

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Richmond Agricultural Centre
Richmond NSW

Schools Infrastructure NSW
MAY 2025

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NBRS & PARTNERS Pty Ltd
4 Glen Street
Milsons Point
NSW 2061 Australia

Telephone +61 2 9922 2344

ABN: 16 002 247 565

Nominated Architects;
Andrew Duffin: Reg No. 5602
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ISSUED	REVIEW	ISSUED BY
27 TH May 2025	REF	Stephanie Ferguson
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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report considers the visual impact of the proposed development of the Richmond Agricultural Centre (RAC) located on the Western Sydney University Hawkesbury Campus.

To determine the visual impact, assessment was undertaken of a number of matters, including:

- The existing place character of WSU and Heritage items located onsite.
- Identification of key viewpoints from private places such as the WSU student accommodation and Carol Allen House Residential Care Facility
- Assessment of visual impact based on the sensitivity of these viewpoints and the magnitude of change resulting proposal's insertion into the view
- Assessment of this visual impact against relevant parts of applicable planning instruments to determine appropriateness

The site is located at the north/west corner of the WSU Hawkesbury Campus accessed off College Drive (privately owned road). The proposed site sits within an agricultural landscape with WSU Administration to the south and the TAFE to the east. West of the site has residential dwellings along Londonderry Road.

The existing WSU campus is a series of 1 and 2 storey buildings within a rural setting. The WSU Campus has a number of local heritage items include:

- Memorial Hall
- Potts Hall, Adams Building
- Grandstand
- Blacksmiths Shop
- Stable Square

Based on the consideration of place, any relevant planning instruments and a site inspection, 4 viewpoints (refer to Section 8) in the primary visual catchment were selected upon which to base the visual impact assessment. Photography and photomontages were prepared for each viewpoint. This provided two images – an existing baseline and an indication of the likely proposed future outcome.

Based on consideration of factors such as distance of the proposal from the viewpoint, the composition and dominant features in the view and the purpose of people being at the viewpoint, the sensitivity of all viewpoints ranged from low to high. Based on consideration of factors such as amount and type of new fabric visible and its relationship to the existing view, the magnitude of change at all viewpoints was also ranged from negligible to moderate. It is noted that the photomontages showed that the proposal was likely to be or not to be visible from a number of viewpoints.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) will for part of the review of environmental factors (REF) and submitted to the Department of Education (DoE). The DoE is responsible for consulting with councils and the community on school development.

The report has been prepared by NBRS on behalf of NSW Department of Education - School Infrastructure NSW and is based on photography and photomontages by NBRS in accordance with Land and Environment Court Policy.

This VIA has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Part 4 of the EP&A Act, Schedule 2 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000 (EP&A Regulation).

2.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to determine whether the proposed development has an acceptable visual impact.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The Methodology used for this VIA has been based on desktop and field analysis and involves the following main steps:

1. Local character: identify local character
2. Visual catchment: identify the visual catchment based on consideration of matters such as landform, built form and vegetation. This will be represented through the use of photographs
3. Viewpoints: identify key viewpoints from where the proposal may be visible. An aerial view will be provided to demonstrate the location of viewpoints.
4. Visual impact: assessment against sensitivity and magnitude
5. Acceptability of visual impact: consideration of the visual impact against applicable and relevant planning instruments to determine acceptability.
6. Recommendation: prepare a recommendation based on the findings of the method.

Central to the assessment of visual impact are the below criteria:

1. Sensitivity
Sensitivity is influenced by a number of factors. It is often important to identify not only what is happening at the viewpoint but also what is being seen. Common influences of sensitivity include:
 - distance from viewpoint (close, medium or long range);
 - relative viewing level (level, below or above);
 - number of viewers (few, moderate or many);
 - use at the viewpoint (residential, business, recreation, industry, special use);
 - purpose of being at the viewpoint (passing through such as a commuter, or dwelling such as resident or a tourist);
 - viewing period (short or long);
 - elements in the view (value and dominance); and
 - view composition type (obstructed, general, focal or panoramic).

The viewpoints will be assessed against the below matrix:

Rating	Common Influences
High	Close, below, many viewers, residential or recreation, dwelling, long period, highly valued and dominant, focal or panoramic
Moderate	Medium, level, moderate viewers, business or special use, passing through, short period, highly valued and not dominant, valued, general, focal or panoramic
Low	Long, above, few viewers, industry, passing through, short period, valued and not dominant, not-valued, obstructed or general
Negligible	The proposal cannot be seen

2. Magnitude

Considerations for magnitude include:

- The amount of new fabric visible compared to the existing situation, which may include a loss or addition
- changes to the composition of the view
- the prominence of the new fabric, or the extent to which its type, role, size, colour, materials and other elements are compatible with the existing view; and
- the ability of the view to absorb the change. For example, a context that is dominated by horizontal elements may limit the ability of the view to accommodate change. Conversely, vegetation may significantly increase the ability of the view to accommodate change.

The viewpoints will be assessed against the below matrix:

Rating	Common Influences
High	Large amount of fabric added or lost, high change to view composition in particular with regard to focus of view, highly prominent in the field of view
Moderate	Moderate amount of fabric added or lost, moderate change to view composition, visible in the field of view but not prominent
Low	Limited amount of fabric added or lost, low change to view composition, visible in the field of view but not noticeable to the casual observer
Negligible	The proposal cannot be seen

3. Consistency with applicable and relevant planning instruments.

Even if the visual impact of a proposal is considered to be high when considered against sensitivity and magnitude, it may be acceptable based on applicable and relevant planning instruments, or through the mitigation measures.

For example, the introduction of an element that has high magnitude of visual impact may be positive where it better aligns with the desired future character.

4. Visual Impact Matrix

While acknowledging that context specific, qualitative assessment is key, the visual impact matrix below has been used to guide a more objective VIA.

Sensitivity	Magnitude				
		High	Moderate	Low	Negligible
	High	High	High – Moderate	Moderate	Negligible
	Moderate	High – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Low	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Moderate – Low	Low	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

The Site is located on 2 College Street, Richmond (Part Lot 2 DP 1051798). The site is located within the Hawkesbury City Council area and is zoned SP1 Special Activities (the SP1 zone) by the Hawkesbury Local Environmental Plan 2012 (the LEP).

Figure 1 is a site plan showing the location of the proposed Richmond Agricultural Centre within its regional context. Figure 2 is an aerial image of the site and its immediate surrounds

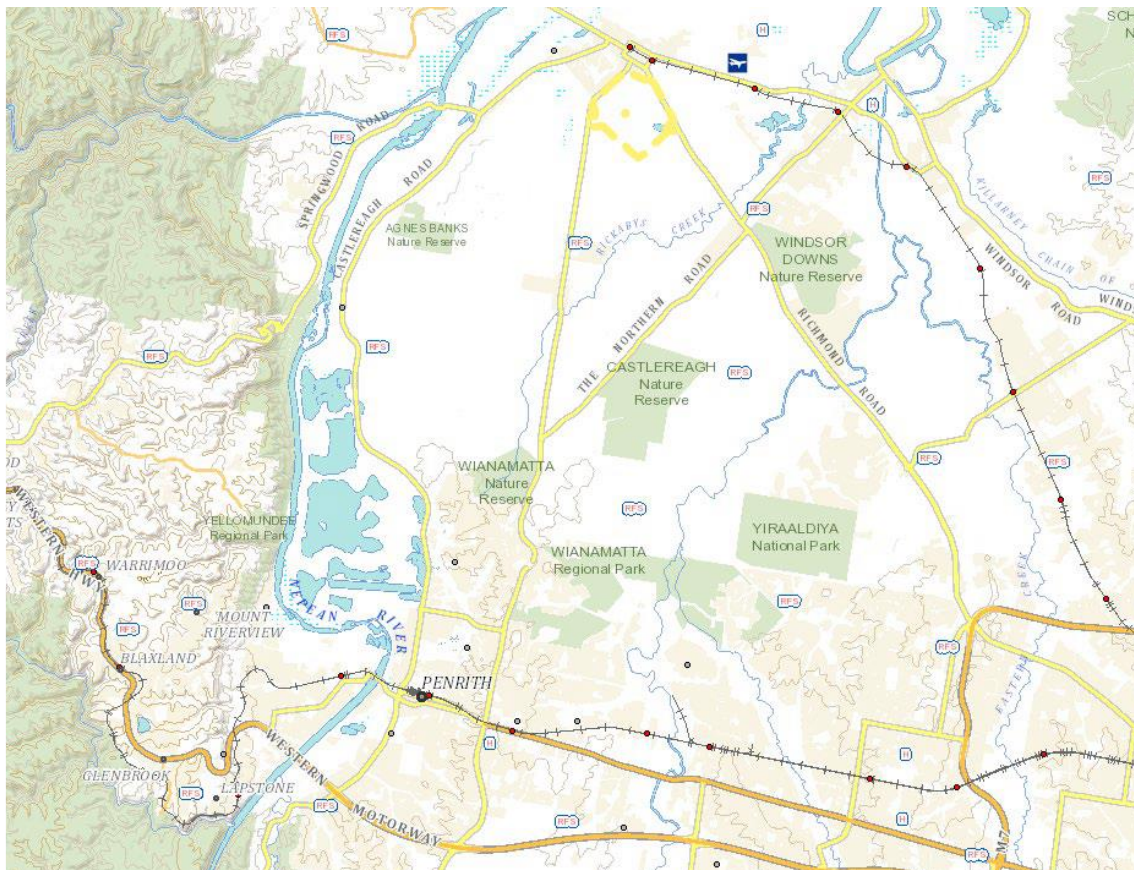


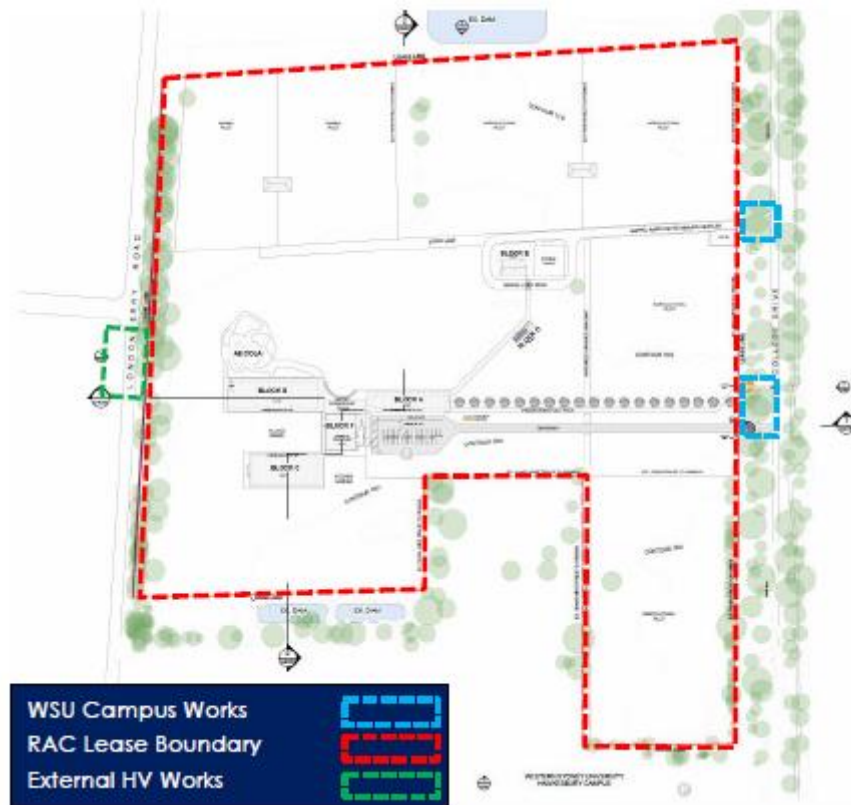
Figure 1: Location of the proposed Richmond Agricultural Centre (source: ePlanning Spatial Viewer).



Figure 2: Aerial image of the site showing the location of the proposed Richmond Agricultural Centre (source: Nearmap, dated 27 October 2024).

The boundary of the REF works is shown in **Figure 3** and comprises:

- **Leased area:** This is the area of land leased by the Department of Education from Western Sydney University (WSU) for the proposed Richmond Agricultural Centre. This area comprises 14.25 ha of land with frontage to College Drive of 480 meters. The future school site comprises existing agricultural land within the WSU campus bound by College Drive to the east, Londonderry Road to the west, WSU facilities to the south and vacant WSU agricultural land to the north.
- **WSU Campus:** This the area of land between the leased area and College Drive



The below photographs provide visual reference of the existing site, context, and character

WSU Stable Square	WSU Microbiology
	
WSU Administration	Rural Setting
	
College Drive	Londonderry Road
	

4.0 OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This report accompanies a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) that seeks approval for the construction and operation of the agricultural centre which will provide facilities for a specialist agricultural curriculum at 2 College Street Richmond (Part Lot 2 DP1051798).

The activities associated with establishing the Richmond Agricultural Centre involves the following works:

- The removal of trees and fencing
- Construction of a general learning hub
- Construction of a science hub
- Construction of a multipurpose hall
- Construction of an administration building
- Construction of canteen and amenities building
- Construction of a new parking area (including accessible spaces) driveway and kiss and drop facilities
- The provision of outdoor agricultural learning areas comprising:
 - Agricultural plots
 - Aboriginal enterprise
 - Agricultural shed and greenhouse
 - Animal plots with associated stock yard, animal shelters, troughs and stock lane
 - Gravel access road with wash bay
- Landscaping including new trees, entry forecourt, village green and kitchen garden
- Ancillary services and infrastructure upgrades including new substation and HV Works, sewer pump station, water booster, dual carriage vehicle access and pedestrian paths
- Wayfinding and school identification signage

For a detailed project description, please refer to the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) prepared by EPM Projects.

5.0 REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS (REF)

This Visual Impact Assessment has been prepared by NBRS on behalf of the Department of Education (DoE) (the Proponent) to assess the potential environmental impacts that could arise from the activities associated with the Richmond Agricultural Centre development at 2 College Street Richmond (Part Lot 2 DP1051798) (the site).

This report accompanies a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) that seeks approval for the construction and operation of the agricultural centre which will provide facilities for a specialist agricultural curriculum at the site. The visual impact assessment has been prepared in response to comments raised by the state design review panel (SDRP) item 19.

The report has been prepared to assess the proposed built form within the current Western Sydney University campus and surrounding Urban context with regards to

- The height, density, bulk and scale, setbacks and interface of the development in relation to the surrounding development, topography, streetscape and any public open spaces.
- Design quality and built form, with specific consideration of the overall site layout, streetscape, open spaces, façade, rooftop, massing, setbacks, building articulation, materials and colour palette.
- How Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles are to be integrated into development.
- How good environmental amenity would be provided, including access to natural daylight and ventilation, acoustic separation, access to landscape and outdoor spaces and future flexibility.
- How design quality will be achieved in accordance with Schedule 4 Schools
- design quality principles of State Environmental Planning Policy (Educational Establishments and Child Care Facilities) 2017 and the GANSW Design Guide for Schools (GANSW, 2018).
- How services, including but not limited to waste management, loading zones, and mechanical plant are integrated into the design of the development.

The outcome of the report should provide:

- A detailed site and context analysis to justify the proposed site planning and design approach including massing options and preferred strategy for future development.
- A visual impact assessment that identifies any potential impacts on the surrounding built environment and landscape including views to and from the site and any adjoining heritage items.

6.0 PLACE CHARACTER

Local character is a fundamental element of place. Based on the importance of place to communities, the NSW planning system seeks to ensure that development considers local character. Identification of local character is therefore an important step in determining the visual appropriateness of the proposal.

In accordance with the Department's Local Character and Place Guideline (2019) (the Guideline), local character comprises a broad range of elements, including the environmental, social and economic aspects of a place. However, for the purposes of guide development it is best considered as a combination of the important physical aspects of a place. These physical aspects can be organised under three main themes:

1. Public domain
2. Private domain
3. Cross domain

Importantly, the Guideline acknowledges that it is not always appropriate to keep a places existing local character. It identifies that planning instruments can seek to change, enhance or maintain existing local character.

7.0 APPLICABLE PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING INSTRUMENTS (LEP)

The LEP does not provide any specific guidance on VIA matters for this site.

7.2 DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PLAN (DCP)

The DCP is a guidance document that sets out principles in relation to character areas.

8.0 VISUAL IMPACT VIEWPOINTS

The below site plan identifies viewpoint locations with arrows indicating the direction of the vista.



Viewpoint 1 – Londonderry Road

Viewpoint 2 – Corner of College Drive and College Street

Viewpoint 3 – College Street (near intersection with Londonderry Road)

Viewpoint 4 – WSU Carpark

8.1 VISTA FROM LONDONDERRY DR LOOKING SOUTH



(Google Street view, taken from Londonderry Rd looking South at the Site)



(Google Street view, Photomontage showing Blocks B,C and F)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	6m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Road abutting North of site
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	View while driving along the North boundary of site
	Dominant elements	New blocks B, C and F
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	Low
	View composition change	Low - The proposal maintains the existing visual composition
	Prominence	The new building fabric is noticeable between the trees within the existing site
	Overall Rating	Low

8.2 VISTA FROM THE INTERSECTION OF COLLEGE ST. AND COLLEGE DRIVE



(Google Street view, taken from the intersection of College St. and College Drive looking North-West)



(Photomontage Showing block A and B)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	70m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular access road
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	Streetscape view
	Dominant elements	Block A and B
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	Low
	View composition change	Low – Visible at a distance between the trees.
	Prominence	The new building fabric is readily noticeable through the trees but not a dominant feature
	Overall Rating	Low

8.3 VISTA FROM COLLEGE STREET



(Google Street view, Looking south from College Street)



(Photomontage overlaying Block A, B & C onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	80m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular road to North of site
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	Streetscape view driving along College Street
	Dominant elements	Proposed Block E, D, A, F, B and Aboriginal enterprise
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	Moderate
	View composition change	Moderate – The visual composition is altered through the introduction of elements of greater human scale when compared to the existing condition.
	Prominence	The new building fabric is readily noticeable compared to the existing site
	Overall Rating	Moderate

8.4 VISTA FROM WSU PARKING



(Google Street View, Looking north at the site from the WSU Parking)



(Photomontage overlaying Block A and the aboriginal enterprise onto the site)

	Characteristic	Comment
Characteristic	Distance from site	30m
	Relative viewing level	Level with site
	Use at the viewpoint	Vehicular Car parking at WSU
	Purpose of being at viewpoint	View towards site from parking
	Dominant elements	No buildings immediately visible
Magnitude	Amount of fabric change	NIL to low
	View composition change	Low – buildings are not immediately visible due to the existing trees
	Prominence	No prominent building fabric visible
	Overall Rating	Low

9.0 CONCLUSION

The below table summarises the proposal against the relevant criteria

View	Location	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Visual Impact	Consistent with Planning Instruments
1	Londonderry Road	Moderate	High	High - Moderate	✓
2	Corner of College Drive and College Street	Low	Low	Low	✓
3	College Street (near intersection with Londonderry Road)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	✓
4	WSU Carpark	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	✓

In response to the surrounding context outlined in section 5.0

- The proposed buildings are all single storey buildings in keeping with the scale currently onsite. The LEP has a maximum building height of 10m, current building heights vary from approximately 6m to 7.4m. The building placement onsite is well setback from roads and property boundaries this creates open spaces and an intimate village green for student to gather.
- The proposed buildings draw on precedents from the rich history of new and old Agricultural Architecture at the WSU campus, future focused Agricultural research architecture, the Australian vernacular farm and architecture from Aboriginal cultural centres. A warm colour palette has been selected for the facades. Mainly neutral colours, greys, blacks, with some warm timber or timber look finishes as features. Reflecting the natural colours in the Australian landscape.
- The buildings have been orientated to provide Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. This includes providing clear sight lines from the administration building to the village green and agricultural plots.
- The building layouts are conducive to flexible learning environments, cross ventilation and natural daylight. An acoustic engineer has reviewed the design and confirmed the distance from the buildings to neighbouring properties will ensure minimal acoustic impact.
- The design has been reviewed against the SEPP and GANSW designing for school principals, refer to the architectural design report section 4.
- Proposed services have been integrated with the design to ensure bin stores, loading zones, and mechanical plant don't detract from the overall aesthetic of the buildings.

An assessment of the proposal as represented in photomontages prepared in accordance with L&E Court policy has been made against relevant factors such as existing place character of the primary visual catchment, sensitivity, magnitude, applicable planning instruments, the need for mitigation strategies and measures and consideration of residual impact.

On this basis, this VIA concludes that considering all relevant factors, in its current form the proposal has an acceptable visual impact.

Mitigation measures as follows:

project stage <i>DESIGN (D)</i> <i>CONSTRUCTION (C)</i> <i>OPERATION (O)</i>	Mitigation	Section
D	Significant departures from REF architectural design resulting in changes to the bulk and scale of the buildings an updated VIA should be completed to ensure the visual impact is acceptable.	Section 5 and Section 8