pty Ltd, Northbridge
- . Landscape drawings by Site Image (NSW) Pty Ltd, Surry Hills
- . Planning & Environmental Assessment Report by Colston Budd Hunt & Kafes, Chatswood

Extensive detailed information is provided in these documents, and this report focuses on the broad issues and principles addressed by the proposal.

The very large amalgamated site of approximately 3 hectares offers unusual opportunities to totally transform a presently somewhat desolate environment. The proposed new activities on the site appear to be consistent with and permissible under the provisions of the Strathfield Planning Scheme Ordinance, and entirely consistent with the Objectives of the Strathfield Development Control Plan No.20. The Built Form Masterplan applying to the site is restrictive as to layout and height, and appears to have limited relevance in the context of changed circumstances. The very substantial scale of the potential development considered together with the intended uses, location of the site suggest that this is a case in which response to the full context of the site can produce an outstanding social, physical and urban environmental outcome. The involvement of the State Government through the Part 3A or similar process is well justified because of the sheer scale of the development and implications related to population growth, infrastructure and urban form, and its relevance to the Metropolitan Strategy.

Context

The nature of the site is both challenging and exciting from an urban design perspective. No other site in the metropolis is contained in this way by the conjunction of intersecting suburban rail lines, an intensively utilized arterial road, also with the elevated six-lane M4 motorway almost adjacent. These constraints pose challenges in relation to access, as well as environmental concerns in relation to noise and pollution control. Immediately

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opposite the subject site on Parramatta Road a separate major development proposal including a hotel, theatre, and commercial development is also currently under consideration.

There are also very positive attributes of the site, including the open space bounding the site to the west, - which although presently an unsightly canal/drainage channel with an easement for overhead transmission lines, -could with sensitive landscape become an extension of the Powell's Creek reserve as an attractive open space and recreation area. There is a large relatively recent residential flat development immediately to the west of the proposed reserve, and other nearby sites to the east are being transformed primarily for medium-density residential flats.

To the north is the Bakehouse Quarter, an unusual example of urban regeneration which in recent years has brought life and vitality to the adjoining area. There is also convenient access to suburban rail, bus transport and public schools, and the Homebush village shops are within ready walking distance.

Whilst the major constraints affecting the site are particularly challenging, there are significant opportunities for innovative and creative solutions.

Concept

The design provides for a wide range of uses, -commercial, including new self-storage facilities partly replacing the existing, together with retail, communal, recreation, and residential, in all generating an FSR density of the order of 3:1. Residential flats are planned to accommodate a new population of the order of 1500 people.

The plan configuration is described in the architect's 'design principles' diagrams which illustrate graphically how the new development is intended to integrate with and enhance the existing nearby environment. From an urban design perspective the key components are:-

1. NEW MAIN STREET

The new street continues the alignment of George Street on the opposite side of Parramatta Road, rather than intersecting at a different angle as indicated in the DCP Masterplan. This will provide a direct visual and symbolic link with the Bakehouse Quarter to the north, and enable direct access to its services and amenities. The street itself is designed to have a tree-lined 'boulevard' character fronted by three-storey buildings with commercial and retail uses at ground-level protected by generous awnings, and with taller towers set back above.

2. SENSE OF ENTRY

The buildings fronting Parramatta Road are designed to frame the entry to the new precinct and invite entry into the main street with its avenue-style planting.

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3. THE SQUARE AND SENSE OF ARRIVAL

It is critical to the success of any new urban development of this scale that there be a centre or 'heart'. Ideally such a place should serve both commercial and communal purposes, it should be convenient, comfortable and accessible, and it should have a strong physical identity. If these criteria can be satisfied it is likely to work well in a practical sense, and be the destination which symbolizes the very sense of arrival at the centre. The main squares of many great medieval towns which we continue to enjoy many centuries after their creation epitomize these concepts.

The Columbia Precinct 'neighbourhood square' in the form proposed promises to be a very successful central space with a very welcoming ambience. The curved plan form of the podium of the southern building has been generated by the curved boundary of that part of the site, and will very effectively embrace the space. It has a colonnaded and/or awning protection along the frontage to the north, and offers ideal locations for restaurant, retail and communal facilities such as library, youth centre, gymnasium and seniors' centre. These will have outlook across the main square, which is designed to have generous seating and a shallow 'theatre' form, fostering informal meetings as well as potentially providing opportunities for outdoor performances. On the north and west sides the square is framed by the low-scale podia of the other buildings. Landscape planting and paving complements the building forms. The several entry points for pedestrians and vehicles are relatively narrow to ensure a sense of 'containment' of the space. A focal element such as fountain or sculpture is located at the northern corner of the square where it would be a strong marker clearly visible both on entering the main street from Parramatta Road, and on approaching along the pedestrian path from the west. It is intended to have a strong presence celebrating arrival at the centre of the new precinct.

4. PEDESTRIAN SCALE

The intention is that all streets will be 'pedestrian-friendly', defined by low-scale street-frontage buildings, with planting and paving as described in the landscape plans. The main street and square and where possible the ancillary streets will be activated with commercial and retail uses. Since there are in effect no 'through-streets', vehicular traffic will be slow moving and the environment safe for pedestrians.

5. BUILDING FORMS

A number of simple principles have guided development of the design:-

. All buildings have low-scale podium elements addressing street frontages to ensure a friendly pedestrian scale

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. The Parramatta Road frontage buildings are limited to 6-9 storeys with setback and landscaping, providing a suitable scale to the street, with showrooms at ground floor level.

. The residential flats are accommodated in medium to high-rise blocks, with the higher buildings graded up to the south. In this way exposure to noise is minimized by the barrier buildings and increasing distance from the source.

. This gradation of height towards the south allows good solar access to all buildings, whilst the shadow from the taller buildings would fall on non-residential land, -primarily rail and electricity infrastructure.

. The tallest blocks have curved plan forms, primarily as part of the design composition linking them to the curved form of the public square, but also serving to minimize their visual bulk and provide variety and interest when seen in silhouette as part of the total development.

. The taller buildings will mark the termination of the George Street axis from the north, and symbolize the location of the public square and community centre amongst the cluster of lower residential and commercial buildings both on the subject site and nearby.

6. RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

The siting, plan-form and northern orientation of the residential unit block ensures that there will be a high level of amenity for future residents. Standards well in excess of those recommended in the NSW Residential Flat Design Code are readily achieved. There would also be a significant improvement in the quality of the environment for residents in the existing units immediately to the west who overlook the presently unattractive site.

7. LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

The master-planning of the various sites provides a unique opportunity to create a very attractive landscape setting for the development. Apart from the landscape initiatives which will enhance the more urban spaces, the extensive and presently very degraded areas bordering the site along its western boundary are proposed to be restored and regenerated, and will provide extensive areas for passive and active recreation. This will involve close cooperation with the owners of adjoining sites as well as Council and public authorities over time, but the vision illustrated in the architectural and landscape proposals gives promise of ultimately realizing a major environmental asset for the benefit of the local community.

Conclusion

This is proposal of significant scale which has the potential to create a very appealing new residential and commercial precinct. Whilst there will inevitably be many refinements in future stages as the design develops, I consider that it is a sensitive and thoughtful application fully deserving of support from Council and the Minister.

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